

HADRIAN'S WALL HERITAGE LIMITED

MEETING OF THE BOARD: 26 NOVEMBER 2008

INTERPRETATION PLANNING

Over the last ten months the Interpretation Framework has proved a useful basis through which HWHL has been working with individual site partners to develop interpretation plans for several different sites along Hadrian's Wall as part of major proposed capital developments:

- Interpretation planning was a key element in helping Vindolanda Trust to secure a Stage 1 offer of £4.5 million from HLF to revitalise displays at the Roman Army Museum and at Vindolanda. At Vindolanda interpretation will focus on the personalities and stories of daily life revealed by the writing tablets, what the tablets reveal about communications within the empire, the process of excavation and research, and on linking the site and museum. At the Roman Army Museum interpretation will be designed to bring the Roman Army to life for family audiences, exploring themes of multiculturalism, daily life, the army and the empire, soldiers and natives.
- Purchase of the Roman fort and vicus at Maryport and of the associated farm land and buildings will be completed at the end of October. This is the first stage in the development of a major new visitor centre and museum on the Cumbrian coast. Interpretation planning at Roman Maryport proposes to focus on the relationship between a site and its garrison and the wider empire. Particular themes (developed in response to the Senhouse Museum collections, the location of the site, the proposed programme of excavation of the *vicus* and target audiences) include military careers involving postings to different parts of the empire, military religion, travel and transport by sea, the frontier along the coast, settlement in the *vicus* and the process of excavation and research.
- Tullie House Museum has secured £500k through Renaissance North West to develop a new gallery focused on the Roman period. Interpretation planning at Tullie House aims to position Carlisle as the western gateway and orientation point for Hadrian's Wall, complementing the Hadrian's Wall Gallery of the Great North Museum in the east. Interpretation will develop narratives that explore the story of the north west frontier of the Roman Empire and the position of Britain as a province of Imperial Rome.
- The Great North Museum will open in spring 2009. The Museum will feature a major new Hadrian's Wall gallery displaying the fine collections of the former Museum of Antiquities and featuring as a centrepiece a scale reconstruction of the whole length of Hadrian's Wall. A number of characters identified through inscriptions will bring different aspects of life along Hadrian's Wall to life and provide links to different forts along it.
- HWHL are working closely with the visitor experience sub-group for the Housesteads 2012 project to develop interpretation that builds on the iconic status of Housesteads and complements interpretation at other sites along the Wall.

HWHL has recently accepted offers of grants from HLF and from Natural England to develop and take forward the two main themes identified in the Interpretation Framework (The Roman Frontier and the Natural/Cultural Landscape). The projects will be led and managed by HWHL in partnership with other stakeholders who will be engaged through workshops and seminars. Specialist teams will be engaged by HWHL over the next three months to manage and implement the projects. It is proposed to prepare the briefs and advertise the tenders before Christmas to enable the projects to start early in 2009.

A particular objective of the HLF funded project will be to develop and to test themes, narratives and presentation techniques with existing and new audiences using focus groups and other research techniques.

HWHL is also developing a proposal for an AHRC funded Knowledge Transfer Partnership with Newcastle University (International Centre for Cultural and Heritage Studies) to explore interpretation applications using new mobile technologies. Over the last 6 months HWHL has hosted presentations by several specialists in this area who have demonstrated a variety of applications. There is significant potential for the application of this technology along Hadrian's Wall. Partnership with the team from ICCHS would provide opportunities to take an experimental approach, testing applications amongst a variety of audiences using different technologies.

The programme of capital investment currently focuses on the major managed sites and museums along Hadrian's Wall. A programme of wall-wide capital interpretation and signage development is needed to maximise the benefits of the site based investment by ensuring effective integration, development and presentation of the visitor offer. Elements include website development, audio-visual presentations introducing wall-wide themes, remote interpretation, new customer facing literature and co-ordinated signage infrastructure.

In addition to interpreting the Roman Frontier and the cultural/natural landscape HWHL is contributing to the development of other interpretation themes that are relevant to Hadrian's Wall country. HWHL has had a significant input to the heritage research project commissioned by ONE that explored the potential of heritage to contribute to the regional economy. The research carried out by Tribal identifies key themes which have some resonance with the consumer, and where the North East is seen as having an advantage:

- Hadrian's Wall and the Romans
- Christian Heritage
- Castles
- Industrial Heritage

The research does not draw out the stories of these themes and how different sites can be linked and developed. HWHL is co-ordinating the development of narratives and linking themes for Hadrian's Wall and the Romans. There is a general consensus amongst the partners involved in the Heritage Research project that a piece of work is needed to develop the stories, and to pull the strands together for the Christian Heritage, Castles and Industrial Heritage themes. This would probably involve consultation with people who know parts of the story (eg historians) and then translating it into something with greater market appeal.

Key actions would comprise:

- Developing the story/stories and, based on the story:
- Produce concepts which will excite the consumer, and testing the concepts with different market segments
- Mapping the current “product” (sites and attractions) to the story and identify any product development work, eg capital investment, interpretation, training etc
- Mapping sites to audiences and identifying ways of communicating the story to different audiences – on-site and off-site

Hexham Abbey and Lanercost have potential to play key roles in developing the Christian Heritage theme while the castles at Carlisle and Newcastle and Reiver and Jacobite sites within the corridor have important contributions to make to the Castles theme.