

# **COUNTRYSIDE EXCHANGE SCHEME HALTWHISTLE 2003**

## **“HALTWHISTLE – JOURNEY TO THE CENTRE OF BRITAIN”**

- (i) Background to the exchange and details that were sent to participants
- 1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS
- 2. MARKET POSITION
- 3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT
- 4. PROMOTION
- 5. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT
- 6. TOWNSCAPE
- 7. VISITOR MANAGEMENT
- 8. BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

### CONCLUSIONS

CASE STUDY: WALKING / HERITAGE / ORIENTATION CENTRE

### APPENDICES

- A. TEAM BRIEF
- B. SWOT ANALYSIS OF HALTWHISTLE

References throughout to “Haltwhistle” should be considered to include the surrounding historic parishes, though the infrastructure of the surrounding settlements has not been reviewed.

## **BACKGROUND TO THE EXCHANGE PROGRAMME**

The North America/United Kingdom Countryside Exchange programme has its origins in a memorandum of understanding signed in 1986 between the United States National Park Service and the Countryside Commission, in which it was agreed to co-operate "on the conservation and management of cultural, natural and recreational resources".

In 1987 the first Exchange took place in New England, USA, establishing a model which has been followed ever since. A mixed team was assembled from both sides of the Atlantic, bringing together in this case land conservation, development and planning professionals, to work for a short period on common problems in a specific locality, and in so doing to share experience and expertise.

Since 1987 more than 100 separate teams have been hosted in the UK, the USA, Canada and the Netherlands, involving nearly 800 team members. As experience has accumulated it has become evident that the benefits to the team members from participating are matched by those to the hosts, both in terms of the ideas and recommendations generated during the visit and of the increased local capacity that develops through the process of planning and managing the event.

in the United Kingdom the Exchange is organised by CEI Associates Ltd. under contract to the Countryside Agency and answering to a National Steering Group. This body is chaired by the Countryside Agency and made up of representatives of other UK funding partners. In 2003 these were: the Countryside Agency; the Countryside Council for Wales; the Department for Environment, Food and Rural Affairs; English Heritage; English Nature; the Forestry Commission; the Heritage Lottery Fund; Scottish Natural Heritage, and the Welsh Development Agency. Representatives of BTCV (formerly the British Trust for Conservation Volunteers) and the National Trust attend as observers.

In North America the Exchange was organised by the Glynwood Center, a not-for-profit body based in New York State and dedicated to helping communities take charge of their future.

## **Introduction for Participants.**

Historically the town and surrounding area of Haltwhistle has been dependant on manufacturing industry. 18 months ago, three main manufacturing businesses closed with the loss of 25% of local jobs. Much of the work force has found subsequent jobs but these are mainly in Carlisle or Hexham. This is having a negative impact on the service centre of the town adding to the reduction in local shopping that is occurring due to the rise in supermarket/city centre shopping.

However Haltwhistle is the nearest community to the busy central section of the World Heritage Site of Hadrian's Wall. Around 1.5 million visitors a year visit the wall, yet Haltwhistle sees very few of them (our Tourist Information centres registered 12,000 last year). To prevent serious further decline in the area we have to improve the economic impact from visitors.

The purpose of this exchange is to capitalise on your fresh, objective view of our area and what it has to offer. We want to be informed by your various expertise to bring about changes that will bring us an improved economy.

We see the outcome of your visit being a number of recommendations for us and our partners to take forward.

I think the following last verse from a poem by the greatest Poet ever captures the essence of what we want the study to be about.

*O, wad some Power the giftie gie us  
To see oursels as others see us!  
It wad frae monie a blunder free us  
An' foolish notion:  
What airs in dress an' gait wad lea'e us,  
And ev'n Devotion!*

*From: To a Louse (On seeing one on a Lady's Bonnet at Church) by  
Robert Burns, 1786.*

## **Key issues and questions for the Countryside Exchange Scheme participants.**

Initially we ask you not to open and read your information pack until you have carried out Question 1. This is because we want your unadulterated impression of the town based on what information is out there and available to the general public.

Question 1.

What can you find out about our area based on what information is available through the web, publications etc.? What impression do you now have of the town and the surrounding area?

*(Notes on sources, ease of finding, impact etc. would be very useful)*

You may now read your information packs!

Question 2.

How has your perception altered over the time you have spent here? What have been the key influences that have effected your opinion?

**We are interested in**

- ◆ **what are the discrepancies when you experience the real thing,**
- ◆ **is what is doing us a service**
- ◆ **what is doing us a disservice,**
- ◆ **what is missing that shouldn't be,**
- ◆ **what is included that shouldn't be?**

Question 3.

In light of what you have experienced during your time with us what would you alter to make Haltwhistle a tourist service centre for this area?

**(We need to improve the economic impact from visitors in the area so what physical and marketing improvements/alterations, i.e. environmental/building improvements, marketing of the town to agencies as well as visitors/tourists, transport developments, service developments.)**

**Question 4.**

***What is your opinion on the concept of a Walking/Heritage/Orientation Centre for the town and surrounding area?***

***What should that concept look like?***

- ◆ **What is it?**
- ◆ **How big is it?**

## **1. FIRST IMPRESSIONS**

The team was asked to spend some time prior to reading the briefing material researching Haltwhistle to develop an impression of the community. Once that was done we then checked our impressions with what we actually found. The picture of Haltwhistle we gained from the readily available sources did highlight the issues we found once we arrived.

Recent efforts to attract people to Hadrian's Wall have been very successful and it has reached the overseas market. The full-page story in the Sunday New York Times August 31, 03 is a case in point. This particular news coverage illustrated the situation very well. It provided an excellent picture of the wall and it has succeeded in attracting people interested in heritage tourism. However, it was very obvious that the Hadrian's Wall story was being told without reference to Haltwhistle or other tourist amenities. Indeed Haltwhistle was not even on the map provided in the paper. This fact became even clearer once we arrived. The World Heritage site designation and the new trail system have made Hadrian's Wall an international tourist destination but the connection to the beautiful English countryside is missing.

We were able to discover information on the web about Haltwhistle and some of the overnight accommodations were listed in various tourist guide publications. We note that the web page for the Haltwhistle does provide some of the tourist information needed to attract visitors. We were also pleased that there seemed to be a very rapid response to email questions, at least in our one case. It is noted that one of the first items to come up when inquiring about Haltwhistle on the web is a trailer (caravan) park not a camping facility. This seemed a bit old for a tourist orientation. In sum before arriving we had a clear understanding of the importance of Hadrian's Wall but not the connection with Haltwhistle.

Once the team began looking around on site we found Haltwhistle to be a very inviting community with many fascinating features. We were also made aware of the significance of the section of Hadrian's Wall near this community. In fact this middle section of the wall offers the tourist the best views and opportunities for interpreting the wall. Given the geography a good case can be made to call Haltwhistle the gateway to the Wall but that case has not yet been made. This is particularly clear when the interpretive signs at various sites and visitor centres along the wall are examined. The effort to link the tourist travelling the wall with the providers of the services they need has been ineffective at best. The impression is that the tourists must fend for themselves.

The impression we have of Haltwhistle, based on our efforts, is that of a community with lots of opportunities. Hadrian's Wall does offer you access to thousands of tourists and a significant proportion of those tourists may be coming to Haltwhistle, but no one knows for sure. The B&B's and hotels have experienced a tremendous increase in business this year, perhaps because of the National and International press and the opening of the Hadrian's Wall National Trail. We were certainly well treated and we very much appreciated the warm hospitality we received. This is indeed one of the corner stones a community needs if it is to be successful in tourism. The community has much to offer, not the least of which is its character as a small English town. The qualities of the accommodations, the vistas and nearby features are outstanding and will attract many international tourists. We learned of many hidden secrets in and around the community. These include the Burn, the AONB, the Reivers story, the POW camp etc.

However, we did see areas that need improvement if the community is to realise its potential. We were overwhelmed with the number of plans, co-ordinating committees' etc. However, there seems to have been much more talk than action. The connection to Hadrian's Wall needs to be made and true partnerships with the agencies running the various facilities along the wall are needed. There seems to be a fair amount of negativity within the community about the loss of a past way of life. There is also a growing understanding

that the community does have fantastic natural and cultural resources both within and next to it. The overall impression is that of a community with more going for it than against it.

## **2. MARKET POSITION**

**Potential and current audience** – The potential audience for Haltwhistle is indeed vast but that very vastness sometimes leads to confusion about market share. Another way to look at it (at least in the near term) is to focus on the actual numbers of visitors already in close proximity.

So while Hadrian's Wall overall visitation approaches a million, a more direct market comparison may be those who just a few minutes away, such as the 100,000 that go to Housesteads, or the 75,000 or so that visit either Vindolanda or the Once Brewed information centre. That market is literally on the doorstep and currently not adequately tapped.

Additionally, there is potential to develop other audiences in more specialised ways around activities such as walking that may be independent or related in some way to the wall itself. The outdoor audience is equally vast in its potential so the community might wisely concentrate on those outdoor enthusiasts with an interest in culture and heritage or who might already be coming to the National Park or Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty (AONB).

**Market share** – determining market share can be useful as a measurement strategy for tracking progress. This effort need not be precise but the methodology will need to be consistent and ideally tied back to strategic goals and purposes. For instance, if the consensus opinion is to extend night stays, then the numbers for accommodations are of paramount importance. If expenditures are the primary value, then it might be tracking how and where visitors spend their money. Benchmarking on a number of variables is possible but not always practical. Understanding what regional partners already track for comparison purposes will be key as the community determines a realistic and reasonable approach that allows it to measure its progress over time. The tourism partners in the region should be part of an initial conversation on how best to proceed, but Haltwhistle taking the initiative in this regard is an important first step. Further understanding the 12,000 or so who are already in Haltwhistle each year will be another key component of this effort as greater efforts are made to link the community with the area's outstanding resources.

**Tourism drivers** – Hadrian's Wall is the leading attractor of visitors to the local market but not the only one; visitors also are interested in what else there is to see and do. In addition to the branded (or to be branded) outlets, such as the park or the AONB, there is potential for using local heritage as well. That local heritage may be community specific (the church) or fit larger regional themes (the Reivers). Understanding how the market for an individual or collective group of things fits a larger market will be critical to determining which ones potentially have the most benefit. Currently, the cycle market is

small and even tripling or quadrupling it might not significantly add to the overall numbers. On the other hand, its very existence and relative health might add to the attractiveness of the mix and support development of the overall community and its quality of life (i.e. it might have high resident benefit). Services can be, but generally are not, tourism drivers in and of themselves. That said, sometimes favourite lodging establishments are visitor destinations, especially for repeat customers. But generally, services are secondary and their usefulness in helping drive visitation is when they link together, as with the “gateway” context.

**Niche** – Determining Haltwhistle’s niche with the local market is paramount for consistency of message and development of the appropriate infrastructure and product mix. Most of the Roman era properties offer much of the same story, which just gets of less and less interest as you go along (except for the most avid buff). But differentiation can be achieved through variations of theme, approach and kind of experience. This concept is true for the communities along the way as well.

If Haltwhistle pursues a niche akin to Gateway to the Region (Centre of Britain) then the key message is found either in diversity or the packaging of experiences – e.g. the wall and the farm experience. A word of caution, however: Variety is a double-edged sword and if chosen will need careful management so the overall experience is not muddied. Again, asking visitors about their initial perceptions and resulting experiences is key.

Another challenge is that, in time, the services message should be secondary to the notion of all the other attractions but that’s a transition from the current position of primarily serving as a base to explore the best of the wall. That challenge can best be managed by promoting the outstanding nearby attractions in concert with Hadrian’s Wall while quietly developing the internal infrastructure to offer local heritage and outstanding service as well.

### **3. COMMUNITY SUPPORT**

Napoleon Bonaparte said:

“The moral is to the physical as three is to one”.

Haltwhistle has plenty to offer in physical terms – historical attractions, beautiful countryside – but tourism is about people rather than things. The human (“moral”) aspects of tourism development are therefore critical.

The whole community of Haltwhistle needs to be supportive of increased tourism from the outset, and engaged in its development, for the initiative to be successful. Individual local enthusiasm is most effectively channelled into what people want for themselves. Personal involvement can be as complicated as setting up a new visitor-oriented business, or as simple as refraining from throwing stones through the new shop’s window.

#### **3.1 Current situation**

Historically, Haltwhistle has been a mining and industrial town. Its position as a service centre for the surrounding area has been diminished by the same factors affecting other rural towns:

- the development of out-of-town shopping centres elsewhere in the region;
- the excitement these offer of a day out; and
- the increased capacity of townspeople to visit those centres by private car, or even by train.

The disappearance of mining and other guaranteed employment in traditional jobs, including most recently the closure of the paint factory, has left the community in a degree of shock. The new uncertainty of the town’s economy has discouraged some retail shops and other services either from coming to Haltwhistle or indeed from staying in business in the town. Much of the community retain a strong feeling of the link between “proper” industrial jobs and a prosperous town, and there is a suspicion of outside agencies suggesting that tourism is a way forward.

The fact that there is a plethora of outside agencies, who do not present a coherent view of the future for Haltwhistle, and none of whom are directly accountable to the local population, has not been helpful.

#### **3.2 SWOT analysis – (Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities, Threats)**

The Haltwhistle community has natural strengths which can help them respond to the idea of more visitors, but also some weaknesses. In summary:

### Strengths

- The natural warmth of local people, and their welcome of visitors;
- Evident capacity to work together, for example in Churches Together, raising money for the town's leisure centre, taking part in "Britain in Bloom" and local open gardens days, and reviewing the future of the church hall;
- Existing visitor businesses such as the Centre of Britain Hotel, and others, who have had the added bonus of a successful year in 2003.

### Weaknesses

- Some inertia due to expectation that jobs and services will be provided and shouldn't need to be sought;
- Lack of understanding of what "tourism" means, what is required of the town and what it can do for the town in return.

### Opportunities

- The expected natural increase in visitors to the area;
- Budding local tourism association, largely accommodation providers at present.

### Threats

- Lack of attention to the town's needs and potential from outside agencies and partnerships;
- Plethora of local plans and studies that only lead to confusion in people's minds.

## **3.3 Issues**

A number of issues emerge that need to be addressed:

- Current lack of clear primary responsibility for tourism in Haltwhistle;
- Too much planning and not enough doing;
- The measure of success in tourism, and who should take credit for it;
- Need to change mindsets in the community;
- Need to set the stage for working together;
- Public distrust of the current hierarchy of organising bodies;
- Lack of understanding of how local government / other agencies work;
- Lack of public awareness of the visitor asset they have;
- Concentration on the idea of a Heritage Centre rather than the underlying need to provide information to visitors and residents alike.

### **3.4 Vision**

Haltwhistle residents and businesses should:

- understand the nature and opportunities of tourism,
- have 'bought in to' the whole process
- have trust in whoever the community decides will take the tourism initiative forward.

### **3.5 Actions**

The town should now build on the public meeting of Thursday 9<sup>th</sup> October 2003 and the presentation made there by the Countryside Exchange team. As well as this report, the video of that presentation could be made available to those who couldn't attend the meeting and who would prefer to receive information that way.

The following steps are recommended for the Haltwhistle Partnership and other local public bodies:

- Preparation of a simple pamphlet, map or diagram explaining the jigsaw of local tourism agencies and partnerships, including the remit of the Haltwhistle Partnership;
- Discussion between the Haltwhistle Town Council, Haltwhistle Partnership, Haltwhistle Tourism Association, Haltwhistle Chamber of Trade and Tynedale District Council to agree a common approach to tourism development in the town. This discussion should also include the community as a whole with agreement on who is going to co-ordinate any agreed initiatives outlined within this report, the 'navigator', and who is going to take on each particular role. It is imperative that the actions are co-ordinated if Haltwhistle is to present a united front to the outside organisations;
- Publication of an article in the Hexham Courant and the Squeak, explaining the potential role of tourism in Haltwhistle's future, for example as an engine to improve local shops and services which the recent Tynedale Community Partnership survey suggests is the top local priority;
- A series of subsequent meetings with the variety of local business and community groups to discuss the way ahead;
- A public meeting involving the community and representative groups should meet to discuss and agree the way ahead.
- Clear communication of the outcome to the Hadrian's Wall Tourism Partnership, Northumberland County Council and other external

agencies as part of the process of ensuring Haltwhistle has its place in wider regional developments.

In parallel with this organisational approach, local community leaders and interested members of the public can prepare a series of community events to encourage local thinking about tourism matters. These would also give local people more experience of working together on tourism initiatives and create a climate wherein volunteers of all kinds can come forward, for example to help care for the Burn gorge and the local environment generally. These events could include:

- An extension of the Northumbria Music Festival and Hexham Folk Festivals to encompass Haltwhistle venues, as a precursor to Haltwhistle's own music festival;
- Continued extension of the walking festival, to draw in other themes such as wildlife, local crafts and farmers' products;
- Living history re-enactments, such as a Reiver's camp;
- A town play in the church hall on the theme of Haltwhistle's history, in whole or in part, written and performed by local people;
- Oral history project led by the young people of the film project.

Overall, there should be a concentrated approach to educate key constituencies – be they local political leaders, businesses, volunteers or citizens – and develop feedback mechanisms for understanding and responding to criticism. A defensive posture is understandable in the near term as roles and responsibilities are unclear and new activity is viewed suspiciously. Continued conversation and committed effort toward working in the open with as many affected parties as is possible should be the goal.

## **4. PROMOTION**

The way in which Haltwhistle markets and promotes itself is of crucial importance. This section examines the way in which Haltwhistle and its surrounding historic parishes currently promotes and markets itself, the issues that are raised and proposes some aims and potential actions that can be undertaken.

### **Current Situation**

#### **Strategies**

Haltwhistle Partnership has done some work on identifying a brand strategy for the area. This goes some way to identify the core brand features for the area that reflect the beauty, culture and wildlife of the areas unique selling points. Nevertheless this work has not yet been consulted on, and it will be important to gain community support and buy-in if the approach is to be adopted.

On a district and county and regional level, it will be important that Haltwhistle's approach nests within their strategies.

#### **Pre-visitor Information**

- Haltwhistle is unusual for a town of this size in that it does currently have an excellent town website which is readily accessible through many of the internet search engines, although there is no link from Visit Britain's site. Whilst this site includes an excellent level of detail, there is no identifiable clear image that the town promotes, although it does highlight the links to nearby Hadrian's Wall and the National Park. The front page on the site includes one image of a black and white building which is not characteristic of the town. A click of the 'movie' button, revealed a graphic showing Haltwhistle as the Centre of England, rather than a movie of the town as might otherwise have been expected.
- The main season holiday guides for the area, including the ones produced by the Regional Tourist Board and the District Council, understandably do not focus on individual towns within the area, but rather on themes. However the only mention that Haltwhistle gets for example in the Hadrian's Wall Country Holiday Guide is for its swimming pool. Haltwhistle events do appear under the events list, but there are notable exclusions, for example the October Walking Festival is not mentioned.

#### **Information within the Area**

There is potential for visitors in the area to find out more about Haltwhistle: for example there is a panel at the Tourist Information Centre at the motorway services, however this is not consistently the case, with some of the Tourist

Information Centres in the area having little visible information on the area. Furthermore, information at many of the Hadrian's Wall and National Park Visitor Centres is patchy and in some cases non-existent.

### **Available Material**

There is no shortage of printed material about the area although it does get lost amongst the sheer volume of leaflets available. A visit to Haltwhistle Tourist Information Centre yielded an armful of leaflets and publications on what to do, which partly due to the proximity of the AONB and the National Park, included almost too much information provided in a fragmented and inaccessible form. The high volume of information available achieves the opposite of what is intended by creating confusion amongst the visitor rather than the clarity that the visitor requires. The information appears confusing, with no clear picture readily available on how they relate to each other geographically.

The 'Haltwhistle Heart of Hadrian's Wall' leaflet goes some way to trying to position the town amongst all of these competing areas, and seeks to summarise what the area has to offer.

### **Direct Marketing from Accommodation Providers**

With such a variety of accommodation providers in the area, it is inevitable that each one is marketing to a slightly different target audience. However, it is also clear that most of the providers are marketing themselves in isolation of other and are not making the links between compatible businesses and opportunities.

### **Issues**

It would appear that the large number of partnerships and initiatives in the area are each focused on producing their own publication, and that there is still some work to do in co-ordinating the many overlapping players. As a result Haltwhistle's message gets lost and is not easy for the potential partners to echo in their material.

It would also seem evident that there is no clear single message for Haltwhistle which can be readily communicated to all levels.

There is also an issue relating to awareness amongst visitor and heritage centre staff, in that with so much on offer, they will not all be familiar with the Haltwhistle product.

Finally, there is an issue that with so many initiatives and partnerships in the area, whatever approach is adopted by Haltwhistle, it must sit within the strategies for the wider area.

## Vision & Aims

- If Haltwhistle is serious about wanting to benefit from tourism, then it must develop one clear image which is readily understood and supported by all. This then becomes the foundation on which promotion and marketing is built and is reflected in the product development.
- This image would need to reflect the locally distinctive character of the town and its hinterland may include, amongst others, its:

- Language
- Clothes
- Food
- Arts & Music
- Architecture
- Employment
- Community
- Individual characters
- Industry/Markets/Exchanges
- Links with other places
- Resistance to outside influences
- Woods/ lanes/fields/hedges

- Once the overall image is identified, then it is easier to formally identify the key themes that the area can offer.
- For example, 'Centre of Britain' has enormous potential, particularly when it includes the concept of Haltwhistle being at the crossroads, AONB to the south; Northumberland National Park and Hadrian's Wall to the North, National Cycle Network Route, Pennine Way and the railway line also within close proximity.
- Identify a brand for Haltwhistle which matches what Haltwhistle can potentially offer with the market.
- Ensure that all visitor and heritage centre staff are familiar with what Haltwhistle has to offer.
- Rationalise provision of information in the TICs

## Potential Actions

- Benchmark where Haltwhistle is at the current time
- Audit the promotional information available, and identify whether it meets the needs of its audience.
- Develop one single image for Haltwhistle; this could be based on the branding work already completed, but must have the full support of the community.
- Target promotion at developing the shoulder season.
- Identify common ground amongst promoters, and look for joint marketing opportunities using existing databases and mailing lists.
- Run familiarisation trips for staff of local visitor and heritage centres.
- Events are important for marketing and there could be key events throughout the year to ensure a spread.
- Use local images on the front page of the Haltwhistle website rather than generic photos.
- Evaluation and monitoring is important if actions are to be identified.

## 5. PRODUCT DEVELOPMENT

### Current Situation

Currently, Haltwhistle doesn't have much of an overall product mix outside of its service sector but that is changing with the development of new projects such as the 22 Ring trail leaflets. As with that project, understanding and connecting what the market wants with available raw resources is key. Assumptions were made in developing the ring leaflets that quantity was important for proving Haltwhistle has sufficient walking opportunities to warrant a visit. That assumption may be correct; but quality also matters, and it is hard to make the case that all 22 are of equal importance. Visitors with only a short time in the area or only a modest desire for walking would want to know about the best opportunities in addition to the fullest range. Asking potential users about these issues while the product is under development will be critical to ensure that efforts are not wasted or duplicative. Often a rural community's desire for inclusiveness (all the parishes for instance) can be contrary to visitor clarity and responsiveness. While this desire is understandable, the default should be what visitors need and want, not just what the community believes it has to offer.

The project team found that the community was doing a great job using local guides with in depth knowledge to guide people up the wall and back. This effort directly meets the brand and improves access, which is a critical issue. Also, the development of luggage transfer service is encouraging because it suggests responsiveness to customer needs and market opportunities.

Because there is no one story, visitors are often confused or make the incorrect assumption that there is nothing there. Actually, there are quite a lot of things that would make for interesting ways to spend one's time. For example, the South Tyne is considered by fishermen to be the finest salmon river in England, and fees for visitors are cheap. The problem is one would have to know about the resource or story to begin with and then spend time and energy discovering how to access it. And while a certain number of visitors may be so inclined, generally the larger tourism market is not. With that said, there is something of an in-between: Haltwhistle can target its initial efforts to those things in which visitors are already expressing an interest (e.g. the Reiver story) and develop better methods for delivering it to them.

Physically, there is not much to do indoors and that alone provides yet another reason to leave the community, either for the day or perhaps for the rest of the vacation. Better connectivity with surrounding towns and their visitor attractions also would be beneficial, especially as a means for adding more room nights.

### Issues

**Unified Strategy** – With the growth in the overall market, there is a large potential for new operations to be successful. Not all of them will be. Obviously, the greater the upfront investment, the more research and analysis

will be required. The converse, however, is not necessarily true. While in and of themselves, modest activities can do no harm they rob the community of time and energy to spend on those with the highest payoffs. The opportunity costs of random development (which happens in the absence of a unified plan and is solely dependent on individual volunteer interest) translate into missed marketing initiatives and reinforcement of a brand position.

**Leadership and co-ordination** – taking the lead on deciding which opportunities make the most sense for Haltwhistle will depend on some organization taking the lead in a facilitating fashion.

**Interpretation/marketing** – telling stories is a way of relating the importance of a site (or resource) to the persons most interested in it. Often the calibre of what is presented is inferior to other products experienced elsewhere in the marketplace, which undermines competitiveness. Enhancing the overall quality of materials and sites will be mutually beneficial.

### **Aim/Purpose**

Therefore, Haltwhistle must make some choices. With its range of possible activities and interpretive stories, it must decide which ones have the greatest potential and fit the best with its overall brand strategy and position. One aim could be to develop a comprehensive visitor experience based in Haltwhistle that will encapsulate the best there is to see and do in the region.

### **Ideas**

**Physical Attractions** – The Burn and other access routes to Hadrian's Wall should have priority. Haltwhistle must work with the National Park to develop better physical access for all and address some of the safety issues associated with the bridges and the bog. Haltwhistle should also explore adding new directional and interpretive signs, plus develop a self-guided trail leaflet coupled with colour-coded signage.

Additionally, other existing sites (especially those such as the church that are indoors) should be inventoried and evaluated for quick 1-hour and 2-hour tour options. This tour may not be marketed as a priority but should exist as a rainy day option for the town.

**Themed Options** – themed projects can often provide maximum effect, especially if combined with a personal tour. One obvious example is the Reiver story. Haltwhistle has the leaflet, while Hexham has the site interpretation at the Old Gaol. While in Hexham, a team member asked if any individual was currently offering tours of related sites in the area. While no one specifically offers that, the customer service representative at the Gaol spoke with the information centre and found two or three individuals who might. Haltwhistle should talk to these individuals and see if there is any interest in putting together a Reiver tour for visitors that can be marketed with the leaflet, the Gaol and the Centre of Britain Hotel with the other sites in the area. Other local assets include the Stevenson's Rocket and the Blue Streak,

the old POW camp and local castles. Perhaps these assets could be put together with like things in the area for those with similar interest. Ideally, visitor interest in such things could be ascertained at the tourism information centre before embarking.

**Interpretation** – community interpretation can be developed outside a full-blown Heritage Centre concept. Interested parties can develop thematic stories based on the community's history and find places in the existing community for their display (perhaps storefronts, perhaps existing businesses). Training local individuals on interpretive techniques and strategies might prove useful for a volunteer-led effort. Their work product can be used for panels in the town but also as the basis for walking tours and other activities. If resources allow, employing a professional interpreter for one of the first projects and asking them to work with local volunteers would give those involved in the effort a practical case study on which to test their new knowledge. Providing interpretation in conjunction with existing walking trails might be an obvious place to start.

**Cycling** – a new leaflet is being produced and there is access to cycle hire. Those opportunities (used more by international visitors than domestic) are realising modest results. Some thought will have to be given as to why – perhaps the location is insufficiently visible within the town? Perhaps because it is an add-on business to the petrol station, customer focus is an issue? If it is a market in which the community has an interest (and the trails are already there), then maybe an effort to promote it more through the TIC and accommodation providers could prove beneficial.

## 6. TOWNSCAPE

First impressions are of paramount importance, and this section looks at the way in which Haltwhistle town might appear to a visitor, identifies some of the issues relating to the townscape, and makes some recommendations for the future.

### Current Situation

Haltwhistle is a handsome town with some fine buildings and a good range of public and community space. Much work has been done to improve the streetscape of the town, with environmental improvements in the market square and attractive street-lighting and pedestrian signposting having been installed.

There are however, a number of empty properties, many of which are either in a poor state of repair or could benefit from cosmetic improvements. Without any improvements, visitors will continue to be put off by the town and will not wish to spend additional leisure time in Haltwhistle.

Elements of Haltwhistle's townscape can be broken down as follows:

- Streets– road surfaces could look tidier if the highway authority repainted the white traffic direction lines. Any redundant lampposts or other redundant street furniture should be removed. There should also be an audit of disabled access in the town.
- Ginnels – lanes between buildings in Haltwhistle have a traditional cobble or sett design. Those in good condition should be preserved, and funding sought for a project to refurbish those that need repair.
- Buildings – some shop frontages need refurbishment, and 50% grant schemes with a ceiling of £2,000 have worked successfully in many towns. There has been resistance from shopkeepers to a public grant scheme that requires three independent quotes for the work, so public sector bodies should agree that two quotes, from local firms and using an agreed town style, are sufficient to ensure probity. There are also a number of redundant buildings not on current estate agent lists that should be incorporated in medium-term plans for the town, albeit the current owners may already have plans for them. Public ownership should only be pursued if a public purpose is served, or public profit generated.

#### **Redundant buildings in Haltwhistle**

(as opposed to vacant shop and business premises)

Old shop / house with orchard, opposite the Grey Bull pub

The "Manse", a large barn-like building behind the Grey Bull which the local church used to run as a doss-house for travelling men

The old forge in the town square, which still contains the original fittings

Empty shop "I. Bell & Son" which closed when the new supermarket opened

There should be an audit to confirm this list and to determine whether any other garages or warehouses etc. should be added to it.

- Parking – there is currently sufficient parking for residents and visitors, both on-street and next to the Quality Care supermarket. However if tourism promotion is successful, the town should expect a need for another 50 to 100 parking spaces, particularly at the time of special events. One medium-term strategy would be where possible to move any more industrial businesses away from the town centre and use the space for example for extra parking
- Street Lighting – the high street style of gas lamp-type streetlights is attractive and could usefully become a standard style for the town.
- Open Spaces – there are a number of useful open spaces that are or could be used for special events, all in good condition, though the Town Square is a little overcrowded with signage.

#### **Open spaces in Haltwhistle**

War Memorial garden  
Town Square  
Twinning Garden  
Meadow behind Ashcroft B&B  
Eden Lawn opposite the parish church  
Railway station forecourt

- Indoor Venues – Haltwhistle has a great range of meeting rooms suitable for a range of community and visitor purposes.

#### **Indoor venues in Haltwhistle**

Church Hall  
Masonic Hall  
Working Men's Club  
Old Comrades' Club  
Conservative Club  
Leisure Centre  
Middle School

- Restaurants/Cafes/Hotels – the two ends of the market are reasonably well catered for, but several local people have asked for more choice in the middle, family price bracket. The owner of the Centre of Britain hotel opines that as he turns away as many customers as he keeps, there is potentially room for two or three more comparable hotels in the town.
- Shops and Market Stalls– the town has a good range of shops, and the weekly Thursday market covers one or two gaps such as men's

clothing. Local people and visitors alike can help prioritise missing services such as children's wear shop and film processing.

- Industrial Sites – long-term screening of the Hadrian's Wall Enterprise Park and other such sites could be achieved by tree planting.

### **Issues**

It is understood that many of the shops in the town are operating at the edge of viability, and do not have spare revenue for improving the appearance of their premises. However, unless Haltwhistle is seen as an attractive place, visitors will not wish to spend time, and therefore money in the town. The issue here then becomes how to break this vicious circle.

### **Vision & Aims**

Haltwhistle should be an attractive and welcoming town for visitors and residents alike; where people will wish to spend time and therefore money.

### **Recommendations**

As part of the ongoing consultation process there needs to be agreement on which partners will lead on the co-ordination of the following recommendations

- To work with the town centre business community to develop a shop-front improvement scheme.
- To improve the appearance of the empty shops by either utilising the window space for interpretation or community projects. Alternatively the windows could be boarded and painted with attractive local images. Co-ordinated approaches could be made to the larger locally based businesses e.g. Nampack, for sponsorship.
- Work with the community to identify specific areas or sites for improvement, possibly giving out disposable cameras to interested volunteers. The resulting photographs can then be used as the basis for a forum and discussion about how to improve.
- Develop a photographic location/backdrop/icon in the market square that enables visitors to find the one image that represents Haltwhistle as the Centre of Britain. Currently the site does not lend itself to a "Here am I at the Centre of Britain" photograph.
- To carry out an access audit of the town, including potential for more car parking.
- To carry out a retail audit of the town, looking at the needs of visitors and residents alike
- To work with the relevant authorities to develop a maintenance and improvement programme for the town's streets, ginnels, open spaces, industrial sites and lighting.
- To carry out an audit and maintain a list of redundant buildings to inform medium-term planning.

## **7. VISITOR MANAGEMENT**

Within this section of the report we will look at the relationship between the following:

- how visitors are managed currently
- what the key issues are revolving around visitor management
- why Haltwhistle needs to address these issues
- what actions Haltwhistle needs to take to resolve the situation

The main topic areas covered by this section will include:

- provision of information for the public
- interpretation of the key Haltwhistle messages
- moving the visitors in and around Haltwhistle
- working with partners and key organisations in and around Haltwhistle

### **Current Situation**

Visitor management should begin from the first moment a visitor decides to visit your site. This could be when they look you up on the website or when they see a sign on the road, make a phone call, speak to an accommodation provider or just turn up.

Overall, we found a sound basic system in place with a few gaps that can be worked on improving in concert. The biggest problem is the related parts don't hang together neatly, resulting in potential visitor confusion and lost business.

### **Website**

- There is one key website for Haltwhistle run by the Haltwhistle Partnership.
- There are also a number of portals by which internet visitors can reach the site and the quality of the links will vary.
- The orientation of the information is mainly aimed at the accommodation providers and the Roman Heritage.

### **Transport and Signage**

- The town is well served with good road links, a railway station and a regular bus service.
- There are brown tourist signs on the main routes into town promoting the services on offer within the town.
- There are schemes in place such as the National Park Bus service which link the town to Hadrian's Wall

### **Information and Interpretation Provision**

- There is a small TIC located at the railway/bus station.
- There are a number panels both within the TIC and the around the town which provide information and some interpretation.
- There is a wide range of leaflets available within the TIC and a limited selection in various businesses around town.

- The interpretation and information is predominantly aimed at the Hadrian's Wall market and supporting accommodation and services within Haltwhistle.

### **Partners in Visitor Management**

There is currently a mixture of different attitudes to the management of visitors from a very blinkered approach to a more holistic and all-encompassing effort.

For example:

- English Heritage appears to take the view that management of visitors is only important for the people who visit their site at Housesteads. Where the visitor goes before they visit the site or after they leave is of lesser concern.
- The National Park strategy has recently changed to be more encompassing and to look outside the park boundaries for economic gain and community involvement. Haltwhistle is perfectly placed to benefit from this strategy.

### **Issues**

There is a wide range of issues which arise out of the current situation. However there are a number of core principle issues which also occur in other sections of this document and which need to take priority.

- The provision of information and interpretation needs to be rationalised as there are far too many people chasing after the same market resulting in a plethora of leaflets and other publications. This leads to confusion and a loss of key messages within the mind of the visitor whether that is in what Haltwhistle has to offer or where to visit around Haltwhistle.
- There is a lack of interpretation about the local heritage. The local heritage should not be aiming to compete with the Roman Heritage but should be exploited to offer the visitor something to do once they have 'done with the Romans'.
- There is a lack of co-ordination and working together between all of the people involved in tourism from the staff involved in the various TIC's through and the visitor attractions through to the accommodation providers and local businesses. There are a wide number of associations and organisations but they tend to be either single local focus e.g. the Chamber of Trade or national wide focus e.g. The Hadrian's Wall Partnership.
- Businesses and organisations appear to be structuring their opening hours and products offered from an internal perspective rather than finding out what the visitor actually wants and trying to find innovative ways within the whole Haltwhistle Community of matching those demands.
- For visitors without their own transport it can prove difficult to get around outside of core times of day and seasons. There are also issues during those core times if the visitor is based in accommodation in the Haltwhistle hinterland.

- The signage around town has developed in a similar way to other towns and sites in that over time different signs have been added for new destinations and services. There needs to be a rationalisation of the signage as it has resulted in a patchwork of different types, styles and sizes of signs across the town which can be confusing to the visitor.

## **Why Manage Visitors?**

So the question has to be asked – why is it important to resolve these issues, after all Haltwhistle has roughly 10% of the local Wall visitors coming through its TIC.

There are a number of key issues which need to be understood if you are going to optimise your resource and they fall into the following categories:

- Avoiding Duplication
- Interpreting your resource
- Know your visitor
- Visitor retention

### **Avoiding Duplication**

With the large number of agencies, organisations, partnerships and businesses involved in tourism either on a local or regional level there is always a danger of overlap and repetition. It is essential therefore that all the individuals and bodies involved have excellent communication between each other and within their own organisations. It is also essential that all involved are committed to the wider picture as well as their own preoccupations – the visitor does not generally distinguish between who is providing the service in an area and it only takes one bad experience to taint everyone else.

### **Interpreting your Resource**

In order to ensure that the visitor gets the most out of your resource you need to ensure that it is interpreted properly. This requires you to look at your resource both from the visitor's point of view i.e. 'What do they want to know?' and your perspective i.e. 'What do we want to tell them?'

Too often people approach the question only from their own perspective which often results in lots of information heavy in detail and of interest only to a very small percentage of your visitors. Very few people actually want to know vast amounts of detail about everything and the trick is to provide a range to meet the needs and make it accessible.

You can easily see this by testing yourself or watching people at information boards or with leaflets. The general visitor only surfs along at a fairly superficial level and if cannot hook them with your interpretation within approximately 3 seconds, they move on and you've lost your message. Interpretation is something which has to be approached professionally whether it is face to face, leaflet, panels, or web-based. You can sometimes do more damage to your message by interpreting something badly than not at all.

## Know your Visitor

It is essential that you know who your visitors are. This not only allows you to manage the ones you have but it also allows to you see who you is not visiting and find out why not. Therefore monitoring and evaluation of your visitors and your resources is essential. This monitoring should be both:

- quantitative i.e. how many visitors are coming/not coming,
- qualitative i.e. who are they, where are they coming from, what do they like/dislike, what are they doing.

## Visitor Retention

The hardest part in any visitor management is getting your visitor in the first place. It is therefore essential that you do as much as possible to extend their stay when they are there and ensure that they come back. This can be as simple as making things easy for the visitor to find out about things and looking after them, to matching what you can offer to what the visitor wants and looking to develop those areas which can build your potential.

## Actions

As with the issues listed above, there are a core number of actions which should be addressed if Haltwhistle and its hinterland are going manage their visitors effectively.

1. The TIC needs to be re-designed from a visitor perspective.
  - The numbers of leaflets on display should be reduced as everyone is losing out in the clutter. Many TIC's already keep drawers of leaflets out of sight for those attractions/services which are only of a specialist interest and are available on request.
  - The following themes should be considered for interpretation and information within the TIC:
    - Local heritage – what's special to do and see in Haltwhistle
    - Hadrian's Wall and the Roman attractions
    - Northumberland National Park
    - North Pennines AONB
  - The craft sales should be evaluated to look at whether the space available is appropriate for sales and to look at the options if not.
  - If there is space designed for sales the TIC should look into the Hadrian's Wall Local Brand initiative and use it to promote local crafts.
  - The opening hours need to be reviewed and looked at from a visitor perspective. The staff need to be supported and be part of the bigger picture – information is a two way street for example any visitor data that is collected by local staff and collated by regional staff, the results should be shared with all staff.

- There may be opportunities to use the water tower building for visitor orientation, if it becomes available but we would recommend if possible not splitting the interpretation from the TIC. It may also be possible to develop it as a local craft outlet for a local business using the Hadrian's Wall brand.
2. There should be an annual pre-season tour of the local visitor attractions and services for people involved in tourism. This could include amongst others, attraction providers, TIC staff and accommodation providers and would ensure that the people who are dealing with visitors have knowledge about and have visited the sites they are recommending. This exchange would also be an opportunity to share information about the coming season and ensure that everyone knows what everyone else is doing thereby benefiting everyone.  
This is also an opportunity to engage with some of the organisations and attractions who are narrowly focused on their own objectives forgetting the wider picture.
  3. The signage for visitor orientation within Haltwhistle needs to be reviewed. Some of the signs should be amalgamated so as to reduce the overall clutter. The parking must be better signed – there is currently plenty of free parking within Haltwhistle it is however a complicated road system and clear signage is essential.
  4. A co-ordinated strategy for visitor monitoring and evaluation must be developed for Haltwhistle. This should involve directly collecting information from the accommodation providers about their visitors and surveys conducted in the town at a variety of sites and times throughout the year. This should then be collated and compared with more regional data and information from the tourist attractions around the area. Most importantly is that the information which is collected should be shared and used to determine how your services and attractions are developed.
  5. Training in visitor management issues is imperative. There are a number of schemes already available which could be offered and encouraged. These include the Blue Badge Guide scheme and the Welcome Host scheme both of which give essential skills in dealing with your visitor. Training should also be seen as an opportunity to invest in your community e.g. a four day course in basic interpretation skills for a member of your community can cost as little as £200 and offer huge benefits to the community.
  6. When you consider interpretation please remember that it is not the same as marketing, promotion or information, it is much broader. As such you should use a trained person whether it is from within your community, using larger organisations skills or an outside professional. Getting your message right is essential to effective visitor management.

7. The National Park is upgrading its interpretation within Once Brewed. It is essential that Haltwhistle ensures that it has a dedicated section within the centre – especially if the National Park is to hold to its own strategy.

## 8. BUSINESS AND ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT

The business and economic development make up of Haltwhistle differs very little to other communities of the same size, in regards to its struggle to manage its economic development efforts on many levels. For the purpose of sustainable economic development, Haltwhistle as a whole must think far outside the box of traditional economic development practice and consider the whole community as the investment, and to have the community as the “product”. The reason this needs to be considered is because we feel the community as a collaborative group has a vested interest in the success of the community both emotionally and fiscally, and not to include the community as a stakeholder would impede progress.

To insure that the product is being structured properly and all aspects of future planning are being thought through, you need to make the distinction if you are modelling a growth strategy or a development strategy. Below you will see the difference between the two, and we hope that your decisions will lean more toward the development process than the growth.

GROWTH	DEVELOPMENT
unplanned	planned
absolute change	improvement
movement	progress
reactive	proactive

Example: To plant a tree in a new park is “planned”; to plant a tree in the path where a new road will be constructed next year is “unplanned”.

When trying to make the distinction of success or failure of your efforts as an entire product, Haltwhistle needs also not to think in traditional economic development ideologies. It must take a look once again at the total community as a product, gauging more than just what is going into the business registers, and consider:

- a. standard of living increases
- b. individual and family spending trends, both of needs and wants
- c. actual business community investing more in their business

Example: If the overall Quality of Life increases in Haltwhistle, it is working.

The next step in managing your economic development efforts, is to create an on-going process to evaluate your business climate. Keep in mind with this process that the tangible parts of the climate like your trees, park benches and other streetscape amenities are important in their own right for visitor comfort and experience, but they do not reflect the true importance of their visit. You will also need to concentrate heavily on the intangible model of the

business climate thought process, and that is to create a positive mind set which will in turn create a positive visit for the tourist coming to Haltwhistle.

This can be done by creating a stable environment in which most of the product (community) buys into, and also never forget the obvious which in technical terms is called "Range of Relative Burden", simply put means (who is going to take care of them the best). When discussing "them" you are referring to your visitors, and one thing to always remember when thinking in terms of range of relative burden, is that if you are not taking care of them, and are not cognisant to their needs as a visitor, they will be apprehensive to visit again.

## **Suggestions/Recommendations**

**Economic Impact Pilot:** Haltwhistle should make a bid as part of the major study into the economic impact of tourism along the Wall, to be a pilot site for the area. The Haltwhistle Community has already identified, on its own, that it wants/needs to improve the local economic benefit from tourism and as such has a head start and is in a strong position to make best use out of the opportunities provided by being a pilot, implementing actions coming out of the study.

**Business Retention Program:** The community needs to establish a program that is proactive in dealing with issues in the business community before the businesses close down or move to another location. This should be done with both a formal outline and a site visit (never/ever do this through the mail). The site visit shows that you really do care because you are taking time to visit that business owner, and that you do have a genuine concern for his problems. One way to make this a success on an immediate basis is quantify all of the concerns of that owner and then take one or two of them and act on them within a 24 to 48 hour period. This will give the sense that the survey was not a waste of his or her time and that the partnership is really serious about making business work.

**Entrepreneurship:** To promote local small businesses, consider involvement with regional governmental agencies that can help promote entrepreneurship in Haltwhistle proper. This will show a proactive approach in 3 ways.

1. small business development
2. creation of employment
3. increasing the communities capital investment

**Shop-Front Improvement Scheme:** It is understood that the partnership had a façade program in the past but for various reasons was under-utilised. This program needs to be put back in place and needs to be made to work, either by restructuring the program or marketing it in a proper manner. To be

totally honest, the reason for failure had to be one of the two problems listed above, because this particular program historically has a high rate of success.

**Internal Needs Survey:** After speaking with the local residents and visitors on an informal basis we feel a needs assessment survey of the local population and visitors should be taken to find out the overall needs and wants of the community. We feel that the community and visitors as a whole are relatively on the same page about the needs of the community, and we find that what they are asking for is not unreasonable or unattainable.

**Information for Businesses:** There should be a “One Stop Shop” for existing and potential businesses to get all the information they need about vacant property, grant schemes, business associations and so forth.

In conclusion, we feel the community has a strong consumer retail driven market economy, but needs to focus on retail diversification by identifying the need through visitor surveys, business interviews and buyer supply fairs for local goods. This will help to meet the proper retail needs of the community and visitors. Also, the local business association needs to take a more proactive role in working together, and other local organisations. And in a broader sense a cohesive look at the overall employment picture of the community needs to be addressed, to see where the strengths and weaknesses lie.

## CONCLUSIONS

It seems clear from the review of Haltwhistle and its historic parishes that it has all the ingredients to enable it to generate real and lasting benefit from tourism. It has:

- a vibrant and welcoming community;
- a range of natural, historical and cultural features within close proximity;
- a town with historical interest;
- transport links to enable accessibility;
- a local agenda compatible with the agenda of those organisations around it;
- potential for developing partnerships with other organisations.

If Haltwhistle is to capitalise on this then it may help to focus on the key steps needed:

### ***Step 1: Get your Visitors***

A clear strategy on how Haltwhistle will attract visitors will be crucial and actions may include:

- Develop one vision, one idea of who you are and what it is you are selling
- Centre of Britain is great theme to build on.
- Use this to develop one advertisement that incorporates a consistent message for the town. Consider taking out an advert in the main season holiday guides: Hadrian's Wall Country, etc
- Develop one block of information for the panels in TICs, and for briefing outside bodies generally.
- Websites: audit the key websites to make sure that the message is consistent, and make sure that the links are there to the key district, regional and national sites.

### ***Step 2: Welcome your Visitors***

Haltwhistle would need to work on its first impressions

- Consider the first impression that people get when they visit
- Improve the appearance of the town through attention to basic street cleaning etc.
- Develop a shop front improvement scheme through a small grant programme
- Make visitors feel welcome

### ***Step 3: Manage your Visitors***

This step addresses what is done with visitors once they are here and includes how they move around the area.

- Assess whether the town and surrounding parishes would benefit from a new centre, be it an improved Tourist Information Centre, a Heritage Centre, an Orientation / Gateway Centre or any mix of them. If revenue resourcing is a limiting issue then it may be possible to use volunteers in a multi-use centre. If space becomes the limiting factor then there may be potential to use empty shop-fronts or window space.
- Even with the best will in the world, it is often difficult to have the opening hours that visitors would want. An option that will need to be assessed is developing a town information point in a suitable venue such as petrol station, post office, convenience store or library.
- Identify key transport improvements.

#### ***Step 4: Keep your Visitors***

Once the visitors are here, then actions will need to be prioritised to ensure that the visitors stay in the area.

- Consider quality at all levels of the market; don't get into mistake that this only applies to top end of the market; quality is just as important for the lower end of the market.
- Restaurants, opening hours to match when visitors want the services
- Visitors enable wider range of services to be available.
- Use Local Food and communicate to visitors when it is included in the menu.

#### ***Step 5: Know your Visitors***

- Develop a programme to collect basic data from the visitors, the businesses and the community. This does not need to be anything onerous, but can involve simple methods, for example working with a representative sample of the businesses in the area. There is also then the potential to identify basic themes to additionally focus on each year e.g. food, service, opening hours.
- It is very important to have baseline in order to measure whether the actions are making a difference.
- It may be helpful to collect data from other public and private sector surveys e.g. Little Chef's view of the area.

#### ***Making it Work***

Away from the local level, it has also become clear that it may be useful if other organisations consider the way in which they work in order to reduce the duplication and confusion that exists. Whilst these observations are outside the remit of the study, there may be value in recording them:

- ✓ There is potential for the National Park Authority, English Heritage, National Trust, local planning authority and DEFRA to work closer together in offering a one-stop advice service for farmers and tourist businesses close to Hadrian's Wall.

- ✓ These bodies should also rationalise their policies so that visitor services are not marginalised. A real case example is a farmer who wanted to extend his campsite next to the vallum of Hadrian's Wall, but while the National Park Authority gave approval subject to screening with trees, English Heritage objected to the planting of trees on a site of archaeological importance! One solution could be a grant scheme for archaeological surveys to remove any such block to visitor service development.
- ✓ There is potential for developing closer relationships between the local tourism associations and the information providers in the area.
- ✓ A comprehensive review of the promotional material in the area is needed to reduce duplication.
- ✓ A computer based destination management system could improve services for customers.
- ✓ The roles of the regional tourist board and the regional development agency need clarifying.
- ✓ It is of fundamental importance to Haltwhistle that the town and its services are properly addressed in the current year-long review of Hadrian's Wall being funded by One North East and the North West Regional Development Agency.

At a local level, if Haltwhistle is to capitalise on this then it may help to focus on the key steps needed:

- ✓ Be clear of roles: identify who is going to do what
- ✓ Will need co-ordination by identified body(ies).
- ✓ Will need buy-in and support from community & businesses
- ✓ But you will need to find a way to work with the system, with your partners, to make this happen

## **CASE STUDY:**

### **WALKING / HERITAGE / ORIENTATION CENTRE**

This section addresses question 4 in the team brief (see Appendix A).

The team explored the various visitor centres, interpretive centres, etc already existing in the area of which there are several. Amongst these existing centres there is overlap and duplication in the information provided although each site does offer something unique as well. The on-going £250,000 study will help to identify the current overlaps and also the gaps such as the under-exploited potential of Haltwhistle as more than just a service centre.

Haltwhistle as we have detailed in the report, stands at the cross-roads of the Wall, the National Park and the AONB. This situation along with its own heritage make it potentially an excellent location for a visitor centre which focussed on the wider picture of things to do and see around the whole area, not just the Wall. In order for this to be effective, some of the major organisations will have to be willing to genuinely combine together for the greater good.

Given the nature and the timing of the study it is important the Haltwhistle starts to address the key underlying issues on its doorstep as well as looking to the outside. This will not only result in a much improved product for Haltwhistle in its own right but will also improve the quality of its bid within the study detailed above.

Because of the complicated nature of such a project, the sensible progression might focus on a series of tasks with decisions that will need to be made along the way.

First, we believe the community should address a number of issues dealing with co-ordinating existing visitor services and creating a shared vision for the community.

There is much work identified in the various sections above which needs to be developed as a primary goal e.g. interpreting the local heritage, building links with the National Park and the AONB, developing a shared, common vision. Until these basic areas are explored and the potential of the markets developed it would be 'putting the cart before the horse' to develop a large new visitor centre now.

With that done the community can move on to clarifying and balancing the various objectives you agree on. Should a heritage centre be pursued? Would a bigger and better visitor centre meet the needs of your visitors? As well as being explored within the community they should also be debated within the context of the current Hadrian's Wall major study.

There has been much discussion about the current Tourist Information Centre about the hours of operation, availability of interpretive materials, information about tourist services etc. In general the goal of a TIC should be to greet the visitor in a friendly fashion. Important issues include access which would include parking, availability of bus service or train service, clean public rest rooms, information on tourist services – lodgings, food and places to see. A heritage centre would do much of this as well providing the public with a good

understanding the history and significance of the targeted area. The interpretation will need to be well developed and based on a well-researched themes to attract and retain visitors.

The current visitor centres run by the National Park, The National Trust and Vindolanda are site specific and for the most part provide services for their visitors only. Some linkages exist and should be enhanced. . The £250,000 survey of the Wall and its impact on tourism, which is currently being undertaken, should be used to look at how these centres interact and how Haltwhistle can add value. If there is genuine desire on behalf of those bodies involved along the Hadrian's Wall corridor, to provide a co-ordinated service which puts tourism and local economy as a priority then Haltwhistle stands in an excellent location to fit into that vision.

Before deciding to operate a facility within Haltwhistle it is important to know why such a facility is needed, who it will serve and what function it will play. Obviously, interpretive surveys will be required to assist the community in reaching consensus on some of these issues. These are necessary steps before one can begin to address possible locations for the facility.

As the town develops over the next few years, opportunities for locating a new TIC or a heritage centre might change. For example, should the community develop the former paint factory as a craft centre it would draw visitor to that end of town, or conversely if a large manufacturing business started up it is unlikely that it would be the best location for the visitor centre. The development of a concept for a facility needs to address the message to be delivered, how the visitor would arrive at and move through the facility. It will also help define staffing, budget and infrastructure issues. We believe it is premature to focus on building a new facility until you have the visitor services, unified message and connections identified and under development first. There are numerous examples of communities who developed large expensive visitor centres without doing all the planning only to have the centre fail. The last thing Haltwhistle needs is a large white elephant on its doorstep however, there is certainly scope within the area for a visitor centre which introduces the whole area to visitors, from the Wall to the National Park and AONB and Haltwhistle's location lends itself to that vision.

## APPENDIX A. TEAM BRIEF

### BRIEF BIOGRAPHIES OF TEAM MEMBERS

#### ***BRITISH TEAM MEMBERS***

##### ***Kaja Curry***

Kaja is the Tourism Development Manager for Caradon District Council in Cornwall. Her work involves developing rural tourism projects in an area heavily dependent on tourism. She is responsible for implementing the S E Cornwall Tourism Strategy ensuring maximum co-ordination and support within the industry, for working with communities to develop community-led tourism initiatives and for developing partnerships to ensure regeneration of rural areas through developments of the tourism industry.

Much of her work is through local partnerships including working with local tourism businesses to develop a shared vision for tourism and developing a strategy for greening the district's tourism businesses. All her projects involve securing funding packages, recently involving successful SRB, LEADER II, DETR, RDA and Countryside Agency applications, which has given Kaja a good understanding of the current funding landscape. She chairs the Funding and Finance group of the East Cornwall Rural Transport Partnership.

She has been responsible for a range of promotion and marketing initiatives including developing the Northamptonshire Countryside Centre in 1990, the South East Cornwall Discovery Centre in 1992 and the SE Cornwall 2001 Tourism Strategy. Other work has involved developing leisure use of the local public transport system as well as organising events and festival, producing trail guides, cycle routes and developing the use of local food in the district.

Before working in Cornwall Kaja was the Countryside Development Officer for Northamptonshire County Council where she was responsible for all promotion, events and interpretation in the County's country parks.

##### ***Andy Fryers***

Andy is Visitor Services Manager for the Forestry Commission in Wales. His responsibilities include developing opportunities for woodland recreation, increasing public understanding of forestry, landscape and cultural heritage of Wales through direct management of the organisation's 5 visitor centres, by setting standards for all recreation facilities and services and by providing support and advice for colleagues in the field.

Andy has been involved in all aspects of the management and development of visitor facilities for over ten years ranging from picnic sites through to major visitor centres. He has also managed the provision of recreation services such as rangers, education and events programmes which have ranged from guided walks through to large music and arts events. Responsibility for the visitor monitoring programme in Wales has given him an understanding of the range of options available for monitoring and evaluating the success of facilities, a key for successful management.

### ***Andrew Maliphant***

Andrew is a Recreation Advisor with the Countryside Agency based in Cheltenham. He is a member of the Agency's Countryside Recreation programme and focuses on rural recreation and access issues where he has lead responsibility for Rights of Way Improvement Plans. This has involved him in greenways, cycling and recreational driving initiatives, and he was heavily involved in the reopening of the countryside following the Foot and Mouth crisis.

Before joining the Agency he was responsible for setting up and managing the SRB regeneration scheme in the market town of Cinderford in Gloucestershire, with a five year action plan costing over £1.2 million. This produced, amongst other things, a new covered market, improved signposting and town leaflets, shop front painting schemes, environmental improvements to the town's gateways and the refurbishment of the local park. Prior to that Andrew was the regeneration partnership leader in Ulverston in the South Lakes, responsible for environmental, architectural and tourism schemes in the historic market town. This involved the creation of a visitor centre and a variety of town promotion projects.

## ***NORTH AMERICAN TEAM MEMBERS***

### **Bruce Fullem**

Bruce is a facility manager for New York State Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation. Currently he is the Site Manager of the John Jay Homestead State Historic Site. One of the important aspects of the position is to develop ways to increase visitation and revenue for a facility. Prior to this he was the manager of four parks within the New York State Park system and previously held the position of Director of the New York State Heritage Area System. He has worked with the tourism efforts of the Heritage areas and he has planned and carried out many small to large scale special events at a number of facilities. These events have demonstrated their value to the economy of the surrounding area as well as to the facility itself.

As a community member, Bruce has also worked at the local level by helping to developing an Education Foundation for the Romulus Central School System. This effort has resulted in raising over \$150,000 in three years for a school system with only 650 students K-12. The result has been a much improved education program and a new cadre of leaders for the community. By working with community based

organizations he has developed many new partnerships, which provided the resource base for many of the initiatives used to increase tourism where he has worked.

### **Curt Cottle**

Curt is a consultant based in Columbia, South Carolina. His areas of expertise include marketing and communications, economic and community development, heritage and cultural tourism, local leadership and board development, fund-raising, public policy and advocacy. Curt was the first and only heritage tourism director for the state. He also was the founding president of the South Carolina National Heritage Corridor, which his office later managed under an agreement with the nonprofit board of directors. The Corridor is a national heritage area (one of about two dozen designated by the U.S. Congress) representing 14 counties across western South Carolina, with more than \$10 million in project and operating funding raised during his tenure.

Before joining the South Carolina Department of Parks, Recreation and Tourism in 1996, Curt was communications director at the South Carolina Department of Commerce, the leading economic development agency within the state. At the state tourism office, Curt was goal leader for an internal team that developed and managed an annual campaign of more than \$10 million. Within the tourism field, Curt served on several national and regional boards, often providing key leadership for new initiatives. Curt has been a speaker for regional and national conferences, including as faculty for *Share Your Heritage* workshops developed this year by the National Trust for Historic Preservation in Mississippi and Kentucky. In addition to a master's degree from Harvard University's Kennedy School of Government, he holds a master's degree in public administration and a bachelor's degree in journalism from the University of South Carolina.

### **Ed Papesh**

Ed is the Director of Economic Development for the City of Lockport, Illinois a community located 20 miles south of the City of Chicago. Ed is responsible for all economic development activities for the City of Lockport, which include business attraction, business retention, tourism and negotiations of infrastructure and incentive deals. Ed has extensive experience in community economic development and has given seminars to communities and counties around the country in what they must do to become proactive in attracting site selectors and commercial real estate developers to their area.

Ed sits on the Board of Directors for the Heritage Corridor Convention and Visitor Bureau. This bureau represents all of the tourism in a 5 county area and represents over 1 million visitors. Ed is also the city representative to the Federal Canal Corridor Commission. This organization has the responsibility of promoting and protecting the history of this man made Canal Corridor that was built in the 1800's to promote trade.

Ed is a graduate of the Robert Morris College in Business and Finance; he also graduated from the University of Illinois Certified Economic Developer Program, the University of Oklahoma's Economic Development Institute and Harvard Universities Senior Executive Negotiations Program.

## **APPENDIX B. SWOT ANALYSIS OF HALTWHISTLE**

Review carried out by the team at the mid-point in the week's study:

### **Strengths**

- Transport Links / Accessibility
- Roman Wall
- Location of Haltwhistle with regard to shopping centres, National Park etc.
- Tourism in area on upswing
- Walking Trails (Hadrian's Wall and The Pennine Way) & Cycle Route
- Places to stay
- Walking Festival
- Buildings
- People
- Enthusiasm
- Haltwhistle Partnership
- Tourism Association
- Youth Project
- Leisure Centre

### **Weaknesses**

- Car Parking / car park signing
- Coach parking
- Lack of data analysis
- Too many partnerships
- Confused message
- Signing blight / too many signs in square
- Signing with regard to Hadrian's Wall
- No visitor orientation strategy
- High street appearance
- Litter
- Opening hours of TIC, shops, petrol station etc : culture
- Shortage of high quality bedspaces
- Ineffective marketing – no clear strategy

### **Opportunities**

- Hadrian's Wall
- Spaces for small events (6)
- Roman Wall Economic Impact Study
- Churches Together
- Themed event programmes e.g. walking festivals, history, wildlife
- Joint activity
- Talk to and involve customers
- Visitor centre for National Park

- Redundant buildings
- Collect data and analysis
- Services for walkers and cyclists

### **Threats**

- Parochialism
- Low horizons/ targets
- Negativity
- Ageing population
- Exiting firms
- Loss of business / jobs / confidence / enthusiasm
- Poor impression
- Lack of joint working
- Lack of focus
- Loss of partnership credibility
- Misdirected enthusiasm