

Area North Committee – 24 October 2012

10. Langport and River Parrett Visitor Centre – Update Report & Consultation

Strategic Director: Rina Singh, Place and Performance
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Purpose of the Report

To provide an update Area Committee on the proposal to change the management arrangements of the Langport Visitor Centre, and to seek initial views from councillors for future use and tenancy arrangements.

A further verbal update will be made at the meeting by the Area Development Manager (North).

Public Interest

The Langport and River Parrett Visitor Centre was built and opened by SSDC in 1998. The centre adjoins the River Parrett and was originally designed to act as a hub for visitors to the Levels and Moors, specifically the River Parrett Trail – a 50 mile network of footpaths following river from 'source to mouth'. The current tenant and manager of the centre – Bow Bridge Cycles – is retiring and so the future use of the property is being reviewed.

Recommendation

Councillors are asked to note and comment on the report and presentation.

Report

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The Centre's floor space is divided into two areas, where 50% of the building has been rented by a commercial business tenant, with the remaining floor space providing a free visitor centre with displays on the Levels and Moors, information about local attractions and a children's "discovery" room.

Since opening, the day to day operation is undertaken by the commercial tenant via a management agreement. The commercial tenant – Bow Bridge Cycles - has given notice to the Council, bringing these arrangements to an end in November 2012.

At the time of writing, it is proposed to move future responsibility for the centre to Property Services, and for the Area Development Manager (North) and Senior Land and Property Officer to undertake a review including local consultation, and to secure alternative arrangements for the occupation and management of the property which suit current needs and circumstances.

Further details of the recent review undertaken by the Assistant Director for Health and Well-Being and the Countryside Manager of the Langport and River Parrett Visitor Centre are published in a recent Portfolio Holder report (Executive Bulletin - 12th October 2012) – see attached we blink:

<http://www.southsomerset.gov.uk/councillors-and-democracy/meetings-and-decisions/agendas-and-minutes/executive-bulletin/>

Work completed (co-ordinated by the Area Development Manager (North) and Senior Land and Property Officer) in the light of current changes to occupation and management include:-

- Consultation commenced with local councillors and community groups to consider and establish current needs, ideas and opportunities to continue or alter current use of the premises to add value to the local economy, provide educational services and promote access to the countryside.
- SSDC property agent instructed to market the premises seeking expressions of interest from potential businesses / other organisations.
- Pre-application planning advice provided in the event of future use requiring planning consent
- Indicative valuations and assessment of current / local rents, a review of operating costs and future budget requirements
- Review of contents relating to the visitor centre to re-locate if required

A verbal update will be given on the above at the meeting, with views and questions from members of Area North Committee invited.

Financial Implications

None from this report.

Council Plan Implications

Focus One – Jobs:

- Provide targeted support for start-ups and small businesses and those with an aspiration to expand
- Work in partnership to deliver investment and development that local people value...
- Enhance the vitality of town centres

Focus Four: Health and Communities:

- ...align council resources to deliver projects to address local needs [relating to health and well-being].

- Maintain and enhance the network of leisure and cultural facilities optimising opportunities for external funding to promote healthy living.

Carbon Emissions & Adapting to Climate Change Implications (NI188)

The energy performance of the Langport Visitor Centre is monitored by Property Services, and will be considered as part of this review.

Equality and Diversity Implications

The building is accessible including toilets and pathways and is well-connected to the town centre via the Cocklemoor Bridge and pathways. Future proposals for use / management will be assessed for their equalities impact.

Background Papers: *Portfolio Holder Report - Changes to the future management of the Langport and River Parrett Visitor Centre, Langport 12th October 2012.*
