

ANNAN INITIATIVE

Chairpersons Report 2008/2009

Welcome to the Annual General Meeting of the Annan Initiative, my second as Chairperson. The Chairperson's report not only gives me the opportunity to reflect on another year but also and, most importantly, gives me the platform to update members with the current plans, projects and focus of the Honorary Officers and Management Committee.

2008/2009 Overviews:

Some of you may remember that at the last AGM the revised version of the constitution was passed and hopefully, we will not have to re-visit this for another couple of years.

This year has heralded a period of challenge and change for the Initiative. The Townscape Heritage Initiative Project is in the last stages but others have risen to take its place - namely, The British Pipe Band Championship Committee and the Economic and Regeneration Steering Group - but more of those later.

Caroline started the year off by organising a Lantern Making morning in readiness for the big celebration for Homecoming in Dumfries on January 25th. Everyone enjoyed making the lanterns and the event was very well attended. I am not artistic, so I made the coffee and tea!

Alan Thomson's role as Development Worker came to an end in March 2008 and he was responsible for developing projects, like the THI and ClipICT. His work was invaluable and in many instances I have just been following in his footsteps!

I am disappointed to lose our Treasurer of the past two years and wish to thank her publicly for all her hard work and wish her well in the future.

I am also pleased to welcome the new members and newly appointed Treasurer, Mr Mitchell and his lady wife.

The Annandale Way is near completion, after a number of delays and although we hold the finance, the Annan Walking Group has been busy co-operating with other organisations.

Over the next few months the Management Committee will have to focus on the next round of Third Sector Funding, due to be submitted by October 31st. The aim is to have a Business Plan in place and apply for three year funding for the first time. It just may be in our interest to apply for charitable status at some point, though the rules of entry are being reviewed. We also need to build capacity within the Initiative, bringing in new members with new talents.

We are indebted to Dumfries and Galloway Council for their continued financial support and also to the Council Officers who offer assistance - Jamie Ferguson - Gus MacIntyre - Steve Southam - Julie Douglas - Chris Brown.

The Townscape Heritage Initiative:

This is nearing the end but we have managed to negotiate a further extension to September this year. At long last the traditional paving and cobbled parking area in front of the Town Hall were re-instated. This particular project has not been without its critics and controversy. The over-run of the works and the effect on the businesses within the vicinity are the most often repeated complaints. Work is now underway on the last stage - the area round the War Memorial.

Unfortunately, the credit crunch has resulted in fewer of the proposed works being either completed or even started - Hares Den and the Erskine Church are the main examples.

On September 15th 2008, a further Public Consultation Meeting was held and in the spring this year the long-awaited Newsletter was finally published.

Dashed Hopes:

We had planned to make some major changes to the website. Unfortunately, our contact was unable to devise pages in her native Polish, due to work commitments. It was also hoped to launch up-beat pages to promote the British Pipe Band Championship and we put a lot of effort to "sell" the idea. Saskia even put in a quote but to no avail. However, some progress has been made. We had a special feature to celebrate this Homecoming year, there is a brand new Fishing page and the Initiative pages were updated. High Jinks have also added a bit of Christmas cheer. Finally, a new bed and breakfast was added to our accommodation pages.

Work on the Victoria Halls Complex has completely stalled and it is unlikely that further action will be taken.

New Projects AI are Involved In:

- The Pipe Band Steering Group's bid to hold the British Pipe Band Championship for three years, 2010 - 2011-2012, was successful. Hopefully, this will bring great prestige to the town and nationwide publicity. This is a collaboration of interested parties within the town. Work is forging ahead on the organisational plan and a website is now online. This is a massive undertaking and a great success story for Annan.
- Notice Boards for the town is moving slowly forward. It is hoped to have one at the new Tesco; this is just the beginning, as we will be working with the Community Council to source funding and further boards for the High Street.
- An Office for the Initiative - a visible presence close to the High Street. A further step in building capacity. This will be a useful tool in the regeneration process.
- The Economic Regeneration Steering Group is the new kid on the block and with a time span of 15 to 20 years should develop into a fully-fledged Annan for the 21st century and beyond. This group is looking at the business and economic development of the town and community/social development. This is a natural progression on from the THI, which focused on the High Street and conservation area. I want to focus on two mini projects which have come out of this and in which we have been heavily involved:
The Farmers' Market - a sub-group was formed to plan, organise and run a Farmers' Market on the fourth Saturday of each month until September of this year. A considerable amount of market research was carried out, including visits to the markets at Lockerbie, Langholm and Longtown. It was decided that the optimum place to hold it was indoors at the Bruce, where an outdoors market already existed in the car park. This disappointed those who would have liked to see it sited at the Market Halls. Long-term, should the market become a permanent feature, this may become a better option but time will tell. We have been hampered by lack of funding, especially for marketing purposes - a key factor to success.
The Business Forum - We were instrumental in organising the two forums that have taken place, the aim to bring the town's businesses together and discover the concerns, especially in these credit crunch times. We took the lead in driving the process of putting a Business Database together; thanks must go to our volunteer. We even had a seat on the panel! The Forum should develop a life of its own but report into the Steering Group.

I will stop now before you suffer from information overload. I hope this report gives you a positive view of the Initiative and how we are continuing to become involved in community projects, sometimes as part of a bigger group, sometimes as a sub-group of ourselves. We are always looking out for new people to become involved in their local community, either by donating their time or bringing ideas to the table.

Thank you for your listening.