

REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR OF DELIVERY AND DISCOVERY

SUBJECT: TOURIST INFORMATION PROVISION (NEWPORT AND TENBY)

Purpose of Report

To approve the closure of the Tenby National Park Visitor Centre and invest in a package of activities to deliver visitor information in the Tenby area.

To extend the period of consultation and engagement regarding potential changes to the future provision of visitor services in Newport.

1. Introduction/Background

At the last National Park Authority meeting held in Dale on the 28th September 2016, Members resolved to consult on proposals to change the way visitor information services are delivered in Tenby and Newport in the future. Members were unanimous in their desire to see the Authority change the nature of its current delivery in order to invest in a package of new initiatives aimed at supporting the growth of the wider visitor economy in Pembrokeshire.

The Authority consequently launched a formal public consultation on proposed changes to visitor services in Newport and Tenby which closed on the 31st October. In addition, public meetings were held in both Newport and Tenby in conjunction with a number of both formal and informal meetings with stakeholder groups regarding both the impacts of any potential changes and the opportunities to deliver services differently.

In addition, a consultation process was undertaken with staff impacted by the proposals and relevant trade unions.

2. Tenby

2.1. Response to the Consultation

Attendance at the public meeting in Tenby was low. Comments received from the very few people that did attend the public meeting, along with the small amount of correspondence sent to the Authority and/or published in the local press, points to a perceived 'duplication of service' in Tenby between the Authority's Visitor Centre and Pembrokeshire County Council's Tourist Information Centre (TIC).

In addition, it was clear from the comments received via the consultation process that more and more outlets (public, private and voluntary) now stock a lot of similar publicity materials to those found at Tenby National Park Visitor Centre. This has, over time, reduced the 'added value' that the Authority's services have historically

provided to visitors by enhancing their enjoyment of Tenby and the wider National Park.

2.2 Future Delivery of an Information Service

During a discussion with Tenby Town Council it was agreed to set up a group with other stakeholders such as the Tenby Chamber of Commerce, Pembrokeshire County Council, Tenby Town Team and the Civic Society to discuss how information could be provided to visitors and residents. A key element of this will be to identify how the new Town Wi-Fi provision can be fully utilised. The group will be set up following an initial invitation from the Town Council and will hopefully contribute towards developing new approaches on how to provide and share information.

In addition, discussions will be held with the Town Council regarding providing information on the National Park at their main office in the De Valence Centre. Meetings have also been arranged with other stakeholders in the town with the view to discussing future shared options. While discussions are ongoing they highlight a positive opportunity to change the way the Authority provides information in the Tenby area.

As part of a process of developing strategies for key towns across Pembrokeshire, the County Council is proposing to undertake a process of developing a Strategy for Tenby. The Authority will engage positively with this process to ensure that new opportunities to provide information about the National Park are provided.

Officers will continue to discuss options for providing information with potential partners.

2.3 Financial Implications

The paper presented to the Authority on 28th September outlined the financial implications of changing the nature of the service in the Tenby area. The main element of this focused on the financial impact of closing Tenby Visitor Centre and an early settlement of the lease on the property. The following information was provided:

- the property is leased until 2019 so the Authority is committed to paying an annual rental and rates. It is estimated that the cost associated with the early surrender of the Authority's lease and associated rates would equate to £160K (see below for further details). While this is the maximum figure, we would seek to negotiate a reduced sum;
- the cost of the exit payment will diminish as time passes;
- the net annual operating cost of the centre is c.£75,000 pa. On the basis of the exit costs of £160,000, by ceasing operation during 2016-17 the Authority will offset the cost through reducing its operating costs;
- the contractual lease expiry date is 24th December 2019. PCNPA could cease trading from the premises at any time prior to the lease expiry date at our discretion, although in the absence of any formally documented early surrender agreement with our landlord, our obligations to pay rent, rates etc. would continue until the 24th December 2019.

The financial picture in relation to Tenby Visitor Centre can be summarised as follows:

Tenby Financial Data

Annual Revenue savings

Net annual operating costs	£72,000
Annual maintenance	£2,000
	£73,000

Capital Outlay

Settlement of Lease & Rates	-£100,000
Staff Costs	-£50,000
Vacate & Relocation	-£10,000
	-
	£160,000

The figures provided above reflect a worst case scenario of the Authority not being able to reduce its liabilities between the date of surrender and 24th December 2019. The Estates Officer has written to the landlord to commence discussions, but to date has not received a response. However, even as the worst case scenario listed above there is still a financial benefit to making this decision. Any subsequent reduction in the cost of Settlement of the Lease would increase the savings for the Authority.

2.4 Non-Public facing use of the Tenby Centre

In addition to public facing services based at Tenby the Centre also provides the following non-public facing functions:

- Disaster Recovery Centre – the Tenby Visitor Centre is designated a Disaster Recovery Centre for the Authority, and hosts a number of back-up IT servers. Plans have already been drawn up to re-locate these servers and review our Disaster Recovery plans.
- Staff base - While the primary use of the Tenby Visitor Centre is as a provider of information, it does have a secondary use as a base for staff based in the South of the county. However, it should be noted that with the exception of the staff currently employed to manage the public facing work of the centre, there are no other staff members who have Tenby listed as their “work base”. However, the Authority will review the situation and if deemed beneficial will seek to secure space for staff to hold meetings or undertake work on an “as needed” basis in the Tenby area.

2.5 The Process and Timescale of Closing

If Members agree to the closure of the Tenby Visitor Centre it is proposed to undertake the following process:

- Closure of the public facing element of the centre, no later than the 28th February 2017;

- Surrender of the lease at a date to be agreed following 31st March 2017 depending on operational needs such as re-locating IT equipment, re-location of interpretation materials and the outcome of negotiations regarding the surrender of the lease;
- Work will commence immediately to invest in a package of activities to deliver visitor information in the Tenby area.

2.6 Conclusion

Since the decision undertaken by the Authority to consult on a proposal to change the way information services are delivered in Tenby in order to invest in a package of new initiatives aimed at supporting the growth of the wider visitor economy in Pembrokeshire, the following has been identified:

- There has been little opposition to the proposals;
- The Authority is in a position to invest resources to deliver information in a different way;
- A number of positive discussions have been held with stakeholders that suggest viable proposals can be developed to provide information in a different way;
- Even when based on the “worst-case scenario” listed above, there are clear financial benefits to taking the decision at this current time. This benefit may increase following negotiation with the landlord;
- Plans are currently being developed to re-locate the Disaster Recovery elements of the Authority’s work in Tenby. These can be delivered within the next three months.

2.7 Proposal

As a result of the conclusions above, Members are asked to agree to:

- the closure of the public facing element of the Tenby Visitor Centre, no later than the 28th February 2017;
- the surrender of the lease at a date to be agreed following 31st March 2017 depending on operational needs of the Authority; and
- work to commence immediately to invest in a package of activities to deliver visitor information in the Tenby area.

3. Newport

3.1 Response to the Consultation

The Authority received a significant number of responses relating to the proposed changes to visitor services in Newport (including responses from outside of Pembrokeshire). The public meeting was extremely well attended and an online petition attracted over 900 signatories all of whom opposed the closure of Newport Tourist Information Centre (TIC). The Authority has received correspondence from a newly established group, entitled the Newport Visitor Centre Action Group chaired by Lady Mary Hallinan, which was established on the 1st November *"to investigate, challenge and oppose closure of the National Park Visitor Centre in Newport"*.

As a result of the responses opposing the proposed service changes in Newport, Officers of the Authority have held a number of additional meetings with local bodies and stakeholder groups to both explain the Authority's current position and to explore alternative ways of delivering visitor services in and around Newport. However, to ensure that the Authority can fully address the issues raised via the formal public consultation and explore in detail the potential options for alternative service delivery, Officers are requesting more time before bringing a formal decision to the NPA.

It is, therefore, proposed that any formal decision on changes to visitor services in Newport is deferred until a future National Park Authority meeting. The additional time will be used specifically to explore new long-term sustainable models for delivering visitor services in Newport in partnership with public, private and voluntary sector bodies in the locality.

4. Risk considerations

The proposed changes, presented within this paper, are geared towards the reallocation of funding to support revised programmes of work as well as a more sustainable and equitable range of visitor services across the National Park. The desire is, therefore, to create a 'people-led' service, in partnership with local businesses and communities, that supports a wider geographical spread, ensuring that we take the Authority's visitor services 'to the customer' so that even more visitors and residents experience the benefits of accessing its services closer to their chosen destination. It is hoped that this will deliver improved benefits to a wider audience whilst reducing costs.

5. Compliance

The proposed changes to the Authority's visitor services will enhance the ability "*to encourage and support the development of sustainable employment and businesses, particularly in tourism and recreation*" and "*to protect and promote the local culture of language, arts and heritage of the area*" as set out in the Authority's draft 2017/18 Corporate Plan.

6. Human Rights/Equality issues

An initial equality impact assessment (EIA) screening analysis suggests that a full EIA is not necessary due to the limited use of the Tenby Visitors Centres by local residents (as evidenced by a recent survey) plus the limited impact on individuals and/or groups with protected characteristics.

7. Biodiversity implications/Sustainability appraisal

The proposed actions in this paper do not conflict with the National Park Management Plan and/or departmental policies for nature conservation, climate change and resource use. It is envisaged that a reduction in building and staff costs will, ultimately, allow the Authority to deliver a more cost-effective and sustainable range of visitor services.

8. Welsh Language considerations

The proposals comply with the requirements of the Compliance Notice served upon the Authority under Section 44 of the Welsh Language (Wales) Measure 2011.

Recommendations

Members are asked to approve the following:

- 1. the closure of the public facing element of the Tenby Visitor Centre, no later than the 28th February 2017;**
- 2. the surrender of the lease for Tenby Visitor Centre at a date to be agreed following 31st March 2017 depending on operational needs of the Authority;**
- 3. work to commence immediately to invest in a package of activities to deliver visitor information in the Tenby area, and**
- 4. To extend the period of consultation and engagement regarding potential changes to the future provision of visitor services in Newport.**

Background Documents

- Report to National Park Authority regarding proposed changes to visitor services in Tenby and Newport – 28th September 2016 (Report No. 52/16)
- Various Reports presented to the Provision of Information to Visitors Task and Finish Group – 11th November 2015 – Present
- Report to National Park Authority regarding creation of Task and Finish Group to look at the Future Provision of Information to Visitors - 6 May 2015 (Report No. 24/15)
- Report to Recreation and Tourism Review Committee – Review of Tourism and Destination Management in Pembrokeshire – 28th January 2015 (Report No. 04/15)
- Report to National Park Authority – Overview of Community Consultation Activities – 17th December 2014 (Report No. 71/14)
- Report to Recreation and Tourism Review Committee – Overview of Service Performance from April 2012 – Mar 2013 – 13th November 2013 (Report No. 10/13)
- Report to Recreation and Tourism Review Committee regarding Newport Visitor Centre - 13 March 2013 (Report No. 04/13)

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