

LEDBURY TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

REPORT BY HEAD OF ECONOMIC AND COMMUNITY SERVICES AND PROPERTY SERVICES MANAGER

REPORT TO CABINET MEMBER FOR COMMUNITY SERVICES AND CABINET
MEMBER RESOURCES

DATE REPORT WILL BE CONSIDERED: 18TH SEPTEMBER, 2006 & 20TH
SEPTEMBER, 2006

PROPOSED DATE OF DECISION: 25TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

DATE OF IMPLEMENTATION: 29TH SEPTEMBER, 2006

Wards Affected

Ledbury, Hope End, Frome

Purpose

To approve the moving of Ledbury Tourist Information Centre.

Key Decision

This is a Key Decision because it is significant in terms of its effect on communities living or working in Herefordshire in an area comprising one or more wards.

Recommendations

- THAT**
- (a) necessary repairs and alterations be undertaken to St Katherine's in order to accommodate the Tourist Information Centre;**
 - (b) work be completed by December 2006; and**
 - (c) the TIC be transferred to St Katherine's prior to the start of the next tourism season.**

Reasons

The Tourist Information Centre is currently located within a rented building on the Homend and the lease expires in the summer of 2007. In order to achieve revenue savings it is proposed to move the Tourist Information Centre into St Katherine's. This building is becoming an eyesore within the main car park and if it continues to deteriorate will be a detriment to the town. The cost of leasing 4 Homend is £27,350. While part of the area is sub-leased and an income of £6,350 is received the cost is still high.

Considerations

1. The Tourist Information Centre has been on the same site since 1995, catering for in person, telephone, fax and email correspondence (81,035 in person visitors for 2005/6 financial year). The Tourist Information Centre is operated 6 days a week for 42 weeks of the year and 7 days a week for 10 weeks a year (covering the main summer period). The total cost of the rent of the TIC is £27,350 with an income from

the upstairs premises which is sub-let £6,350 p.a. The rental is only a proportion of the cost of operating the service with the total cost including staffing of £96,790. The income generation for sales amounts to £12,271 and therefore the net cost is £84,519. The TIC has a good reputation for its high quality of customer care, which is evident in correspondence and general feedback.

2. The net annual operating costs of the TIC in its current location in Ledbury High Street are £84,519 (a rent review is due in August, 2007 and this figure is likely to rise).
3. In the proposed new location at St. Katherine's the net annual operating costs would be £73,519. There is therefore a new annual saving of £21,000 which could be achieved by moving the TIC to St. Katherine's.
4. The lease is due to expire on 31st August 2007, and the landlord may increase the rental costs as this is the market trend for other rented property.
5. The relocation of the TIC would offer the opportunity to make use of St Katherine's as a Grade 2* listed building as a public facility whilst at the same time improving the visual appearance of the building. St Katherine's is not on the public high street, but has the advantage of being at one of the main car parks in Ledbury, near coach dropping off and can provide links to the Info facility currently in the building.
6. A funding allocation from the capital budget for creating a temporary library in St Katherine's is available to meet the cost of the move of the TIC and improve the premises. These costs are:
 - £5,000 for transferring the fixtures and fittings
 - £40,000 for internal and external improvements
 - £10,518.28 for IT requirements
 - £3,000 signage
7. The savings from rent income will be reinvested in promotion of tourism in general and specifically the new TIC site.
8. The refurbishment of the building would need to include the provision of adequate signposting for the TIC for pedestrians and drivers.
9. Public consultation on the proposed relocation commenced at a Local Area Forum on 13th June, 2005. The Community Services Scrutiny Committee received a report on the proposed relocation at its meeting in Ledbury on 5th October, 2005 and agreed to note the proposals. The issue of the TIC moving was raised at the Ledbury and District Civic Society AGM of Friday 21st April along with a general discussion regarding the Master's House. The meeting was attended by 120 local people with Councillor Stockton and Jane Lewis, Cultural Services Manager in attendance to answer questions. Correspondence has also taken place with Ledbury Town Council, Ledbury and District Civic Society and Ledbury Tourism Association.
10. Some local residents have indicated they wish the TIC to remain in its current prominent position. A suggestion aired in the press was that the centre should be run by local businesses. However, to maintain the quality of service, opening hours and range of services there would need to be considerable investment by the local business sector. Seven letters were received from the public regarding the move of

the TIC. 5 were generally against, 1 was in favour and the other felt it made no difference but something needed to be done to St Katherine's. The main objections were around losing the very prominent position of the centre, the location being ideal for coach drop-offs, and St Katherine's not providing a shop-window for local shops.

Alternative Options

The only alternative option is to remain in the current building.

Risk Management

Some adverse public opinion in favour of retaining the current location of the tourist information centre, although there has been consultation on this matter.

Continuation of vandalism of the site, though occupation and regular use of the site will alleviate this to some degree.

Financial risk of not moving TIC – the opportunity would be lost to reduce running costs.

Consultees

Ledbury Tourist Association
Ledbury Civic Society
Ledbury Town Council

Background Papers

None