

**Teesdale Marketing Ltd - Annual General Meeting**

**Chairman's Report**

**29<sup>th</sup> March 2011**

2010 has been a remarkable year with the successful start of the Love Food initiative; a subject close to my heart. Working within a budget of around £400,000 and with partners including the AONB, the Enterprise Agency, Weardale Visitor Network, Allen Valleys Community Partnership, UTASS, Middleton Plus, Barnard Castle Vision and Durham County Council, Hazel Coppack, ably assisted by Angela Whiting, demonstrated comprehensively what Teesdale Marketing is all about.

As I said last year, the project is a tremendous opportunity to help local producers emerge, grow and develop, to encourage both commercial and domestic consumers to expand their local food knowledge and repertoire, to educate young people as to the joys and benefits of producing, cooking and eating and to promote the Durham Dales as a food destination for both visiting and sourcing. This is an economic development project, welcome enough in these challenging economic times, that embraces both local industry and tourism and also works within the education sector.

The project is now well under way, just having completed the Brilliant Breakfasts competition where awards were made for the best breakfasts in the Love Food area and, amongst other things, is about to embark on an exciting Come Dine With Me competition in schools aimed at Year 5 and 6 pupils.

Some magnificent equipment, in the form of demonstration kitchen and classroom trailers, has been designed and sourced and is currently being used at events throughout the North. The progress only slightly being marred by the recent stealing of some market stalls and their trailer.

2011 looks to be an exciting year for Love Food.

Due to public spending cuts there has been considerable upheaval in the publicly-funded tourism representation. Visit Tees Valley has been completely disbanded and Visit County Durham has been absorbed into the new Durham County Council unitary

authority; albeit with quite a lot of trimming. Because of the reduced funding available, there has been a reappraisal of the need for the Tourism Information Centres within the County and it is likely that the existing publicly-funded TICs will close or, at least, have their capabilities vastly reduced. There may be a role for Teesdale Marketing in trying to fill the gap left behind because, despite the views expressed by Visit County Durham, there is still a strong support-base for the TICs from within the County's tourism industry itself. This was echoed by the protests from the industry when Visit County Durham chose to discontinue the Teesdale accommodation guide, citing a reduced demand by tourists who increasingly use the internet and smart phones. Much of the industry felt that there was still a demand for the printed guide from a section of the visiting public so, as a result, Teesdale Marketing stepped in and were able to produce the guide for the 2011 season. However, it'll be interesting to monitor the trends as time progresses to determine the continued worth of such printed material.

The footbridge attraction across the Tees is still quietly on the agenda. Keenly supported by the County Council, a technical feasibility study is currently being completed. Despite having been a dream of Teesdale Marketing since 2003, it's interesting to note that two similar bridges in France took 15 years to come to fruition with initial opposition from local civic officials turning to support once the bridges were built, demonstrating their benefit to the surrounding area.

There are going to be continuing considerable challenges to economic development and, particularly relevant for us in Teesdale, tourism over the next few years. With the reduction in public sector front-line services it becomes ever more important that residents become involved in the invigoration of the local economy via such organisations as Teesdale Marketing as well as the Barnard Castle Vision which Teesdale Marketing is keen to continue to support.

2011 and beyond will be a challenge but Teesdale Marketing's risen to it so far and particular thanks must go to Hazel Coppack, without whom it couldn't happen.

Bill Oldfield

Chairman

29<sup>th</sup> March 2011