

Area North Committee – 27 June 2012

10. Developing Sustainable Tourism in Area North (Executive Decision)

Portfolio Holder: Patrick Palmer, Area North
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Assistant Director: Kim Close, Communities
Service Manager: Charlotte Jones Area Development Manager (North)
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Purpose of the Report

For members to consider a request to support investment at the Cartgate Picnic Area in support of increasing the value of local tourism.

Public Interest

Area North has a distinctive environment, including its historic buildings and natural environment. Finding ways to increase the value of sustainable tourism to the area is a high priority. The Cartgate Picnic Area is a well-used stopping point by thousands of potential visitors, and this project will assist in attracting further visits into South Somerset itself.

Recommendation

To allocate £5000 from the Area North Reserve to support the installation of a series of interpretation panels at the Cartgate Picnic Area.

Background Information

Area North has a distinctive environment, including its historic buildings and natural environment. The National Trust properties, the networks of pathways for walking, cycling and riding, open spaces like Ham Hill and the River Parrett Trail are notable assets within the district. The Somerset Levels and Moors is a low wetland of international significance for bio-diversity and is home to a variety of programmes initiated by the RSPB and Natural England.

A Somerset Tourism visitor survey conducted in 2010 indicated that the local scenery and heritage are key reasons for people visiting the county. Visitors do find it quite easy to get here, a large proportion coming down from the Midlands, and once they have stayed in Somerset many people do tend to return in following years. Key messages were that there is still great potential for growth and that our tourism offer needs to be customer focussed with emphasis on quality, while still providing good value for money.

In establishing local priorities, Area North Committee has recognised that tourism presents economic opportunities to our diverse rural communities; this may be through marketing local produce, diversification of buildings and facilities or better use of our existing assets.

Promotion and marketing and improved signage and interpretation for businesses and attractions have been identified as first steps in supporting the potential growth of this sector.

The Cartgate Picnic Area, just off the A303 hosts the SSDC Tourist Information Centre and a new locally run café, which reports to have 300-1,000 customers per day. There is an increasing number of coaches, minibuses and cars using the site; the TIC helps to promote our district by giving each coach driver an information pack about South Somerset and for this year has advertised in the Coach Drivers' Handbook.

The site is owned by the Highways Agency, they have recently given permission for SSDC to install free standing, large scale photographic images that promote the district to users of the A303; we see this as a chance to promote our district and encourage visitors to explore the surrounding local area.

Project description

The project is to create and install seven individual interpretation units within the Cartgate Picnic area, which will illustrate the distinctive character of the local area and encourage visitors to explore.

The Tourist Information Manager will oversee the project, in conjunction with the Community Regeneration Officer (North) and liaise with other organisations (eg Local Attractions, National Trust) to gain sponsorship and support for the work at that site.

The **cost** of the project is £6000 for six boards (design, manufacture and installation). Business sponsorship of £1000 has been offered, leaving **£5000** to fund.

Anticipated benefits and outcomes

- Visitors to the area will be more aware of the local facilities, attractions and services through targeted marketing
- The project aims to promote the varied landscape, rich architectural heritage and local distinctiveness in Area North

Ownership and consents

The boards will be owned and maintained by the Economic Development service which manages the Cartgate Tourist Information Centre.

The project does not require planning permission. Highways Agency consent received.

Financial Implications

The uncommitted balance in the Area Reserve is £28,920. If this allocation is approved that will leave an uncommitted balance of £23,920 for future years.

Council Plan Implications

Focus One: Jobs – “We want a strong economy which has low unemployment and thriving businesses.”

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

Locally sourced products. Promotes sustainable tourism initiatives.

Equality and Diversity Implications

Design will confirm to accessibility standards.

Background Papers: none
