

West Lothian Council to do more promotion of tourism

West Lothian will do more to build tourism, including looking at community management of heritage sites, councillors agreed in the wake of VisitScotland's decision to close its information centres.

The move to close tourism information centres comes as Visit Scotland claims tourists now look online for information.

As there are no VisitScotland offices in the county, these closures will have no direct effect.

However, Linlithgow LibDem councillor Sally Pattle argued that community-led management and promotion of tourism sites and venues in the county was another way to develop underused venues and boost visitor numbers.

It was reported earlier this year that the council owned Burgh Halls in Linlithgow had made a loss in excess of £70,000 this year.

A proposal from the Lib Dems and Labour acknowledged that "while West Lothian Council is not the driving force behind a tourism strategy for the area, it is certainly a key strategic partner in ongoing work by Visit West Lothian (VWL), the county's business led Destination Management Organisation, to enhance and develop any strategy that will contribute to a sustainable long-term vision for tourism in our area".

A report from VWL on the current strategy is to be discussed next month.

Councillors agreed the three requests: for training of elected members on the Community Asset Transfer process for West Lothian; a call for a report on future plans for a West Lothian-wide tourism strategy to come to PDSP and for officers to bring a report to Local Area Committees identifying heritage sites within each ward area and highlighting any assets at risk.

An SNP amendment argued the council should become the driving force, highlighting the party's budget proposals to employ staff to promote tourism. This would "mirror successful tourism development strategies put in place by other, more forward-thinking councils in Scotland."

Linlithgow councillor Pauline Orr said the council should take the lead in driving a policy to promote the county, and urged the set up of a working group to promote public awareness and use of the Community Empowerment Act to improve conservation of sites across West Lothian.

The SNP proposal was defeated 18-14, but Councillor Moira McKee Shemilt asked why the initial "really good" original proposal on the agenda from the two Linlithgow councillors Pattle and Orr had been replaced with a composite plan from Labour and the LibDems.

She added: "Someone has sharp elbows here."

Council leader Labour's Lawrence Fitzpatrick said the composite motion was a "positive way forward " and added that the SNP had opposed it for sake of opposition.

Councillor Pattle said: "I thought we would be able to work across the chamber. As a council we are able to highlight the work that is being done to promote tourism, but also identify the areas in which we could do a lot better because there are

a lot of areas where we could do better.”

By Stuart Sommerville, Local Democracy Reporter



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