



**BERWICK-UPON-TWEED
TOWN CENTRE HEALTH CHECK
AND EARLY ACTIONS**

July 2006

Version 4.0

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1. Vision

The vision for Northumberland is set out in 'Northumberland 2010 - A Community Strategy for Northumberland'. The over-arching aim is by 2010 Northumberland is recognised as The Blue Sky County – well connected and proud of its people, heritage, excellence and ambition.

Some of the guiding principles are –

- Partnership working as a priority
- Open and transparent decision making
- Devolving decision making to the most appropriate level

The most relevant aims in the Strategy to Berwick Town Centre are –

1. Delivering economic prosperity for all
2. Being confident and secure.

The strategy makes no attempt, however, to engage local communities leaving this aspect to the Local Strategic Partnerships.

The local strategic partnership is the Berwick Borough Local Strategic Partnership. Their Community Plan's (2005-2015) stated aims are –

1. To have a prosperous economy
2. For education and skills to be gained by all
3. To promote good health and wellbeing
4. To have a good quality environment
5. To preserve the past and promote the future.

Relevant specific priorities are to –

- Improve car parking and signage within Berwick town centre
- Fund a Town Centre Manager, new cultural events and the promotion of the borough to tourists and businesses
- Extend the tourist season
- Encourage and support local food production

1.1. Berwick Town Centre Vision

There are already many discussions ongoing to develop a detailed vision for Berwick from a diverse range of groups, organisations and individuals. These have generally focused on our strengths as a traditional historic market town, developing business and attracting more affluent tourists especially out of season. A town centre partnership can be the focus for fine tuning the vision of the Northumberland Community Strategy and the Berwick Borough Local Strategic Partnership's Community Plan to develop a vision for Berwick and implementing that vision. The Roger Tym 'Berwick-upon-Tweed Town Assessment' report in 2004 identifies the need for the Council to work in partnership with the Chamber of Trade, property owners, agents and English Heritage to identify development and redevelopment opportunities within the town centre. It states "Retailing in Berwick-upon-Tweed can only benefit from a more co-ordinated approach to ongoing development of retailing and related opportunities. The development of a town centre management approach could have clear benefits in improving the co-ordination of public and private sector marketing, environmental enhancement and

business development efforts. The willingness of the local business sector to become involved in a partnership approach is to be welcomed.”

This report attempts to sets out how some of the issues and priorities can be tackled to deliver tangible results. Without tangible results our Community Plans can not be implemented and we can't make Berwick Town Centre a thriving and vibrant place for everyone.

2. Berwick in General

Berwick Borough has a population of 25949. There were 13,040 people living in Berwick Town at the last census in 2001. This can be broken down into wards.

Berwick-upon-Tweed Town	
East Ord	1,372
Edward	1,743
Elizabeth	2,462
Prior	1,946
Seton	1,666
Shielfield	786
Spittal	3,065
Total	13,040

The Borough has the lowest average earnings out of the whole of Northumberland at £12,294 which has fallen 17% during 2003/4. Blyth and Alnwick are the closest in earnings at just over £17,000. Employment is the best in Northumberland with only 11% unemployed despite having the lowest number of jobs at 10,411, an increase of 4.2% in 2002/03. Berwick has the largest number of VAT registered businesses per 10,000 population but this figure may be influenced by a large accountancy firm with many registered businesses from outside Northumberland.

Source: State of Northumberland 2005, Census 2001 and local accountancy firm

3. Swot analysis of Berwick-upon-Tweed

An initial assessment of the strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats to Berwick-upon-Tweed is detailed below. These are unlikely to cover everything and are intended as a baseline and to start discussion.

3.1. Strengths

- amount of history and historical buildings
- finest 16th century walls in Northern Europe
- walks on and around walls (also available for disabled access)
- oldest purpose built barracks in the UK (Vanderburg?) (19,000 visitors a year)

- Most traditional town centre buildings remain giving potential for an attractive streetscape
- friendly welcome
- historic guildhall
- twice weekly markets (wed & sat)
- farmers markets (last Sunday in month)
- continental markets (once/twice a year)
- gunpowder magazine
- Main Guard (old Guardhouse for soldiers) (7000 visitors a year)
- icehouses
- 3 great bridges
- Main line train station with good links to rest of UK
- great view from train station
- quayside
- guaranteed tourism from holiday camps
- very close to Edinburgh & Newcastle for day tourists
- beaches and promenade (spittal)
- many varieties of local shops
- some national shops
- empty roads and open countryside for walkers/cyclists
- easy access to other attractions at holy island, Alnwick Castle & Gardens, Chillingham and Norham castles etc, St Abbs head. You can walk to places like St Abbs Head and Holy Island from Berwick
- Good service in shops
- low crime rate
- clean streets
- many events including Green Festival, Film Festival etc,
- bird watching (swans etc locally and nearby watching at Farne Islands and St Abbs Head)
- Best b&b in England (Sallyport) and some excellent b & b's with return visitors
- good arts facility available (Maltings)

3.2. Weaknesses

- Historic town with little room for redevelopment (although quite a lot taking place recently)
- lack or perceived lack of parking
- entrances to towns not really in keeping with historic centre
- reduction in convenience parking in recent years without improved pedestrian, bus or cycle access
- Marygate appears unwashed and lacks greenery & town centre appears rundown
- empty or unvaried markets especially in winter
- perceived lack of toilet provision and state of current toilets
- lack of affluent tourists
- limited marketing and promotion of Berwick
- feeling of isolation

- low paid economy with seasonal jobs (eg Morrisons takes on 300 extra staff from March to September)
- inconsistent service in shops
- lack of ambition
- lack of movement of pedestrians in town centre from Marygate
- not enough to do especially for young people
- lack of wet weather tourist/town attraction
- no main cinema
- arts facility underused
- number of empty shops often due to unrealistically high rents
- lack of tourist shops
- perceived excessive number of charity shops, especially in Marygate. Could convey a 'downtrodden' view of the town.
- lack of coach parking
- lack of evening economy (cafes etc often shut after 4pm)
- lack of interpretation of historic sites (although recent improvements have happened)
- limited promotion of events
- wheelchair access difficult in town centre in places
- twice weekly market unvaried, untidy and expensive for pitches. Few local traders.
- farmer's market perceived as expensive by some residents & visitors
- perception that we are forgotten by County Council and sometimes Borough Council.
- complacency over captive tourist market.
- Lack of joined up working and some partnerships working in isolation
- A1 south to Alnwick needs upgrading

3.3. Opportunities

- Holiday camps continue to develop more affluent tourism and we can tap into their market
- Promote the history, heritage, local shopping, especially as far as Edinburgh, Newcastle (and also Glasgow)
- Improved use of main line train station with marketing
- easy tidy ups such as plantings, trees, shrubbery, flowers in town centre and at entrances to the town
- improve pedestrian, car park and tourist signs (eg re-sign barracks as 'Museum' and have signs to other attractions)
- improve entrances to town, especially signage
- communicate better
- develop genuine partnership working
- co-ordinate events and activities better
- co-ordinated approach to development
- improve tourist season by appealing to more affluent tourists including those who already visit Bamburgh and Holy Island.
- provision of a wet weather facility,
- provision of marina
- steady growth with more housing
- Improved markets perhaps coloured and covered with standard stalls.

- Extension of tourist season through partnership, marketing and events.

3.4 Threats

- Holiday camp market will disappear reducing tourism market by up to 32,000 people a week or 1.64 Million a year. (Haggerston 18,000 capacity and Berwick 14000 capacity).
- Town centres generally under threat from competition from out of town retail, changing market and regional centres (metro station and Edinburgh)
- closure of hospital or train station
- stifling of development by English Heritage
- increasing number of holiday homes not rented out.
- Out of town developments and internet shopping
- Regional Spatial Strategy and housing restriction – stifling and strangling investment and regeneration

4. Possible measures to improve the vitality and vibrancy of the town centre

Following on from the SWOT analysis are some positive actions that could be taken to improve vitality and viability of the town centre and Berwick in general. Again this will not cover everything and is only intended as a baseline and to start discussion. The report does not assume that the recommendations will be acceptable.

4.1. Partnership Working

The main priority of town centre management is to make town centres bright, safe, clean and accessible and to promote 'our town'. To be effective we need to work together and partnership working with key partners and involving the local community in decision making is very important. Partnerships often begin informally and develop over time. Effective partnership working is tried and tested and is often the main difference between successful towns and those in decline. However the road to partnerships is not always easy and compromise on all sides is generally needed. The main benefits are that the whole community gets behind the partnership and civic pride ensues. This can also be an unsettling time for Councils and other partners who in effect have to relinquish some control. Partnerships will need to spell out what they expect partners to contribute. It is a two way street. Job descriptions are a way to achieve this. There should be a limit to number of partners to be effective. Other partners and the community could be engaged at 6 monthly forums or equivalent.

Berwick Town Centre Partnership will be an informal partnership in the early stages and, whilst it will take on board the Community Plans it is intended as a stand alone partnership that brings people together and can eliminate the need for other meetings that can occur in isolation. Once the benefits of partnership working are more obvious, trust is gained and some fine tuning occurs we can move to a more formal arrangement.

Partnership initially should consist of –

1. Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council Local Councillor representatives (John Stevenson & Alan Bowlas)
2. Chamber of Trade (John Robertson 307226)
3. 1 national retailer – Boots (Stuart McBean)
4. Professional association (Andrew Ayre 306688)
5. English Heritage (Malcolm Sutcliffe)
6. Bring Back Berwick Group
7. Bridge Street Traders
8. Preservation Trust
9. LSP
10. Northumberland County Council local Councillor representative (Cllr Diana Beith)
11. Civic society (Alison Cowe 01890 883005)
12. Development Trust (Carol Johnson)
13. Castlegate Area Residents Association (CARA) (Margaret Shaw 308005)
14. Spittal Improvement Trust (Hazel Bettison 331448)
15. West End Residents (John Robertson)
16. Police
17. High school

The day-to-day responsibility for helping and guiding the partnership is the Town Centres Manager (Neil Brown 301767). It is intended to invite a County Council highways officer to attend.

The Town Council, when it comes into being, should be represented. The Council is likely to take on the role of the residents groups. However at present we need cohesion of the different residents groups in the town.

Recommendation

- Start informal partnership on 7 July

4.2. Quick Wins

To start to engage partners and the local community we need to quickly demonstrate that we are listening and we are taking action. Therefore a series of quick wins are needed to bring others on board. Names in brackets refer to where a request has been made.

1. Improved communication, more co-ordinated action and start of town centre partnership.
2. Fix 21 lights out on Royal Tweed Bridge (reported 22/5/06 to 'Pothole Pete' at County Council – update all but 3 lights now fixed 27/6/06).
3. Improve pedestrian signage in town centre at finger pointers in Marygate, Hide Hill and Castlegate (discussions held with Chris Budzynski and County Council).
4. Paint old historic signage on Walkergate/Marygate junction of those facilities still in use with black lettering. (Shop owner undertaking).
5. Wash Marygate weekly especially in the tourist season. It is free from litter generally but quickly gets dirty with seagull droppings etc. (Ross Buchanan)
6. Fill flower pots at outside town hall (Colin Carpenter)

7. Paint lines on disabled spaces on Marygate (Chris Budzynski)
8. Shop guide to make residents and visitors aware of the range of shops and services.
9. Business survey. To let businesses we are listening and interested. Baseline for future. (being drafted).
10. Town maps (similar to Morpeth information board) at Castlegate, Marygate, Bridge street and also perhaps at Morrisons and railway station (discussions held with Chamber of Trade & request submitted to County Council.)
11. Removal of skips opposite Morrisons (now removed)
12. Introduction of rubbish bins at recycling areas (Ross Buchanan)
13. Inclusion in Borders Banquet (asked 22/5/06 – however it is a Scottish Borders Chamber of Trade event. Asked again 5/6/06 & 27/6/06. They will consider it.)

4.3. Parking

A recent (2005) survey by the RAC has found that up to 80% of traffic in centres consists of motorists searching for a parking space and new research also shows that many drivers have abandoned journeys after finding being unable to find somewhere to park. Berwick is unlikely to be much different. The loss of car parking spaces from the town centre and a move to pedestrianisation over the last few years does not appear to have helped the retail or professional sectors in the town centre. However it is still early days and once greenery and street entertainment starts this may change. Also the length of time taken to complete the works and other roadworks that took place at the same time will have had a negative impact. Pedestrianisation for towns or making towns more pedestrian friendly can work if appropriate schemes are implemented and sufficient car parking is available or perceived to be available close to the town centre (300m or less). As well as greenery and street entertainment we need better pedestrian links from the car parks and better cycle and bus access to the town centre. Zebra crossings should also be considered.

There is a perception, and sometimes a reality in the summer months that there is not enough car parking in the town centre. The recent removal of car parking in Marygate appears to have had a major impact on bulky/larger goods retailers. One retailer is shutting and at least one has reported a severe downturn. The pop-in shopper also appears to have stayed away. A gift shop also advised that they had to close as a direct result of the pedestrianisation and associated roadworks. Northumberland Water plan to dig up Marygate in 2007 and this will again have a major impact on retailers. Currently businesses and residents have little or no liaison from the Water Board and often works appear to have been started but the workmen are nowhere to be seen. Better liaison and communication should be sought. It is unfortunate that the Marygate water improvements could not have been undertaken at the same time as the pedestrianisation. Any further improvements of this nature should take account of all infrastructure and other requirements.

Free or inexpensive long term parking provision is required to remove some commuters' vehicles from the town centre. This would free up a substantial number of spaces. Commuters also need to be encouraged more to walk or cycle where possible. The best place that is available to provide parking long term in the town centre is on the outside of the walls. If this area was made to complement the walls, it could be both a tourist attraction and car park. However some imagination may be required to come up with a suitable scheme that would be acceptable to English Heritage who manage/own the area outside the walls. Generally though these areas are not used much by tourists and there is an opportunity here.

At present English Heritage require the current overspill grassed car park at Castlegate to be returned to them after 2011.

There is also some land by the railway station and the station car park could be a two tier or multi-storey car park. Perhaps removing the bank in the Castlegate car park would be worthwhile. There is also land opposite at the barracks which could be turned into coach or additional car parking. There may be ways of keeping the amenity of the open space yet have more parking. However a planning application for coach parking was turned down in recent years due to residential amenity. One other possibility is the green area at dock street, Spittal. By retaining the area near the Tweed as green for tourists and residents we could have some commuter/business parking at the road. However this may require a park and ride scheme and there is the added complication of a gas main in the middle of the grass just below the surface.

The only other viable option would be to introduce park and ride for all. To be effective a large area is likely to be required with sufficient signage. Ideally 2 park and ride car parks at different ends of the town should be considered, both connected by a free park and ride bus. Running costs are estimated at £10,000 per month.

The current overspill car park for the Castlegate is a needed and useful asset. However even if we have to give it up in 5 years time improvements could be made. The cones should be removed and replaced with something more appropriate (e.g. like trees in Seahouses car park) and the spaces could at least be lined with the same material used on football pitches.

Resident's permits also appear to allow residents to park in any residents' area in town for £10 a year. Steps to restrict residents parking to an area surrounding their house and neighbouring streets should be taken.

Lorries and other vehicles loading, unloading and just stopping to pick up has become a problem on Marygate and we perhaps need to consider some sort of restriction e.g. loading/unloading only before 10am or after 5pm.

Recommendations –

- Retail survey to find out state of retail and other businesses in general and impact of pedestrianisation of Marygate. Follow up survey to take place at regular intervals (annually?).
- New car parking signage is considered absolutely essential (as recommended under Town centre signage.)
- FREE Long Term parking to be provided for businesses and commuters to free up space for visitors and shoppers.
- Once, and only once, sufficient long term FREE parking is in place then charges for annual tickets could be substantially increased.
- No other major policy changes are made until the impact of the park and ride is assessed.
- Improve Castlegate overspill car park by lining and removing cones; also allow up to 3 hours parking in short-stay and extend short stay to include all of the tarmac area.
- Improve parade car park by providing a proper entrance and exit
- Investigate impact of loading restriction on Marygate

4.4. Entrances to Town

4.5. North Entrance

From the North the entrance is via Trading estate, Morrisons and MacDonalds as well as some 1960's housing. There is no promise of the attractive historic market town in the centre. It looks like any other town.

There are some things that can be done.

Recommendations

- Improve Brown signage. Brown signs are not really evident. There needs to be a sign much further back, perhaps at Lamberton or just past and the sign near the roundabout is obscured by several signs including one for 'Services' and 'the Meadow House'. There is no Brown sign on the entrance to the Town off the roundabout.
- Consider new brown signs promoting Berwick better eg 'The finest complete medieval walls in Northern Europe, England most northerly town'
- Improve the entrance. Public Art could work well here. We would need to work with the community to get some civic pride/ownership in such a scheme.
- Tree planting or flower beds or something eye-catching on the grass on the left as you enter the town
- More trees or planting all the way into town.

4.6. South Entrance via Scremeston

This is a very nice way of entering Berwick, adds to the visitor attraction and first impressions. There is a brown sign (missing accommodation/bed sign?) just before the turn-off and the town would benefit from bringing tourists in from the Scremeston turn-off. The only problem could be the traffic. Perhaps by signing Lorries and Park and Ride to enter from East Ord Roundabout this would mitigate it. The main problem with road safety had been at the leisure centre and the new roundabout has solved this problem. The other main issue is that the co-op exit may need upgraded.

Recommendation

- Sign entrance from south via Scremeston and take any other measures necessary to mitigate against increased traffic. However continue to sign lorries, coaches and potential future park and ride at industrial estate via next turn off.

4.7. South Entrance via east Ord Roundabout

If coming from the south it does take longer to get into town than via Scremerston. Brown signs are ok until you get onto the roundabout. Unfortunately the Berwick entrance is missing a brown sign. In fact the next brown sign is some 200+ metres down the road with symbols for the attractions. Does anyone know what these symbols are? Not really. Just a Brown symbol is not really sufficient to sign attractions. The spring flowers here are nice though but once further along you hit the industrial estate. Not the best way to enter an historic market town.

The North Entrance to East Ord is not signed at all, presumably because of the earlier signage.

Recommendation

- Introduce new brown sign at Berwick exit.

4.8. Signage

4.9. Signage Generally

Signage generally could do with a clean. Old bits of paper or other vandalism to signs needs to be sorted. Old signs that are of no use either need to be removed or replaced (eg the old A1 Edinburgh sign at start of North Road or Alnwick sign via Scremeston). Also facilities such as the beach, historic bridge and museums are not signed.

Recommendations

- New signs for the Beach(es) (next to Spittal promenade and elsewhere). The fact that we have a beach is a great selling point and we need to make better connections between the town and the beach.
- Clean all the signs
- Sign the museums. The Barracks complex as “Museums (Barracks)” or equivalent at the parade and all the way into town from both directions. The Teddy Bear Museum could be signed from the Barracks. The Main Guard could also be signed.
- A sign for the historic bridge at West Street and views over the Tweed
- Replace old worn out signs.

4.10. Town Centre Signage

The main issue for town centre signage is for parking, buses and lorries. We need to direct all traffic left (from the south). Parking signs are not obvious to the visitor. The Castlegate Car Park resembles a supermarket car park and the parade and others are not adequately signed. Pedestrian signage is small, difficult to read and not really obvious. Several signs are not seen until you know where they are and consciously look for them. Car park signage must be a number one priority if we are to address the perceived problem of a lack of parking.

Generally people on foot tend to stay in Marygate. The lack of obvious signage and the steep hills at hide hill and West Street put people off. The Scots gate also helps keep people in. We need to encourage people to go round the whole town to get the best out of it. If visitors just see Marygate and go home they are less likely to enjoy their visit, find out the history of Berwick, come back or even recommend it to friends.

Recommendations –

- New signs for Castlegate car park. The signs here need to be much bigger and certainly be bigger than the sign for long stay at the railway. The signs need to state

“**Town Centre Car Park 550 spaces**”. Also if we can electronically show how many spaces are left that would be a significant improvement.

- Improve the signage to the parade and other car parks off Walkergate. Ensure that the parade car park shows signage to town centre via quickest route (i.e. down Church Street.)
- Increase size of pedestrian signs or consider replacing with improved display boards that other towns are now considering. In meantime – a) Add signs to pedestrian signage at West St directing to ‘historic bridge’, quayside etc. b) Add signs mid way down hide hill for quayside and bridge st shopping. c) Add sign to Castlegate for ‘Castlegate Shopping’. (shopping signs can be paid/part paid by businesses)
- Install town centre maps and display boards. Initially at Marygate, Castlegate Car park and Bridge street car park (A0 size upright map and other information eg A-Z shop guide). Allow space for expansion.

4.11. Marketing and Promotion

Marketing/promotion of Berwick could be improved. Morpeth’s TIC thought Berwick was in Scotland whereas Kelso knows we are in England. However businesses are interested in promoting Berwick and may be willing to contribute to the funding.

The history of Berwick-upon-Tweed and what the town has to offer has been very undersold. Perhaps the steady supply of captive tourists from the holiday camps and caravan parks has made many complacent about attracting more affluent tourists, visitors and other people to the town. The whole border wars with Edward I, William Wallace and Robert the Bruce has been almost ignored. Such a theme or exhibitions on this type of history would help put Berwick on the Map. For example, we know that a part of William Wallace was placed on the old ‘old bridge’ as a deterrent to armed conflict from Scotland. There is a rumour that Wallace’s remains were thrown down a well at Wallace Green, named after Wallace. Local historians doubt this rumour believing the street to be named after the Walls (ie Walls Green to Wallace Green). However it doesn’t really matter and Berwick could have as much claim to William Wallace as Stirling does. Given sufficient display or interpretative material this could be an added attraction. One idea could be to have Uri Gellar, Derek Accorra or others in town to ‘find’ William Wallace’s remains and perhaps petition the Queen to pardon Wallace.

Some other ideas – Declare independence or declare war with Russia.

Recommendations

- Concentrate on Border wars as an historical theme
- Exploit the rail links to rest of UK
- Consider inexpensive or free ways of publicity

4.12. Free Leaflets

Free leaflets have to be a cornerstone in effective marketing. However there are few free leaflets distributed that highlight Berwick, and most of these don’t make it far afield. For example East Linton’s TIC (40mins away), Morpeth’s TIC (60 mins) and Kelso’s TIC (30 mins) only had leaflets on display on local places such as pot-a-doodle-do, Paxton house, The Fenton Centre and Alnwick castle (all private businesses). There was no material to let people know we are here. Holiday guides were sometimes available but only on request.

Leaflets we do have on Berwick are –

1. Town Map by Chamber of Trade – Great map mini-guide aimed at the tourists here already.
2. Lowry Trail – Undertaken by the preservation Trust and reprinted by the Council. It is an excellent trail and leaflet.
3. Barracks leaflet – Good that we have one but could be improved.
4. Ports of Berwick Borough (Linda Bankier) – Soon to be updated and reprinted.
5. Nearby promoted attractions worth mentioning – a) The Battle of Flodden Field – New leaflet. Great history leaflet. b) Halidon Hill leaflet – Great new leaflet. c) English Heritage leaflet on Holy Island.

Recommendations

- Introduce FREE leaflets for Berwick-upon-Tweed and nearby attractions, (eg Come to/Visit Berwick, Berwick History including walls, History trail)
- Organised distribution of leaflets over a vast area as other attractions (our competitors) do already. A 60-80 mile radius perhaps. Easily available, obvious and 'in your face'

4.13. Leaflets not Free

There are some leaflets which are not free (available in the TIC) such as the 'around the walls in 80 minutes' leaflet (black and white), and other organisations/societies leaflets (coloured paper). Despite some income generated by these leaflets it would be much more beneficial to make these free as part of the tourism offer. Booklets could remain available to buy. It is even perhaps feasible that making the leaflets free will make people more interested in the other publications and we actually sell more booklets and generate more income.

There are also some inexpensive booklets/leaflets such as CARA's history trail which could perhaps be adapted to a smaller free leaflet.

Recommendation

- that all leaflets (not booklets though) are **Free**.

4.14. Alnwick & Berwick Holiday Guide

There have been several comments about the guide in the town and elsewhere. Great Idea. Tie up with Alnwick, especially garden and castle could be good but we need to ensure accuracy of adverts (several B&B are still in dispute) and increase the information on Berwick and Borough. Businesses report less inquiries and bookings via recent holiday guide compared to 2005.

Recommendations

Keep publication for next year subject to –

- Improved information and additional pages on Berwick and Borough (at least equal billing with Alnwick).

- Accurate proofreading
- Early publication (eg November 2006 for 2007?)
- Refund or part refund all businesses affected by adverts with immediate effect.

4.15. Seagulls

Always a problem in seaside towns. Generally there are mitigation measures available.

Recommendations

- Promote the chimney wiring scheme more.
- As bins require replacement, replace with self-closing bins that can't be accessed by seagulls or pigeons.
- Consider coating or pricking eggs yearly
- Provide noise measures on a regular basis to stop seagulls from nesting.
- Consider an in-house bird of prey

4.16. Toilets

After parking one of the biggest complaints is about public toilets or lack or perceived lack of them in the town centre. Recent times have seen the introduction of superloos including 1 in Eastern Lane and 1 in the Woolmarket. The Council is now tied in to paying a private firm over a number of years (10-20?). The Eastern Lane toilet floor is always covered in water or other liquid and it is not really an inviting place. Some people report that they are even afraid to go in case they get locked in. The Castlegate car park toilet is not really inviting either. What can we do? There are some ways of helping the situation. Other properties or businesses in suitable locations could utilise their toilets as 'local toilets'. This type of scheme works in other towns by inspecting toilets and paying the owners around £600 a year to make them available. Perhaps 2-3 additional locations in Berwick could be found.

Recommendations

- Consider a toilet scheme as detailed above
- Improve signage to toilets
- Consider long term solutions to public convenience provision

4.17. Charity Shops

Difficult to do anything about. Charity shops are the same use class in planning terms as an ordinary shop. Some charity shops do help the mix of retailing in towns generally and are preferable to an empty unit. However the number and location of the charity shops generally on Marygate indicates to many a town in decline. In other towns the retail cost is prohibitive for charity shops and they are pushed to the less expensive streets. Perhaps that is an indication that despite much higher rents than Alnwick, rents are still reasonably inexpensive (eg Falkirk compares at double the rents to Berwick). (Newcastle rents to be investigated)

Recommendations

- Consider introducing a planning policy to restrict the number of similar premises within a designated area.
- Lobby the government to change the use class of charity shops.

4.18. Shop Fronts

Traditional and historic shop fronts could enhance a town such as Berwick. Planning policies and funding for this type of development could be explored.

Recommendations

- Consider replacing shop frontages and whole shops
- Explore planning policies and funding (HERS scheme? etc) for shop fronts.

4.19. Crime and fear of Crime

The level of crime in Berwick is generally low and we are one of the lowest crime areas in England (stats to follow). CCTV has been introduced in recent years. However funding is required to replace the cameras in the future. Some retailers have signed up to a radio scheme which is seen as a useful addition to fight crime. A taxi marshalling scheme is being proposed to increase safety and awareness in the town centre in the evening.

4.20. Events

There are a number of events going on in the town every year including the successful Green Festival and Film Festival. For a town the size of Berwick it is doing very well in events terms. However promotion and marketing could be improved from banners to the simple leaflet advertising events in the town to the larger scale. For example the 1603 Union of the Crowns event was a fantastic success and did bring in many visitors. In previous years there had been a number of festivals, from the annual May fair to historical enactments, the tattoo and the Dickensian market. Events that give the town some civic pride should be promoted or re-introduced where possible. However all events will need a core number of volunteers to take their projects on. Unfortunately, in the past, events have folded because the very generous volunteers have not been able to find replacements to take on their role.

A number of street events such as a shop front competition, hanging basket competition, buskers competition, low key music, belly dancing, historical enactments etc are being considered by the Town Centre Manager. However it is likely to be a very small programme in 2006. Even with the smallest event funding is required to pay for competition winners or travelling expenses and there may be a requirement for marshals.

See also 4.11 marketing and promotion.

Recommendation

- Investigate providing a sustainable yearly themed event to promote Berwick.

4.21. Markets

Berwick has two markets a week all year round as well as a farmers market and special continental markets. Markets are extremely important to keeping the town thriving and vibrant and are a cheap way of attracting people to the town. Evidence suggests that the weekly markets have been on the decline for at least the last 4 years with few stalls in winter. The markets also tend to be more expensive for stallholders than other local markets eg Alnwick. (prices to be checked). Some variation of stalls could be introduced as well as a reduction in price in winter to encourage more stallholders to come. High prices can be very prohibitive except in the height of summer. We mustn't forget how much benefit is brought to the town with the markets and also how market forces work – lower prices bring more stalls & higher prices less stalls. As well as promoting Berwick and making it a nicer place to visit we may be able to maximise income by reducing prices.

We could also look at making the stalls uniform in size & colour, tidying up the whole of Marygate. Inconsistent charges for markets are also a factor. Other markets do come to town but they are generally not charged at all. Most, if not all, would be happy to pay a fee. These fees could help pay for other town centre improvements.

High stall prices equal fewer stalls and less income. More and varied stalls bring more people into town and will benefit the whole of the town centre.

Recommendations

- Recommend that the winter markets are charged less and develop policies to help vary the market and encourage, support and work in partnership with the stallholders
- Charge other markets a fair price for using Marygate or other Council Land with any income reinvested in town centre improvements.

4.22. Quayside

Highly underused. Possible granary development and river trips will help footfall here. However the recent quayside redevelopment deposited rubble in the Tweed making it much shallower than it need be. Also the side lip overhangs the quayside and any boat tying up could get stuck under this lip. Major refurbishment would be required to allow use of the quayside by boats. The area next to the old bridge could be used for markets or some other use. The potential for boat trips via a pontoon is being investigated.

Recommendation

- Investigate use of land at quayside next to the old bridge.

4.23. Marygate Generally

Marygate is the retail hub and focus for visitors to Berwick. It has the highest retail rents in town which vary roughly from £47-£55 a sq ft. Alnwick generally compares at £28 a sq ft. Other streets in Berwick, including Walkergate, are much less. Many tourists report that they find the Marygate drab and dirty and there have been some complaints from residents that the street is not very clean. Most people visiting Berwick for the first time tend to visit Marygate and often leave without visiting anywhere else, so it is particularly important that it is seen as clean and green and leading to other parts of Berwick. It can't be stressed highly

enough that the visitors' view of Berwick is often dependent on Marygate alone. If it is a nice safe, green, clean and accessible place to visit everyone will benefit. If it is not then everyone loses. We do need to start thinking about what would be good for the town and not just about who will contribute. There will always be businesses or organisations that won't contribute financially but we should not let that stop us making an improvement to those areas.

Access to other streets and encouraging movement around town is very important. By ensuring that visitors see all of what Berwick-upon-Tweed has to offer we can increase our chances of them returning or recommending us to their friends as a place to visit.

Other issues that could be improved include pedestrian crossings and improved bike storage. According to local cyclists the current racks could damage your bike if more than one bike is attached.

Recommendations

- Clean (ie wash) the street weekly with immediate effect (see quick wins).
- Introduce greenery e.g. flowers, trees shrubs etc now
- Investigate introducing hanging baskets in consultation with the businesses.
- Investigate introducing better street furniture in keeping with rest of town.
- Investigate commissioning a street design guide which will advise of current standards and recommend which materials should be used in future as well as street furniture standards.
- Investigate introducing zebra crossings or other measures
- Investigate introducing appropriate bicycle storage
- Improve the signage (See Town Centre Signage)

Source for rents: local estate agent.

4.24. Local Food Production

Good local food is already available in Berwick and the Borough and there is great potential for promoting local food. We already have many shops and restaurants using local or organic produce and promoting local food more can only have benefits for Berwick-upon-Tweed. A slow food convivium for the borough is being investigated by a local resident and the Town Centre Manager has joined 'slow food' to demonstrate Council support for the initiative.

Recommendation

- Make more of local and organic produce through the slow food initiative

4.25. Festive Lights

In many towns festive lights are organised and put up by local volunteers and local organisations. Last year in Berwick there were some good displays on the Royal Tweed Bridge and in some streets. Unfortunately Marygate was disappointing with many missing lights. 2006 is likely to be much the same or worse unless some local volunteers or organisation can take on this responsibility even for fundraising only. Festive lights on average last between 3 and 5 years before they need replaced or rotated around the town.

Even the best lights on the bridge are now over 3 years old. Ten percent breakage per year is normal.

Castlegate would like to erect lights in the street on the lampposts but they have been told by the County Council that a feasibility study will cost them £6000. Private firms advise that it will cost around £20 per lamppost to undertake a structural test.

Everyone will be aware of the importance of putting on a good display of festive lights. Festive lights bring people into town outwith the main tourist season, keeping the town thriving and vibrant in winter. The festive period is often a crucial time for businesses, keeping many afloat in the quiet months to come. Most importantly good festive lights gives everyone that feel good factor that can last many many months into the new year and engender a civic pride in the town. No lights or poor lights, on the other hand, will have the opposite effect.

Recommendations

- Try and attract volunteers to run or fundraise for the lights
- Liaise with County Council on feasibility of lights for Castlegate.
- Ask for advice from private firms

5. Funding

Funding is a major issue that the partnership will need to address. Berwick-upon-Tweed Borough Council are funding the post of Town Centres and Inward Investment Manager and do not have any additional resources to commit to the partnership at this time. Project funding will have to be found from the remaining partners or by other means. Some ideas to consider will be a Membership scheme with specific benefits for members. Requests for voluntary contributions can also be made. Many businesses may be interested in joining such a scheme to fund such projects that include promoting and marketing the town.

6. What is already developing?

There are a number of great things happening in the town which will lead to either short or long term improvements.

Some of these are –

- New interpretation for some attractions
- Possible re-use of pontoon for boat trips
- Development at Walkergate (incubator units)
- Re-development of the Granary
- Possible redevelopment of quayside, Spittal point, cinema, Youngman's premises on hide hill, Blackburn and Price.
- Ramparts Industrial Park extension to the North Road Industrial estate
- Investment and interest from partners (County Council, One Northeast, NSP etc)
- New Berwick Development Trust
- Improved communication between the Council and Chamber of Trade and others
- Shops on Castlegate, Hide Hill and Bridge Street selling or leasing quickly