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Economic Perspective 2

THE GLASGOW GARDEN FESTIVAL: MAKING GLASGOW MILES BETTER?

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INTRODUCTION

The Glasgow Garden Festival (GGF) opened its gates to the general public on April 28, 1988 and represented a crucial step in Glasgow's development as a tourism destination. The Festival, alongside Glasgow's designation as the European City of Culture in 1990 can be seen as the basis of a strong events-led tourism development strategy. The sponsors and organisers of the Festival had set a target of 3 million visitors through the gates by the time the Festival closed on September 26, 1988. In fact, the Festival has achieved a throughput of 4.25 million people.

The GGF is essentially a tool for urban regeneration and the site's after-use will be closely monitored given the difficulties faced by previous festival sites at Stoke and Liverpool in generating substantial post-festival development. However, there are high expectations that the Glasgow festival will act as a catalyst for the economic regeneration of derelict sites along the River Clyde. In this article we examine the background to the garden festival movement in the UK; review the two previous garden festivals at Liverpool and Stoke; consider in some detail the background to the Glasgow Garden Festival project, its ethos and operational set up; and finally assess its implications for future tourism development in Glasgow.

THE GARDEN FESTIVAL CONCEPT

The garden festival concept is not British in origin. Its roots lie in Germany where it was applied extensively during the post-war period, initially as a means of repairing war damage and "greening" devastated cities. Such festivals attract large numbers of visitors and are held bi-annually; the concept spread eventually to North America. The basic principle involved is now well established: derelict land is reclaimed

and/or existing parkland is refurbished in order to mount major exhibitions of plants. The festival's duration is normally six months in order to allow the changing seasons to be mirrored in floral displays. The exhibitions are then removed, leaving the upgraded land for future development.

Despite the widespread popularity of gardening in Britain, it is only recently that serious attention has been paid to the garden festival concept in the UK. There are some historical pointers in that Britain did pioneer trade exhibitions, beginning with the Great Exhibition of 1851 at Crystal Palace which attracted over 6 million visitors. The Festival of Britain held in London in 1951 commemorated the 100th anniversary of the Great Exhibition and had a major leisure component (situated in Battersea park) including a giant rubber Octopus. The festival attracted over 8 million visitors.

THE GARDEN FESTIVAL MOVEMENT IN THE UK

In July 1980, following consultation between government ministers and landscape and horticultural interests, the Department of the Environment (DoE) produced a discussion paper entitled "Garden Exhibitions and the United Kingdom". This document traced the post-war development of garden festivals on the continent, referring mainly to experience in the Federal Republic of Germany where they typically attract between 4 - 8 million visitors. It went on to suggest that potentially the concept could be profitably adapted in the UK. The DoE report was circulated to local authorities and those interested in staging a festival were invited to submit applications.

The DoE stressed four critical points to be borne in mind by those authorities wishing to bid for a festival:

1. The festival should ideally take place on a derelict or neglected urban site, which would be unlikely to be reclaimed quickly without the stimulus provided by the festival.
2. The festival, though not necessarily the derelict land reclamation, should be designed at least to break even financially.
3. Competitions played an important part in any festival and should run through the design, reclamation, construction and show phases.
4. Horticultural bodies needed to be closely involved throughout the build-up to the festival.

In the event, two potential venues (Liverpool and Stoke) were short-listed and a feasibility study of each was commissioned. In September 1981 Michael Heseltine, then Secretary of State for the Environment, asked the Merseyside Development Corporation (MDC) to mount Britain's first garden festival on a 125 acre riverside site of desolate industrial wasteland. The bold scheme proposed was to stage a showcase horticultural event on the banks of the River Mersey, comparable in significance to the 1951 Festival of Britain.

REVIEW OF THE LIVERPOOL AND STOKE GARDEN FESTIVALS

The government denied that its selection of Liverpool for the first garden festival in 1984 was influenced by the spate of urban disorders which had occurred over the summer of 1981 and had centred on two districts in particular - Toxteth in Liverpool and Brixton in London. However, the site's close proximity to Toxteth was probably a major factor, further emphasised by the relatively short timescale from inception to execution of the project. Continental festivals are normally planned at least five years in advance, but the MDC was given only two and a half years. The bulk of the funding of the festival was provided by the Merseyside Development Corporation, the project costing some £30 million in total, approximately one half of this being land reclamation and infrastructure costs. Despite involving commercial interests in a wide variety of sponsorship schemes, the festival required a high level of public subsidy amounting to £13.5 million.

The organisation of the Liverpool Garden Festival

(LGF) raised complex administrative questions because of the sheer enormity of the task and the fact that little was then "known" about the practicalities of staging garden festivals. In addition, the Merseyside Development Corporation was only two months old when the festival decision was announced. A festival board was constituted and a Festival Director appointed responsible to the Festival Executive Committee of the MDC. However this two tier arrangement never really worked and the Festival Director resigned after 13 months in the job amidst a Sunday Times investigation into the organisation of the Festival.

Concern was expressed by the English Tourist Board at the MDC prediction that the Festival would attract over 3 million visitors and at the absence of an explicit and purposeful marketing strategy. A marketing plan was not drawn up until October 1983 and a budget of only £700,000 was allocated. At such a late point in time, there were inevitably limits to the extent to which marketing could prove effective in influencing both the travel trade and the general public. Despite this Liverpool confounded the cynics by attracting 3.4 million visitors during its six month operating period, thanks in part to unusually good summer weather in July and August - see table. The majority of visitors (70%) were drawn from a 100 mile radius of the site.

Visitor figures to garden festivals ('000s)

	Liverpool Actual	Stoke Actual	Glasgow Projected
May	450	250	900
June	500	350	500
July	800	500	800
August	950	550	890
September	450	350	350
October	200	150	-
	<u>3.4</u>	<u>2.2</u>	<u>3.4</u>

There were short term benefits: hotel occupancies were boosted and in terms of jobs, some jobs were created in site preparation and 450-500 people were employed by the event itself. Spin-offs from visitor spending led to a modest expansion of jobs in local service industries and retail trade.

The longer term benefits appear much less tangible. The LGF to some extent provided

Liverpool's tourist industry with a launch pad ie "putting Liverpool on the tourist map". The MDC have also suggested that it helped boost investor confidence in the city and that the Albert Dock scheme reflects this.

However, the plans envisaged for after use (housing, factory units and industrial warehouses) have been slow in coming to fruition. The future of the site is still uncertain some four years on. Part of the festival site has only recently been allocated for housing and retail warehousing, and planning permission has been granted for a private hospital, but this is a long way from the original vision viz city park, sports centre, housing, factory units and industrial warehousing). There are also substantial reserve costs in the maintenance of the park area, and the resultant leisure uses have not been successful. In particular, Transworld Festival Gardens ran the site as a leisure park in 1985/86, but went bankrupt in 1986 with an outstanding debt of £5.4 million. The site was subsequently operated in 1987 as a leisure park under the control of MDC, but this was only a temporary measure. Site after-use continues to be a pertinent problem.

In 1986 the second national garden festival took place on a 173 acre site comprising redundant steel works in the heart of the "Potteries" at Stoke-on-Trent. Stoke had already been short listed with Liverpool for the first garden festival in 1984 emphasising the force of its initial application. Unlike the Liverpool festival, a greater share of financial responsibility was placed on the local authorities (Stoke City Council and Staffordshire County Council). They each contributed approximately £10 million with a further £10 million from the Exchequer. A company with a Board of Directors nominated by the two local authorities was set up to run the project. Approximately 1,000 short-term jobs were created, the vast majority being MSC funded Community Programme places for staff who had no previous experience of the leisure industry.

The fortunes of the Stoke Garden Festival contrast sharply with Liverpool and Glasgow. For example only 7,000 season tickets were sold in advance of opening (Glasgow sold in excess of 100,000 season tickets) and marketing expenditures were very limited - c.£700,000. It attracted only 2.2 million visitors, despite having a larger 100 mile catchment radius than Liverpool. David Hancock, the Managing Director of the National Garden

Festival at Stoke, stressed the need for future festival organisers to fight for a larger marketing budget, (circa £2 million). The low visitor figure also reflected inclement weather (especially during the key opening weeks) and a failure to capture the support of the local population, reflected in the poor season ticket sales. This might perhaps be as much a comment on the local community as on the festival organisation. The Potteries are a very disparate area, unlike Liverpool and Glasgow, and local rivalry is commonplace. The general perception was the the locals did not regard it as "their" festival. However, the limited pre-planning period which applied to Liverpool was again a factor at Stoke.

Despite the poor operational performance in revenue and "numbers through the door" terms, the plans for site after-use are - after initial doubts - now being realised. Part of the site has already been allocated for housing, retail shopping, and a new science park. More recently a leisure scheme proposed by Rank has received outline planning permission from Stoke City Council. An investment of £17 million is proposed to include a large indoor "Winterworld", multiplex cinema, ten-pin bowling, snooker hall, indoor bowls, dry ski slope, catering and discotheque. If this scheme comes to fruition then advocates of garden festivals as a means of regenerating derelict sites will be able to point to a major success story and one, moreover, with a significant leisure element.

BACKGROUND TO THE GLASGOW GARDEN FESTIVAL

Glasgow has a tradition of staging major events. In 1888, following Queen Victoria's Jubilee, it was the venue for the first of four exhibitions which promoted industry, art, history and science. The last and largest Empire Exhibition staged in Bellahouston Park in 1938 attracted 13.5 million visitors. In March 1983 Glasgow District Council submitted a proposal to stage the third national garden festival on the site of the redundant Princes Dock (120 acres including 20 acres of water) on the south bank of the Clyde adjoining the area of Govan.

A strong case was made for Glasgow and the Princes Dock site based on a number of factors: the need for a Scottish based festival; Glasgow's tradition of staging major festivals; the contribution a garden festival could make to the economic

regeneration of the city; and the importance of the project within Glasgow's tourism development strategy. The preliminary estimates of capital costs including site acquisition, reclamation and festival development was £23 million with a further £3.5 million operating costs. Visitor income was projected at £8.5 million and the value of the residual assets (land and retained structures) estimated to be £9.5 million. Thus the "net cost of the festival" was put at £8.5 million. In fact the Festival was to cost £41 million to stage with £23 million of revenue giving a net cost to public funds of £19 million.

The proposal emphasised the need for joint public/private sector funding and cited the example of the Scottish Exhibition and Conference Centre (SECC) which opened in 1985 and cost some £36 million shared between the Scottish Development Agency (SDA), Glasgow District and Strathclyde Regional Councils, and the private sector. This and other environmental initiatives taking place in Glasgow gave strong support to the garden festival bid, and the linking of the site with the SECC and its car parking offered substantial infrastructural advantages.

In addition the Glasgow bid highlighted a number of short and long-term benefits arising from the proposed garden festival. The short-term benefits envisaged were:

- * the generation of employment opportunities in an area of high unemployment;
- * the immediate improvement of the riverfront which would support a range of other initiatives, particularly in relation to the Govan and Kinning Park area;
- * the attraction of the festival to new visitor groups who might not otherwise have visited Glasgow and spent money there;
- * the opportunity for landscape, horticultural and other businesses particularly in Scotland, to display their products and services.

The longer-term benefits of the garden festival were deemed to be:

- * the future improvement of Glasgow's image stemming from the opportunity to sell the city to a wider audience;

- * the opportunity to use the festival as a vehicle for creating an inner urban site of exceptional quality;
- * the creation of new recreational, cultural and tourist assets which would reinforce Glasgow's development as a tourist destination;
- * the catalytic contribution to the overall environmental upgrading of the inner city as part of a major economic initiative to counter extensive job losses in shipbuilding and engineering.

As a result of this bid the government took the decision in the Summer of 1985 to select Glasgow as the UK's third national garden festival. The Scottish Office appointed the SDA as the management authority and this led to the establishment of Glasgow Garden Festival 1988 Ltd. However, it was decided that the date of the festival should be brought forward from 1989 to 1988 to coincide with the centenary of the Jubilee Exhibition and the 50th anniversary of the Great Exhibition of 1938, thus raising the event's profile particularly amongst the local population. A significant factor has been the fact that Laing Homes - who had acquired the bulk of the Princes Dock site for £2.5 million before Glasgow's bid to host the festival was confirmed - agreed to a lease arrangement for the duration of the festival, but only after SDA had spent £8 million preparing alternative sites for Laings which it sold to the company for only £3.6 million. Laings will be building houses on the Princes Dock site now that the festival is over.

ETHOS AND ORGANISATION OF THE FESTIVAL

The 1988 Glasgow Garden Festival put great emphasis on the concept of leisure which is a throwback to the Festival of Britain in 1951. It aimed to provide a complete family day out and this was reflected by the nature of the attractions on site. There were five identifiable rides on site - the trams, the festival railway, the Clydesdale Bank Anniversary Tower, the Mississippi Steamboat and the Coca Cola White Knuckle Roller Coaster. The latter was an important feature aimed at a particular age group (15-24 year olds) which had been under-represented at the two previous garden festivals - at Liverpool they formed only 9% of visitors. A separate charge of £1 was levied for the Roller

Coaster on top of the normal adult admission charge (£4.95).

The main body of the festival is divided into six theme sectors:

- * Science and technology which featured milestones in science. Displays of current achievements in the sciences of horticulture and agriculture featured alongside the future of electronics and energy. This sector combined education with entertainment in a horticultural setting.
- * Health and wellbeing which emphasised how awareness and appreciation of plants in the environment relaxes the mind and body, and featured wholefoods, herbal and medicinal gardens.
- * Plants and food which was the main horticultural display; and food production exhibits also featured strongly.
- * Landscape and scenery which attempted to recreate the mountains and moorlands of Scotland.
- * Water and maritime which reflected Scotland's history of maritime trade and exploration as a backdrop to water features, nautical exhibits and moored vessels.
- * Recreation and sport which incorporated action, entertainment and education in an array of sporting and leisure activities.

In addition to the themed areas there was a specially created High Street which had over 20 single storey shops within temporary structures, and included street cafes, fashion shops, knitwear, souvenir shops and a tourist information centre. There was also an educational trail, visual art displays and permanent events areas for concerts, parades and street theatre. An important aspect of staging a garden festival, particularly in terms of revenue generation is food and drink. The catering was very much orientated towards a family event, and appears to have been far more successful than at either Stoke or Liverpool, with appreciably higher per capita spend.

Working with outside consultants, (Allied Lyons), the Festival organisers' policy was to ensure that

a wide variety of options were available for visitors - from pub food and fast food to haute cuisine. Whereas previous garden festivals had everything supplied by one caterer, the Glasgow Garden Festival organisers felt it necessary to have variety in service and styles, with arrangements by a selection of expert individual and chain operators. Although many of the catering outlets reflected a strong local content there was also a variety of international flavours eg Italian ice cream, Cajin dishes from the deep south of the USA, German sausages and beer. The menus available covered 20 different food styles set in food courts, garden cafes and bars. The organisers aimed to put the catering at least on a par with, or above, that which the British public are used to at mass catering events.

Regarding the specific organisation and pre-planning of the festival, a Festival Company was established, with a Chief Executive and Management Team responsible for the implementation and the operation of the festival site. Consultants to cover the various specialist fields (engineering, landscape, architects, catering contractors, operational management) all formed part of the team. A major advantage in relation to the Liverpool and Stoke festivals was the pre-planning period. For example the marketing campaign was launched two weeks prior to that of Stoke's! In addition the marketing budget is reported to have been around £3 million which was far in excess of Stoke and Liverpool. Over 100,000 season tickets were sold at various prices and 1 million visits were expected from these alone. The travel trade were approached as early as April 1986 to feature the festival in their 1988 packages. At the time of opening it was estimated that 940,000 visits were committed through this outlet. Thanks to good planning, effective marketing and reasonable weather, Glasgow has broken the 3.4 million attendance record set by Liverpool, despite being several weeks shorter and having a resident catchment area less than one-fifth of Liverpool's.

Commercial sponsorship has also been a significant feature in funding the festival. Financial backing approached £14 million. The Clydesdale Bank as the festival layout sponsor, committed £500,000 to the 240 foot revolving tower. Arthur Bell Distillers sponsored the construction of the bridge linking the festival site with the SECC to the tune of £250,000 and IBM provided 25 touchscreen VDUs in a sponsorship deal worth £300,000. Other major industrial sponsors

included ICI who supplied grass seed and fertiliser; Coca Cola (Thrill Ride and Tram); House of Fraser, Tate and Lyle (Festival Train); Laing Homes, Lithgow Group, British Rail (Train stations); Stakis, Tennent Caledonian Breweries, British Gas, Belhaven (Trams); and Marks and Spencer and Scottish Amicable Life Assurance Society. In fact 90% of the site had been committed to sponsors six months prior to the festival opening. Clearly a number of high profile national companies appreciated the potential marketing benefits to be gained from the festival.

ASSESSMENT AND IMPLICATIONS FOR GLASGOW'S TOURISM DEVELOPMENT

The Glasgow Garden Festival captured the imagination of Glaswegians, reflected in very high season ticket sales. In addition the opening weeks of the festival were blessed by good weather (always important for what is essentially an outdoor attraction) particularly over the key weekend periods.

However, as one might expect, the event has not been without its problems. There have been some criticisms of high food prices and the standards of service at some of the catering outlets, which is nearly always a major headache for large scale public events. In the first two weeks, there were operational problems with the Festival Train and the Clydesdale Tower, both facilities being temporarily withdrawn. Furthermore, the SDA was asked by the Comptroller and Auditor General to justify its expenditure on the Garden Festival and received much criticism for its deal with Laings. The site's after-use will be dominated by private housing, with public uses being confined to projects such as parks and/or a major attraction.

One major point is that the Glasgow Garden Festival should not be viewed in isolation but out to be considered within Glasgow's wider tourism development strategy. The Garden Festival and Glasgow's designation as European City of Culture in 1990 form of a co-ordinated image building campaign to establish Glasgow as a leading tourism destination. It is no coincidence that the bid for the 1988 Garden Festival and the establishment of the Greater Glasgow Tourist Board took place within months of each other. Glasgow has strongly projected itself as a cultural centre and has developed an innovative and successful marketing campaign based on its cultural attractions

(theatres, museums, art galleries) and existing events such as Mayfest. In the absence of major paid visitor attractions this event led strategy has been extremely effective in improving Glasgow's image and increasing the level of tourism to the City. To develop further and become a major tourist destination, Glasgow has to develop permanent site attractions - to persuade new visitors to come to the city and existing visitors to stay longer. A start has already been made: the conversion of the Kelvin Hall into an impressive sports centre with an outdoor track means that Glasgow can now attract major indoor athletics events. The recent relocation of the Transport Museum to the Kelvin Hall Complex, close to the Kelvin Art Gallery and Museum, should also benefit both sites. The major shopping complex with ice arena planned for the St Enoch's development and the recently opened Princes Square shopping mall will strengthen Glasgow's position as a major shopping and leisure venue. And a number of environmental schemes throughout the city, particularly the Cathedral Precinct project will help to provide the right environment for attracting major tourism/leisure investment. As part of the project, there are plans for a £5m hi-tech leisure attraction to occupy a site adjacent to the Provand's Lordship to be called the Glasgow Ark.

Therefore, the Glasgow Garden Festival must be viewed as a state in the evolution of Glasgow's tourism development strategy. It has been Britain's major consumer event of the year, and served as a palpable demonstration that there is a market for day visit attractions which entertain and inform. This should help to reassure the private and public agencies backing the Glasgow Ark project. We believe the time is right for investment in built attractions in the City to complement the established events programmes. Glasgow needs to take a leaf out of Bradford's book which similarly undertook a strong image destination marketing campaign culminating in it securing the National Museum of Photography, Film and Television. A major, high quality visitor experience, providing family fun and appealing to holidaymakers is required to make Glasgow "miles better" as a tourism destination.