

REPORT OF NATIONAL PARK CENTRE MANAGER, TENBY

SUBJECT: TENBY CENTRE AND ASSOCIATED FUNCTIONS

Purpose of Report:

A review of the seasons work at the National Park Centre, Tenby.

OVERVIEW

The Tenby Centre currently in its sixth year, continues to receive favourable feedback from new and returning visitors alike. Providing general, local and National Park information, accommodating an interactive exhibition and a small shop, the centre provides a useful service in promoting National Park messages. The Centre's role also encompasses offices and meeting rooms for Park staff. The building operates from the ground floor of a leased building (with 7 years unexpired) opposite the Five Arches Tenby.

The Centre Manager also controls other elements of the Authority's functions from the Centre. These are mainly stock related and include staff clothing, the distribution of saleable and free material (including Coast to Coast) and last year the Centre Manager oversaw a Visit Wales funded project on promoting sustainability appraisals for local tourism businesses.

1. THE CENTRE

1.1 Visitors

Throughput has remained relatively stable since the centre opened, averaging 42,442 people per year (2007 to 2011). However, so far this year (January to September incl.), visitor numbers are down by nearly 13% on 2011. If the last quarter follows a similar trend, total throughput for 2012 will be around 37,000 visitors.

The County Council's recently completed Pembrokeshire Visitor Survey indicates a decline of 13% of visitors to Tenby over the last 4 years. Tenby being surpassed by St Davids as the visitor's most quoted place to visit.

A visitor survey is conducted annually at the centre, so that we can monitor the visitor's perception of their experience. In 2011, (2012 survey still ongoing), responses indicated that 97% of respondents were 'satisfied' or 'very satisfied' (77% 'very satisfied'). No one indicated they were 'not satisfied'

1.2 Income

Despite fewer visitors, gross receipts have risen by 20% on 2011 (January to September incl.) to £19,496, much of this increase can be attributed to the sale of the 'retro' railway posters, produced to celebrate the 60th

Anniversary of the Pembrokeshire Coast National Park. With these sales taken out of the equation, the Centre's sales are still 4% up on the same period as last year. The sourcing of new lines has contributed to this. Where possible we continue to support local businesses, and attempt to achieve a balance of good quality and cheaper gifts to meet the differing needs of the various market segments that visit the centre. (It is interesting to note from the Pembrokeshire Visitor Survey that overall visitor (non accommodation) spend in the County is down 25% on 2008).

1.3 Expenditure

Minimising expenditure wherever possible has always been a priority at the Centre. Over the last year, along with the other National Park Centres and sites we have endeavoured to further reduce the overall net operating costs.

In Tenby, this has mainly been achieved by reducing staff levels. Two members of staff service the Centre during Pembrokeshire school holiday periods, (and not the additional week either side as in previous years) as a result of which the Centre Manager spends more time on the front-desk and shop. Winter opening hours have been reduced. This represents a saving of £4,043, which is 8.8% of the staffing budget.

1.4 Staffing

Throughout the winter period, in the main, the Centre Manager runs the facility alone for four days, but has help from two other members of staff that work a day a week each. This enables some flexibility and Saturday opening. During the main season two others join the team to facilitate the holiday doubling as mentioned above and allowing the Centre to also open on Sundays.

Centre staff run weekly family craft sessions during the summer holidays.

1.5 Exhibition

Elements of the exhibition are changed each year to improve quality and provide renewed interest for returning visitors.

At the end of 2011 a short film on the history of Tenby was introduced. At Easter 2012, a painted panel representing 19th Century bathers posing outside a Tenby bathing machine was borrowed from Tenby Museum. Visitors can stand behind it, put their faces in the cut-outs and have their pictures taken.

Both of these new elements have been well received by the public.

A quiz on the exhibition (aimed at both infants and primary children) is available for visiting groups when required.

1.6 National Park Events

The Tenby Centre is the booking centre for the Authority's Activities and Events programme. In 2012, 434 bookings were taken for 1,003 people. There are many processes that are involved as part of, and beyond this:

various enquiries are processed, confirmatory letters and receipts dispatched to all who book, activity leaders are updated with booking information, and occasionally refunds and cancellation calls are made.

1.7 Disaster Recovery

The Tenby Centre acts as an IT 'disaster recovery site' should the National Park headquarters suffer major failure. Certain computer files are backed-up to Tenby and stored on removable disk after every working day.

The re-written tapes are changed by the Centre staff then retained off-site to ensure safe keeping of the latest files.

2. OTHER FUNCTIONS

2.1 Stock

The corporate stock for the Authority is held in Tenby. The Centre Manager orders, records and arranges weekly dispatches of National Park merchandise to the Authority's other sites, the County Council's TICs and a small number of other outlets as requested. The cost price of goods processed and delivered (January to September incl.) in 2012 totals over £17,000

2.2 Coast to Coast

Storage and delivery of the Authorities visitor newspaper is managed from Tenby Centre. 2012 has again seen 235,000 copies 'drip-fed' to over 500 outlets countywide and beyond. Demand is monitored on a monthly basis, and this year it was noted that mid season take-up was slightly down on recent years. However whereas normally deliveries begin to be cut back from mid September, this year supplies have been maintained across all outlets ensuring that once again there will be no wastage.

Delivery of the Authority's free publications and some staff uniform items are also managed from Tenby.

2.3 Future Plans

Following staff restructuring, a strategic review of all Centres has just begun, with a draft plan expected to be in place by April 2013. All Centre Managers, the Discovery Team Leader and the Head of Discovery are involved. This fresh look at what we do will undoubtedly bring positive changes, with possible action taken on previous ideas for improvement as well as new innovations.

Recommendation

Members' comments are invited.

(For further information, please contact John Worrall, 01834 840870)

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Consultees:*