

BABERGH DISTRICT COUNCIL

COMMITTEE: CABINET	REPORT NUMBER: BCa/18/13
FROM: CABINET MEMBER FOR ECONOMY	DATE OF MEETING: 12 JULY 2018
OFFICER: LEE CARVELL – CORPORATE MANAGER OPEN FOR BUSINESS	KEY DECISION REF NO. CAB51

LOCAL TOURISM STRATEGY (BABERGH VISITOR INFORMATION OPTIONS)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Following Cabinet's decision taken on 08 March 2018 (Paper BCa/17/59 refers), to now provide an update to Members on progression of a core visitor information offer in support of Babergh and Mid Suffolk districts. Both Councils have determined to discontinue with direct Council staffed and funded fixed location Tourist Information Centres (TICs) at Lavenham and Stowmarket from the end of the main 2018 visitor season - end of October 2018.
- 1.2 Further, to also update Cabinet on linked discussions regarding future use of the Lady Lane, Lavenham TIC building, which is a Babergh owned asset. In that regard this report seeks Cabinet approval in principle, and subject to further work up, to enable Lavenham Parish Council (or community group linked to the parish council) to take on the Lady Lane building whether on a below-market rental value leasehold basis or freehold/lease with option to buy. An appropriate delegation to Strategic Director level on negotiating the terms and detail of such an arrangement, in line with Asset and Investment Strategy, is also sought via this report to enable responsive and timely progress. The final terms of agreement or disposal would report back to Cabinet in due course for consideration of approval.

2. OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 2.1 Officers were instructed by Cabinet in March 2018 to proceed with facilitating a visitor information offer for the district, so as to ensure that the Council is helping to support a succession visitor information offer upon cessation of the current TIC arrangements.
- 2.2 The option of 'do nothing' for Babergh and Mid Suffolk was discounted through the previous Cabinet discussions and decisions at both Councils. Inaction may have risked a transitional gap in visitor information following the end of the TIC arrangements and thereby leave businesses, communities and sector stakeholders to decide what, if anything, should emerge and when without any interim support. BMS seeks to demonstrate its local leadership to support a transition and establish a core concept so that there is some degree of district consistency which is also in support of our local economy, communities, key destinations and attractions.
- 2.3 Due to the timeframes involved and variety of local (and broader) level interests involved in the tourism sector, an initial core offer provided from existing business and community premises, which can then be supplemented and adapted by local stakeholders over time to best suit local circumstances, is proposed as being the

most viable approach at this time. This may also enable BMS to target best impact support interventions in line with approved strategies.

- 2.4 The level of local community and business input will vary from place to place. Broader place-shaping/visioning considerations are also relevant. As an example, Lavenham has a strong and pro-active community and business base, and a tourism offer needing minimal marketing and promotion given its recognition internationally as a one of the UK's most beautiful and preserved medieval villages. The desire and enthusiasm from within that local community and business base to continue supporting a relevant tourism offer as part of a broader community-hub/co-location opportunity is best led by them, with supportive facilitation from the District Council. BMS can have an influence in that being successful as an enabler, through asset utilisation approach, initial set-up of visitor information scheme and also through our mainstream economy and community support (including with partner network). BMS also have various inputs into development of events, attractions, facilities and products.
- 2.5 There is firm interest from Suffolk Library Service in providing a link-up which could support visitor information, utilising the libraries existing infrastructure and as a logical place for accessing printed information plus digital channels via hosted terminals and free Wi-Fi. This may support the library service's own asset viability through increasing footfall and form part of broader public access strategy. Babergh already grant supports a library link-up at Sudbury, although that is also funded and staffed by the town council as a separate TIC desk. Any new arrangements would likely combine library desks with visitor information and be supported by trained library staff. We have active and ongoing discussions with the Library Service business development officer, and they attended our visitor information stakeholder event on 06 June 2018 at the Museum of East Anglian Life.
- 2.6 Additional/supplementary visitor information options may include:
- visitor information within the Councils own Customer Access Points;
 - our own website tourism resources and links (including progression of our own Heart of Suffolk digital and publications offer);
 - events-linked, and opportunistic, pop-up support;
 - closer longer-term sector support through our key relationships development with Gainsborough's House and Museum of East Anglian Life;
 - longer term link up with new developments which may emerge, for example Needham Lake; and
 - strategic level work with Suffolk Tourism Partnership and district/borough colleagues

These are being/will be progressed but as next phase discussions, and part of broader strategy. Given immediate resource and timeframe/local economy needs it is considered that priority must be given to establishing a core 'Visitor Information Point' scheme, with any potential enhancements not just for BMS to lead or facilitate.

- 2.7 A core (joint Babergh Mid Suffolk) 'Visitor Information Point' scheme has been proposed by BMS, based upon what happens elsewhere including in Suffolk. This was discussed in a workshop discussion with interested parties, and follow-up conversations have since taken place. Full details of this concept are attached as APPENDIX A.

<p>3. RECOMMENDATIONS</p> <p>3.1 That Cabinet note the updated position in relation to Visitor Information Point development, and the specific and ongoing progress in relation to supporting Lavenham and the broader Babergh and Mid Suffolk area; and</p> <p>3.2 That approval in principle be given to both options of (i) a below market rate lease agreement with Lavenham Parish Council (or community group linked to the parish council); and (ii) a freehold disposal to the same body for the existing Tourist Information Centre premises at 2 Lady Lane, Lavenham; and</p> <p>3.3 That authority be delegated to the Strategic Director with responsibility for Visitor Economy matters to enter negotiation with the lessee regarding duration, terms and conditions, periodic review and other relevant detail, or else a freehold disposal negotiation. (Note: the final lease agreement or disposal terms will be brought to Cabinet for approval).</p>
<p>REASON FOR DECISION</p> <p>To continue to strategically support progression of the visitor economy within the Babergh District, and within financial and operational resource constraints for the Authority. To responsively support the community and local economy of Lavenham, bringing potential benefits to broader economy of the district.</p>

4. KEY INFORMATION

- 4.1 This paper follows on from Paper BCa/17/59 considered by Cabinet in March 2018.
- 4.2 The staffing impact in terms of support, consultation and process is being progressed by HR, Corporate Manager from the Open for Business Team and involving the Unions.
- 4.3 Officers have progressed discussions with partners, neighbouring authorities, communities, businesses and stakeholders in relation to both visitor information and asset use opportunities. Discussions have centred around the principles of:
- accessible, relevant and non-fixed single point visitor information delivered in partnership with local communities and business
 - value-adding to self-help and other resource channels
 - encouraging community and business leadership, self-sufficiency and innovation
 - best value to the extent of Babergh's support intervention and within its Medium Term Financial Strategy (MTFS)
 - opportunities for greater community impact from BDC's asset, which may also deliver a commercial return for the Authority
 - support for existing staff directly affected by these changes
- 4.4 Significant discussions have progressed since March 2018 regarding development of a multi-purpose community hub utilising the Lady Lane building, with the Lavenham Parish Council and Business Forum taking an active and progressive approach. Whilst the building itself is quite small, it has potential to provide appropriate Sub-

Post Office level services and other community uses, and would likely retain a visitor information element (not directly delivered by BDC). At local level the existing Discover Lavenham website and the 'Lavenham App' provide further opportunities to support visitor information resources directly and from within the community.

5. LINKS TO JOINT STRATEGIC PLAN

5.1 This project most closely aligns with, and tangibly delivers against Priority 2.3.3 'Develop and implement our Suffolk Tourism Strategy'. 'Tourism Strategy' is a key 2018/19 joint priority. It also impacts upon:

- Priority 2.1 Increased understanding of our local business needs
- Priority 2.2 Engage and support our businesses to thrive
- Priority 2.3 Further develop the local economy and market towns to thrive
- Priority 4.1 Property investment strategy
- Priority 4.4 Effective corporate asset management strategy

5.2 The Council's approved Joint BMS Economic 'Open for Business' Strategy (particularly section 6.8 'Supporting the Visitor Economy') also refers.

6. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

Revenue/Capital/ Expenditure/Income Item	Total	2017/18	2018/19	2019/20
TIC operational costs, end of service liabilities plus pump prime for Visitor Information Point Scheme		£100k net cost of operating TIC (inc corporate recharges)	Pro-rata at 31 October 2018 plus redundancy liability plus kick-start VIP scheme allowance	See below
Note: See Appendix B (Confidential) regarding asset utilisation matters				
Net Effect			Likely to be a pro-rata 'saving' to order of £22k One-off liabilities will offset any savings in 18/19. Savings including for reinvestment in key economic priorities will be realised from 19/20 onwards	Estimated £57k operational service savings (not including £43k of attributable corporate recharge)

7. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

7.1 Legal implications in relation to the asset ownership and registry, for example any restrictive covenants, have been ascertained and checked by the shared legal partnership. Any lease agreement terms and conditions with third parties would be considered by legal as standard operational practice. Any freehold disposal

agreement would be similarly reviewed. At this stage there are no prohibitive clauses to impact unfavourably on any potential agreement with Lavenham Parish Council.

7.2 'Tourism' is not a statutory function for district councils. Investment and resource decisions in support of the visitor economy are subject to identifying and monitoring positive outcomes, with legal service input and scrutiny on a case-by-case basis and in line with joint strategic priorities.

7.3 The staff HR process in relation to cessation of TIC operations is being project managed and progressed in accordance with applicable legal and policy obligations, including engagement with the Unions.

8. RISK MANAGEMENT

8.1 This report is most closely linked with the Council's Corporate / Significant Business Risk No. 2AO4 / Visitor Economy support aligned with approved Economy Strategy and Service Plan.

8.2 This report is also closely linked with the Council's Corporate / Significant Business Risk No. 3a 'If we do not effectively engage communities about their future needs, then we will not be able to help them become more sustainable' and also 4c 'If we do not manage our asset portfolio effectively it may result in lost opportunity; loss of capital value; increased revenue costs and loss of public confidence'.

8.3 Key risks are set out below:

Risk Description	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigation Measures
(a) Lack of suitable Visitor Information Point locations or not having them operational before the commencement of the main 2019 visitor season	Unlikely	Noticeable	(a) Effective and focused engagement with our destinations and groups/business network. Progression of a flexible concept scheme which is consistent with successful models operated elsewhere.
(b) Considering or supporting too many local place variable options at this transitional stage could result in delay and impact on deliverability by the start of 2019 main visitor season	Unlikely	Noticeable	(b) Focus on facilitating a core flexible Visitor Information Point offer for BMS and implement by the end of 2018. Other local enhancements/options may progress as may emerge through relevant stakeholders.
(c) Failure to work positively and decisively with the community and	Unlikely	Noticeable	(c) Progressing outcome focused and inclusive negotiations. Early decision 'in

<p>local businesses of Lavenham may result in missed opportunities to support the visitor and local economy/community.</p> <p>(d) Continuing to take lead and financial responsibility for matters which are owned/shared by private sector businesses, sector professionals and communities may result in wasted spend, confusing offer for visitors and lack of sustainability.</p> <p>(e) Resource pressures within the Open for Business Team given competing priorities. Some expertise and local knowledge gaps following Visitor Economy Development Officer moving post making support and delivery of priorities difficult at a critical time</p>	<p>Likely</p> <p>Likely</p>	<p>Bad</p> <p>Bad</p>	<p>principle' regarding leasing/disposal of Lady Lane building may give confidence and momentum to those discussions, including Sub-Post Office potential link-up.</p> <p>(d) Risk may not be fully mitigated as the tourism landscape is fragmented and complex. BMS has some challenges not shared by other authority areas. Approved BMS Economic Strategy seeks to set out targeted intervention approach linked to priority outcomes.</p> <p>(e) Risk may not be fully mitigated. Effective project management, resource deployment, service plan priorities and assessment and recruitment of relevant expertise will assist.</p>
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9. CONSULTATIONS

- 9.1 Various officers across the Council have co-ordinated in respect of these issues – which cut across multiple specialisms (including asset management, finance, economic development, communications, public realm, communities).
- 9.2 We have commissioned an independent valuation report and ('lifetime' i.e. 30 year) buildings maintenance report for the Lady Lane building. Summary details, financial information and valuation estimates are contained within Appendix B (Confidential).

- 9.3 We have engaged, and continue to do so, with local interested groups and parties interested in supporting a modernised and flexible concept visitor information point offer.
- 9.4 We have advised affected suppliers and other businesses in relation to the changes in visitor information. Should opportunities arise to network tourism retail sectors with emerging visitor information points this will be progressed accordingly, but is ultimately not a matter for the Authority.
- 9.5 We have made our Suffolk Tourism Partnership, Local Tourism Action Group colleagues and broader network aware of the changes. With the exception of Ipswich (at St.Stephen’s Church TIC facility) all other district/boroughs have already ended their direct TIC support.
- 9.6 All Councillors have had access to a broader context tourism workshop and update session delivered by the Open for Business Team.

10. EQUALITY ANALYSIS

- 10.1 Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) not required directly arising from the matters contained within this report.

11. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1 There are no direct environmental implications from the matters contained within this report.

12. APPENDICES

Title	Location
(a) Outline Visitor Information Point Scheme for Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts	Attached
(b) CONFIDENTIAL (NOT FOR PUBLICATION) Survey and Maintenance summary - Lady Lane TIC Building, Lavenham	In Part 2 of the Report - Restricted

13. BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS

- 13.1 VISIT BRITAIN - ALTERNATIVE MODELS OF VISITOR INFORMATION
- 13.2 AECOM VISITOR DESTINATION PLAN FOR BMS (JUNE 2015)
- 13.3 JOINT BMS ECONOMIC ‘OPEN FOR BUSINESS’ STRATEGY

Visitor Information Point Scheme for Babergh and Mid Suffolk Districts 2018/19



VISITOR INFORMATION POINT (VIP) BABERGH & MID SUFFOLK (BMS) NETWORK

Briefing Summary:

The visitor economy is of significant importance to Babergh and Mid Suffolk, and the broader region. Research has shown that in 2016 the overall economic impact of tourism to the Babergh District was £188.5m (tourism related employment accounting for 11% of all employment) and for Mid Suffolk District £167.5m (9% of all employment) [source Destination Research Ltd Economic Impact of Tourism Reports 2016]

BMS is changing the way it supports visitor information following a review of the service and the changing needs of visitors, particularly regarding greater access to electronic information.

In March 2018, the Councils decided to discontinue with the current direct service and funding of staffed single fixed point Tourist Information Centres (TICs) in Lavenham and Stowmarket with effect from the end of the main 2018 visitor season (end of October 2018).

This decision was based upon changing visitor trends (and use of technology) which has declined the use of traditional fixed location/uniformed and staffed TIC formats, which have inherently higher delivery costs. There is an opportunity to modernise visitor information by making tourist information more flexible and accessible across the districts – working with local businesses, communities and existing infrastructure.

The Councils seek to instigate a 'Visitor Information Point' (VIP) network across the districts, in partnership with a local business and/or community organisations. We are looking to establish VIPs in each of the market towns and in our key destination towns from existing business and community premises.

The Visitor Information Point concept:

The vision for a VIP is an accessible location which provides a friendly focal point for providing Visitor Information in the town centres or key visitor destinations. The concept is flexible. However, we currently anticipate:

- The VIP will be promoted as part of a BMS wide VIP network as the local place to access literature. In some cases, information and signposting via face to face contact will be available - directing enquirers to available tourism literature and the various visitor support websites available from regional to local place level.
- The VIPs will work together including with other visitor support organisations in an integrated way to promote the areas attractions, accommodation, towns, events etc. to benefit local businesses and the visitor economy.
- The VIP will be within an existing private or community sector premises (such as shop / café / library or other facility), located close to the town centre or key tourist areas and will be open to the public, reasonably frequently, particularly on weekend or event days.
- Staff working within the VIPs will be able to access free 'Welcome Host' type training (supported by BMS), to enable them to provide a warm welcome to visitors, to promote digital offers (for more comprehensive information) and use the printed literature provided to answer local queries – such as events programme and activities.
- Free Wi-Fi provision for visitors is desirable, to encourage visitors to use the websites to search for information.
- The premises could also have the option to offer additional services such as selling tourist merchandise, maps and guides and tickets for local shows, tours/walks and attractions. These usually attract a commission for the retailer.
- There will be space within the premises for leaflet display, the distribution of which will be initially supported by the Councils.
- The premises will be clearly signed from outside as a point for Visitor Information – these signs will be provided by the Councils and be consistent/recognisable as Visitor Information.
- The Councils will monitor the VIP transition and will consider where it may support any refinements so as to maximise impact.
- The Councils do not envisage a substantial cost for the operation of the service within an existing business or community premises. Day-to-day costs will be offset by the additional footfall benefits and advertising as a VIP.
- Visitor information (leaflets, screen displays, pop-ups etc.) may also be utilised elsewhere at non-VIP designated or branded locations – such as taxi waiting rooms, cafés, leisure, events, retail or broader customer access points.

Setting up as a Visitor Information Point:

The Councils will set aside a limited funding allocation to support one-off set up costs for VIPs - which will cover signage, shelving units for literature, an information folder, initial training support and any other reasonable elements.

If you would be interested and motivated to provide this service in support of your local area and economy, we would be delighted to receive an Expression of Interest and some information from you by [DATE] regarding how you would operate the service. The Councils, in consultation with any relevant local organisations such as the Parish/Town Council and local Business Association representatives, will assess and select the VIPs, based on best achieving the above concept. The criteria for assessment will include:

- Proximity to town centre, main footfall or key visitor areas
- Opening hours (particularly weekend)
- Availability of Wi-Fi
- Browsing space
- Impartiality of advice (must be clearly stipulated, to avoid accusations of bias/favouritism)
- Pride in being a VIP and part of a BMS wide network to ensure a quality product is maintained
- Availability of staff for interaction with visitors
- Flexibility/availability to receive initial 'Welcome Host' training (free)
- Ability to network in support of the scheme – for example events such as leaflet swaps