

REPORT OF VISITOR SERVICES MANGER SOUTH

SUBJECT: CAREW CASTLE AND TIDAL MILL

Purpose of Report

To update Members with current operations at the Carew site, recent developments and future plans.

Introduction/Background



Carew Castle and Tidal Mill's rich history spans over 2,000 years from the Iron Age, through to Elizabethan intrigue and Civil War devastation. Today Carew welcomes approximately 45,000 visitors throughout the year for action packed days of family-friendly discovery and adventure or just for a gentle stroll with the dog and a picnic.

Set in a stunning location with magnificent views overlooking a 23-acre Millpond, the Castle is one of the most architecturally diverse in Wales; from the west a Norman fortress, yet from the north a splendid Elizabethan mansion.

The site also incorporates the only restored Tidal Mill in Wales, extensive grounds, three car parks, several outbuildings, an 11th century Celtic cross and a picnic area. All are linked by a mile-long circular walk, including a Medieval bridge, suitable for buggies and wheelchairs, with magnificent views over the Millpond.

The Castle and Mill are open all year; daily from the end of March to the end of October with shorter opening hours throughout the winter.

Carew Castle and Tidal Mill are still under private ownership. The Authority leased the site from current owner, Anthony Trollope-Bellew, on a 99 year lease in 1983.

- Carew Castle is a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM)
- The site is a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI)
- The Castle, grounds and Millpond are a Special Area of Conservation (SAC)

Conservation

Carew is a significant location for bats in the county and they are the main reason for the site's SSSI status. Around two-thirds of all the species of bats found in Britain have been recorded at Carew, including the rare greater horseshoe bat. The grassland surrounding the Castle is managed as a hay meadow, which supports moths, beetles and other invertebrates, an important source of food for bats.

Rich in plant life; Carew is one of the best sites in Britain for the southern polypody fern. Several rare species of flowering plants grow in the grassland, including spotted medick, knotted hedge-parsley and fiddle dock.

The walls of the Castle offer nesting opportunities to a variety of birds including tawny and barn owls. The mudflats of the Millpond support redshank, curlew, heron, and shelduck amongst other species. The 23-acre Millpond is an important site for the nationally scarce tentacled lagoon worm. It has been recorded at only two sites in Wales, both in Pembrokeshire.

The Team

- Manager
- Supervisor (new role for 2017)
- Administrator (2 days per week)
- 6 Discovery Guides (part time)
- Seasonal Events Leader (summer holidays only)
- Educational Contributors (as needed)

What we do

- Provide exceptional days out to approximately 45,000 visitors and school children every year
- Interpret the history of the site and cultural history of the area for our visitors
- Offer a varied programme of events and activities ranging from 'have-a-go' archery and falconry to open-air theatre, specialist tours and re-enactments.



Medieval Mayhem at Carew Castle

- Free daily guided tours
- Educational programme
- Use the site to convey park messages on conservation, environment and sustainability, though land and building management and interpretation - using our past to promote a sustainable future.
- We use the site as a venue for social inclusion work, local schools, youth clubs, work experience, trainees and charities:

Carew Castle and Tidal mill present an ideal setting for a range of educational visits and discovery days. In recent years many local schools have taken advantage of educational programmes which provide an insight into life in Tudor times and the history of the Castle. Many of the activities are delivered by costumed staff, bringing the whole experience to life for learners. Educational opportunities are taken up by both local and visiting schools, with the majority of visits coming from primary schools. Carew Castle has significant potential as a setting for a much wider range of educational activity, in particular the sciences and geography. Darwin Science and the National Park Authority have already started to develop these opportunities, with a particular focus on the area around the Mill and Millpond.

The site is also an excellent resource for a range of local groups and organisations, all of whom make full use of the historical and natural backdrop provided at Carew to provide an unforgettable experience for participants. As part of the Big Lottery funded Your Park project and more recently as part of a wider programme of work with disadvantaged group/communities the site has hosted many visits. From Young Carers and local day centre users to older peoples groups and PCNPA's Youth Rangers, numerous groups have been able to discover Carew in recent years. We envisage that opportunities will increase as the National Park Authority continues to develop its work in this area.

Recent / current development

Recent capital investment into the site include an impressive new oak roof, doors and windows to the Lesser Hall, a new visitor entrance, shop and toilets in the Walled Garden, resurfacing to the main car park and a new roof on the Tidal Mill. Recent work has been funded by Cadw (Heritage Tourism Fund), European Social Fund and PCNPA.

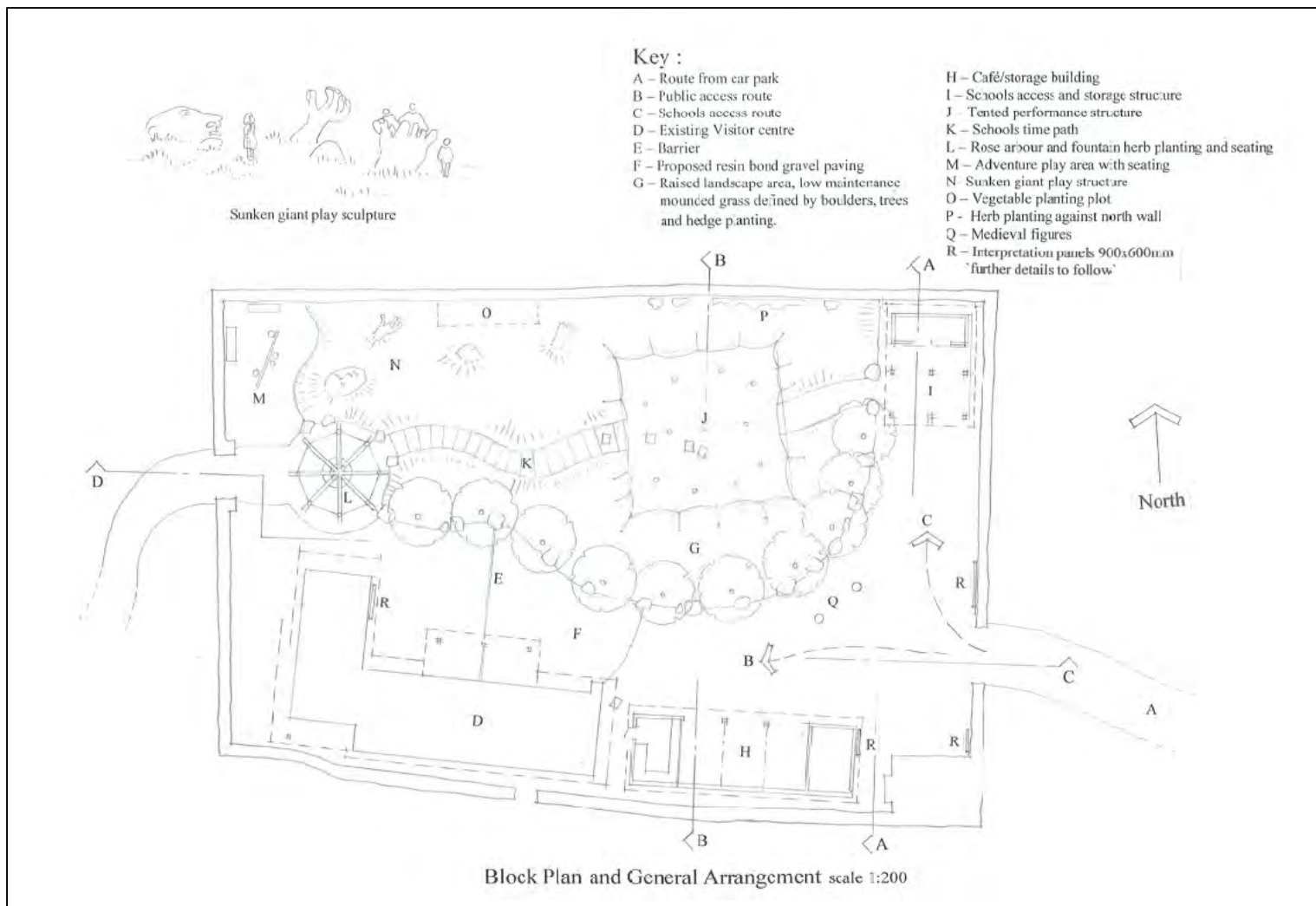
Current major work includes:

- Repairs to the causeway and sluice gates
- High Level Masonry Repairs / Vegetation management plan
- Resurfacing of path leading from Walled Garden to Castle.

Future Development – The Walled Garden

We have plans to develop the remainder of the Walled Garden, including a café. Planning consent, SAM and SSSI consent have been granted and phase one of the project (the café) is hoped to commence over winter 2017/18.

We are constantly asked by visitors where our café is; we are long overdue in meeting the visitor need for onsite catering, which will also hopefully extend length of stay at the site and increase secondary spend.



Development of the Walled Garden will improve the visitor experience. We will create an aspirational space in which to relax, explore, enjoy and engage with the experience on offer at the Castle, the cultural heritage of Pembrokeshire and Pembrokeshire Coast National Park.

The Walled Garden project will develop a currently blank area adjacent to the Castle; this area currently gives a very poor welcome to visitors. The Garden will vastly improve the overall visitor experience at the site; inspiring repeat visits and recommendations. Designed to compliment the magnificent Castle and stunning location, it will be a high quality garden combining landscaping and native planting with useable spaces for visitors, schools, communities, cultural events and as a 'Night Garden' base for Dark Sky Discovery within the National Park.

The Garden will be a space to inspire our visitors and to set fire to young imaginations as they explore the adventure area, complete with oversize 'castle' building blocks and a one-of-a-kind sunken Giant play sculpture. Nearby, parents can sit beneath the rose arbour and take in the fragrant scent of lavender, mint and rose.

A separate secret entrance for educational groups of children, with a time path to slowly transport pupils back through history to the Tudor period, will help to inspire a future generation and bring history to life.

An undercover tented area will provide a venue for craft and food fayres, acoustic music, theatre, workshops, meeting space for community groups or a picnic spot for families and schools in wet weather.

In the evening the Garden will be transformed into a 'Night Garden'. It will act as a base for Dark Sky Discovery at the Carew site, and the wider National Park. The Carew site is ideally placed for Discovery in the Dark Adventures (www.discoveryinthedark.wales) and activities including stargazing, bat walks, moth trapping, night walks and a pop-up planetarium will be run from the Walled Garden.

The Garden will add value to any visit to Carew; it will be welcoming, relevant and have a strong sense of place. The aim is to increase repeat visits, particularly with the inclusion of a café and allow the Castle to be used more out of the peak season and in evenings. We are constantly trying to improve visitor experience and this project will bring the Walled Garden, which is the visitor entrance, in line with the fantastic work completed on the Castle and car park in recent years.

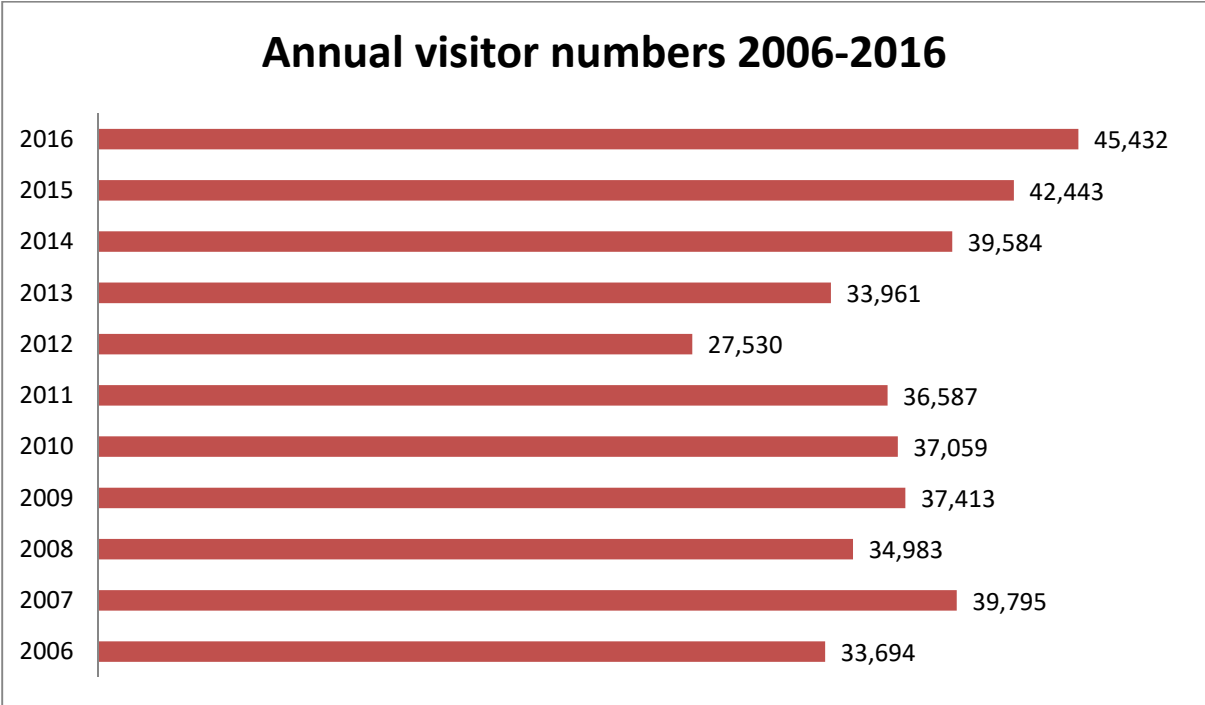
We are currently looking at grant funding options for the Walled Garden project.

Financial

Visitor numbers and income have been climbing steadily for the past few years as we become more commercial in our approach to marketing, retailing and events.

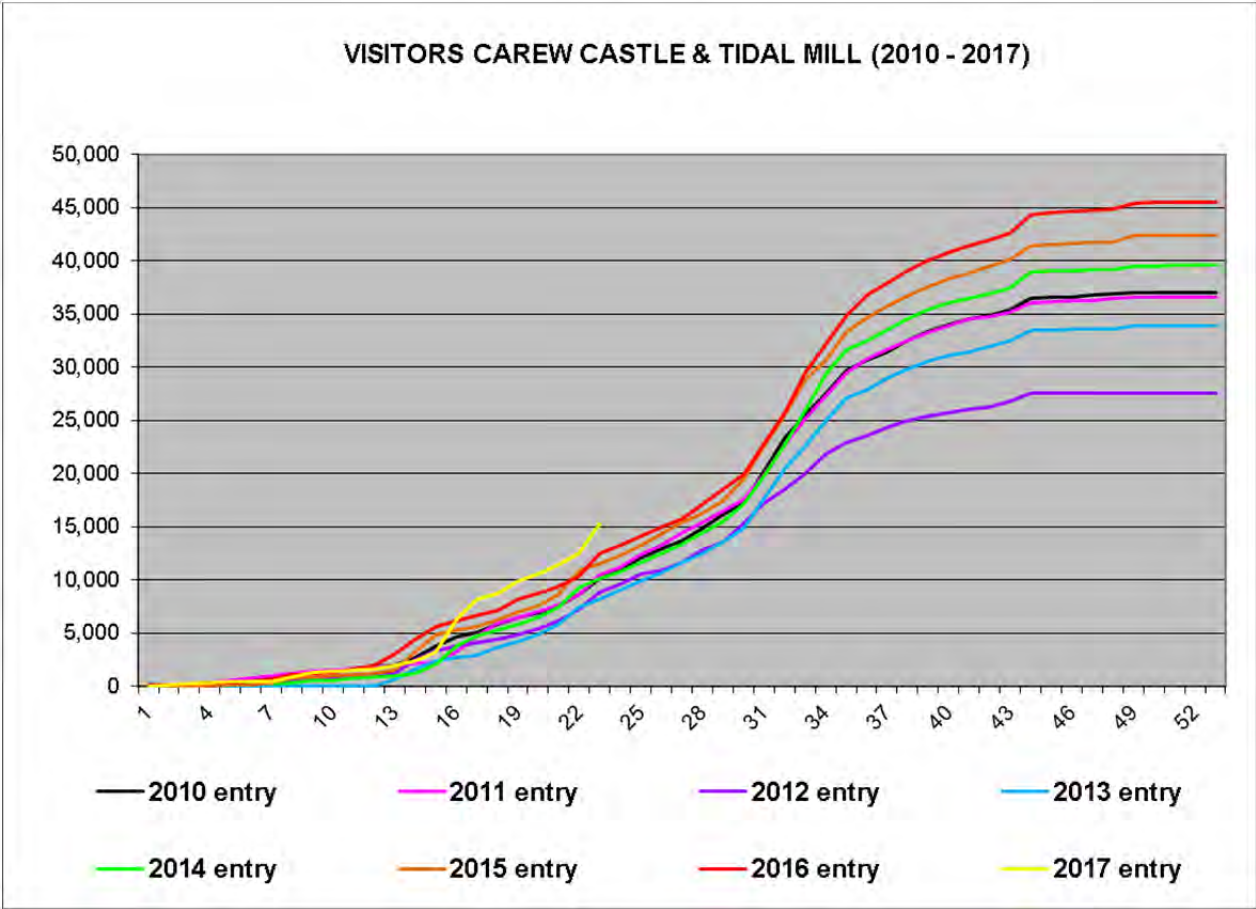
In the past 10 years since 2006 Carew has seen an increase of nearly 12,000 visitors per annum, including an increase of 6,000 visitors per year since 2014.

Gross income has increased within that 10 year time frame from £131,297 to £275,059 in 2016. Since 2013 Carew has seen a gross income increase of over £90,000 per year.

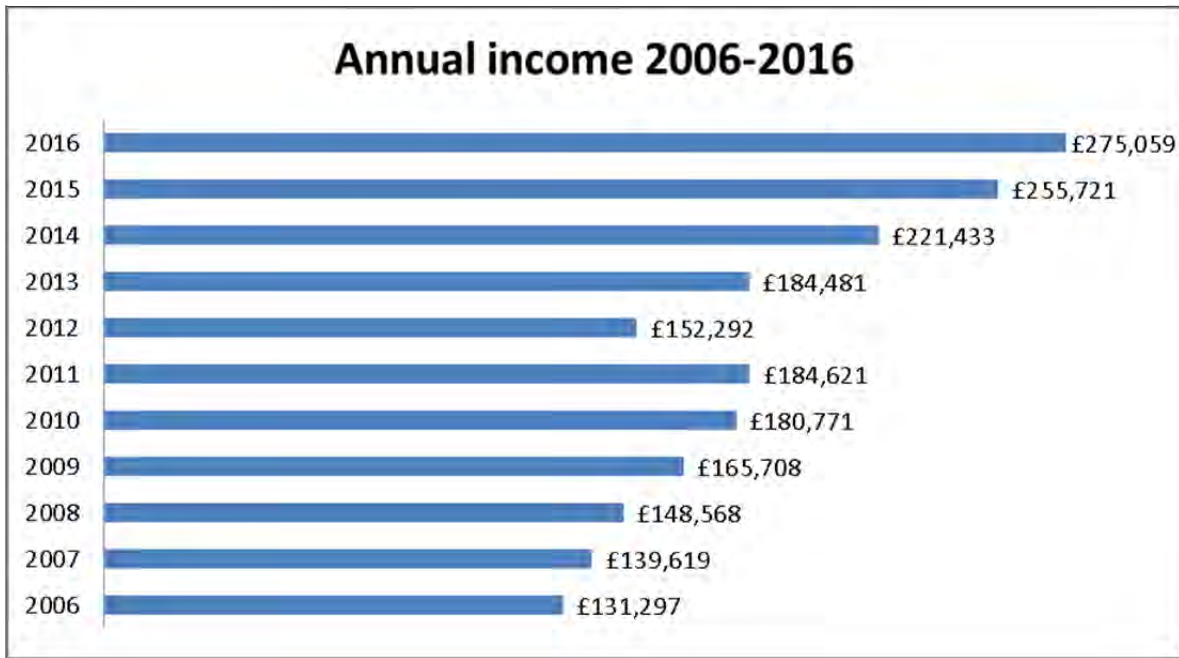


Calendar Year

The trend is continuing for 2017 as we continue to grow our visitor numbers:



Calendar year



Gross income. Calendar year

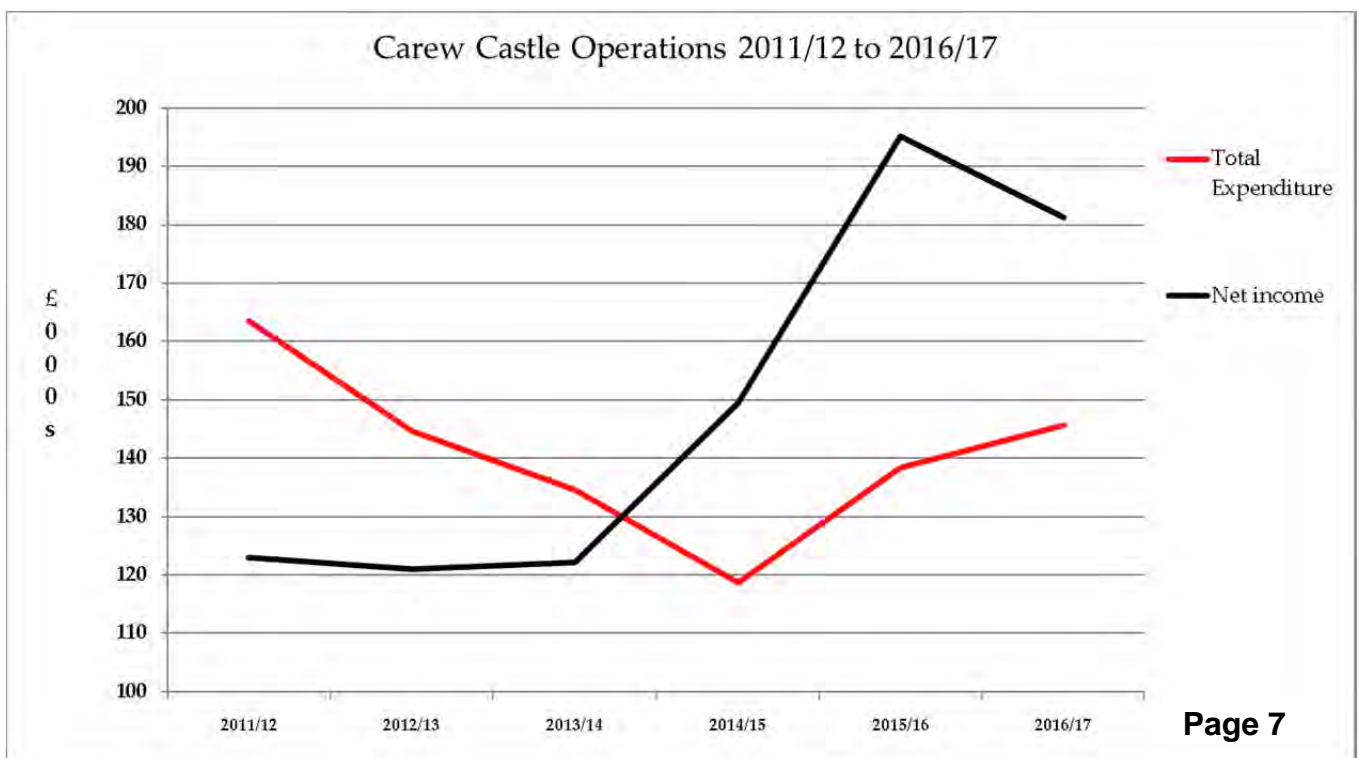
The increase in income is helping to reduce running costs at the Carew site.

The chart below shows the relationship between net income and total net expenditure since 2011/12.

Income had plateaued for some years but has been climbing steadily since 13/14 (the dip from 15/16 to 16/17 is because of two Easters in 15/16 and none in 16/17). Total expenditure is rising as we invest in the site, particularly in increased staffing levels to cope with increasing visitor numbers, but the gap between the two lines is healthy, and far wider than previous years.

Since 2011/12 the turnaround has been over £75,000.

Carew has gone from making a net loss of £40,500 to a net profit of £35,700 in 2016/17.



These figures include controllable costs only. They exclude support services (maintenance costs from Buildings Projects budget and capital expenditure), depreciation and pension adjustments.

Customer Experience

Some recent visitor feedback:

"A wonderful site with even better staff"

★★★★★ Reviewed by judith_cutler 14/06/2017

We only came here because by chance we had met one of the staff putting in a day at another attraction, Castell Henllys, a marvellous re-constructed Iron Age site near Cardigan. She was so full of passionate and knowledgeable enthusiasm for Carew and its mill we felt we had to go. We were very glad we did. Last time we went there was no attempt to make any sense of the large number of rooms and other spaces. This time it was clear that someone had really tried to make history come alive for both old and young; visitor facilities were vastly improved. A ten minute walk up a quiet lane takes you to a rare tidal mill, still in need of a little restoration but fascinating as it is. Thank you for your advice!

"Enjoyable Visit - amazing ruin of a castle"

★★★★★ Reviewed by Cshonie 07/06/2017

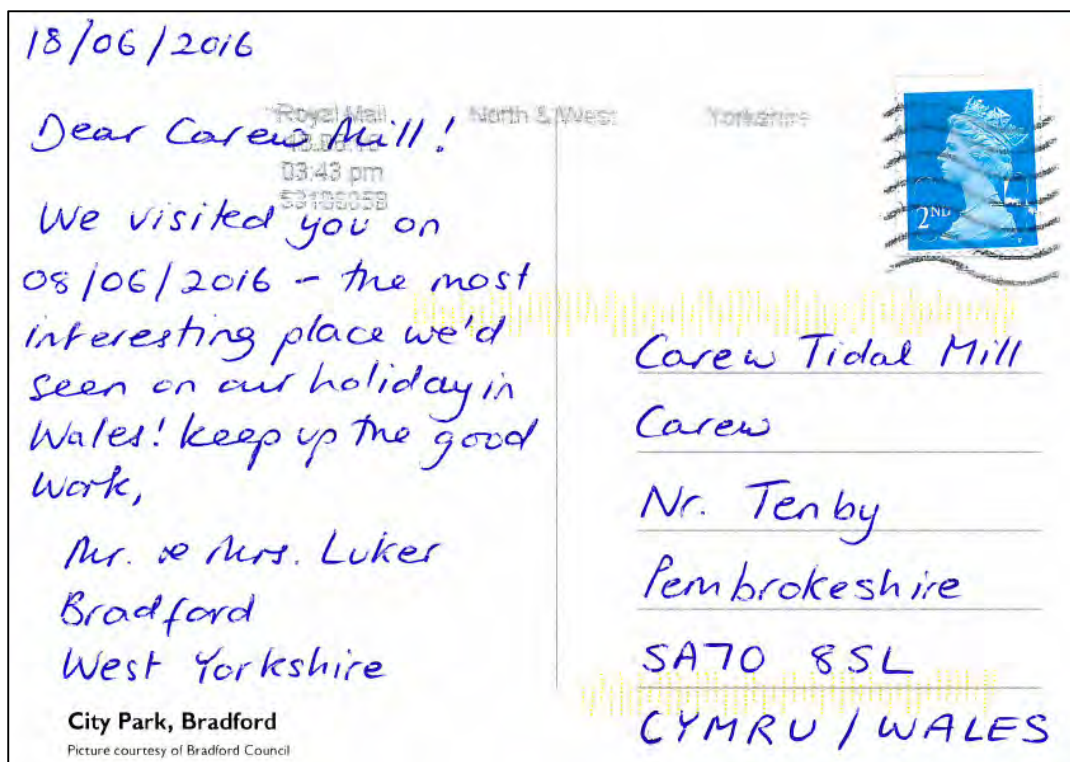
We loved our visit to this welsh castle and mill. Staff very welcoming - good facilities and car parks. Also has access for those with wheelchairs we observed. I have to say this is one of the best Castle ruins I have been to. Well looked after and clearly loved by the national park who look after it. Nice walk along river around to mill with stunning views of the castle - highly recommended as a half day visit. Great location for picnics.

"Brilliant day out despite the rain"

★★★★★ Reviewed by Emma J Dunn 31/05/17

Having two castle & knight mad boys (9&6) any castle is a must. Despite the gloom Carew looked majestic overlooking the mill lake. Entry fee was very reasonable (even without the 25% off as earlier in the week had visited Castell Henllys) We also paid £1 each for a treasure hunt & £2.50 for a 'preparing for battle' half term activity. The treasure hunt was good fun & the chocolate treat for completing it was a hit. The 'preparing for battle' activity was fantastic. After moving it inside due to the inclement weather the three staff were immensely helpful. I thought the boys would only be able to do one of the three activities for our £2.50 but no! They got to make a helmet, lance & paint a shield. Brilliant!!! The mill was interesting too - although not so much of a hit with the boys who did enjoy watching the swifts. Highly recommend





Future Priorities

Continue enhancement of the visitor experience and development of the Walled Garden into a useable and enjoyable space, with a much-needed catering offer.

Interpret the site in interesting ways, in order to communicate the site's cultural significance to our visitors.

Continue to use the site to demonstrate Park purposes, promote the wider National Park, and engage with schools and communities, through joint working with specialist colleagues and partnerships.

Expand on our popular events and activities programme, promoting visitor diversity and enjoyment of the site.

Look into options for restoration of the Tidal Mill as an opportunity to demonstrate how renewable energy has been used through the ages and is relevant today, to talk about sustainability and the use of local resources.

Challenges

- Restrictive lease that hampers the full commercial potential of the site (e.g. car park charges for non-castle users).
- An expensive and time intensive maintenance regime that dominates the buildings maintenance budget.
- Securing investment in the site during a time of public sector budget cuts.

- The need to renovate the Mill and the desire to see the Mill wheel in operation again.
- Increased visitor numbers has lead to a shortage of parking space (public transport links to Carew are not great)
- Issues relating to long-term site maintenance – temporary warden solution ‘in-hand’ but potentially storing up problems.
- Restrictions that come with SAM, SSSI and SAC status.
- PCNPA’s role as the ‘custodians’ of Carew is often unrecognised and, as a result, we may need to do more to market the site (possibly via an updated branding exercise – similar to the ‘origins’ work undertaken at Castell Henllys).

Opportunities

- Manager’s revised role as Visitor Services Manager (South) and the new Carew Supervisor role will allow for the retail and events lessons at Carew to be shared across other PCNPA sites (updated trading strategy on the way).
- Increasing events programme is attracting new customers and re-positioning Carew via a more ‘contemporary’ visitor offer.
- The ability to hold new and exciting events in the Lesser Hall is in the pipeline which, with further investments in the Walled Garden, will help to expand the range of activities and events on offer at Carew.



- Opportunity to add a catering facility.
- Improved on-site interpretation is helping visitors to better understand the conservation status of the site and deliver ‘park purposes’ – still more to do.
- Strengthening community links with Carew Cheriton Control Tower to offer an enhanced experience for visitors and school children alike.

Conclusion

Members are asked to note the report.

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Consulted/engaged with: Graham Peake (Discovery Team Leader), Richard Griffiths (Finance Manager), James Parkin (Director of Delivery & Discovery)

Appendix 1

Net income/operating costs

£000's											
	201	SS	Depn	other	Net Main	202 Schools	203 Events	204 PR	Total Costs	206 Income	NET
2016/17	232.6	82.7	-27.6	-5.1	117.2	6.8	16.0	5.6	145.6	-181.3	-35.7
2015/16	191.6	46.0	-25.3	-6.3	114.0	3.9	14.8	5.6	138.3	-195.1	-56.8
2014/15	190.5	57.6	-25.4	-2.3	105.2	2.8	8.6	2.1	118.7	-149.5	-30.8
2013/14	183.0	54.5		-6.5	122.0	3.1	6.0	3.5	134.6	-122.1	12.5
2012/13	164.7	31.2		-2.8	130.7	6.8	7.1	0.0	144.6	-121.0	23.6
2011/12	175.1	28.7		1.1	147.5	3.1	8.3	4.6	163.5	-123.0	40.5