

MINUTES of the meeting of Community Services Scrutiny Committee held at St Katherine's Hall, Ledbury. Committee Members only. on Wednesday, 18th October, 2006 at 7.00 p.m. and reconvened at 12.45 p.m. at the Council Chamber, Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford on Friday, 20th October 2006

Present on 18th October:

Councillor A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
Councillor H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)

Councillors B.F. Ashton, Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, B. Hunt, J.G. Jarvis, G. Lucas and D.C. Taylor

Co-opted Members Mr A. Blackshaw (Tourism), Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils) and Mr G. Woodman (Chamber of Commerce)

Present on 20th October

Councillor A.C.R. Chappell (Chairman)
Councillor H. Bramer (Vice Chairman)

Councillors B.F. Ashton, B. Hunt, J.G. Jarvis, G. Lucas and D.C. Taylor

Co-opted Members Mrs. E. Newman (Herefordshire Association of Local Councils) and Mr G. Woodman (Chamber of Commerce)

In attendance on 18th October: Councillors D.W. Rule MBE (Deputy Leader and Cabinet Member – Children and Young People), R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services) and R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Resources)

In attendance on 20th October: Councillor R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services)

18. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Councillor R.B.A. Burke, Councillor M.R. Cunningham, Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie, Councillor P.G. Turpin, Councillor A.L. Williams, Mr. G. Jones and Ms. C. Jones for the meeting on 18th October 2006.

Additional apologies were received from Councillor Mrs. S.P.A. Daniels, Councillor R.M. Wilson (Cabinet Member – Resources) and Mr. A. Blackshaw for the reconvened meeting on the 20th October 2006.

19. NAMED SUBSTITUTES

Councillor B.F. Ashton, Councillor G. Lucas and Mr G. Woodman substituted for Councillor M.R. Cunningham, Councillor J.G.S. Guthrie and Ms C. Jones respectively on 18th October 2006 and at the reconvened meeting on 20th October 2006.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

Mr. A. Blackshaw substituted for Mr. G. Jones on 18th October 2006 only.

20. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Councillor J.G. Jarvis declared a personal interest in Item 7.

21. MINUTES

RESOLVED: That the minutes for the meeting held on 16th June 2006 be approved as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

22. SUGGESTIONS FROM MEMBERS OF THE PUBLIC ON ISSUES FOR FUTURE SCRUTINY

No suggestions from members of the public were received.

23. PERFORMANCE MONITORING

Members were informed about the available performance indicators position and provided with information about current performance management work within the economic and community services division of the Community Services directorate.

The following are the principle points from the ensuing discussion:

- In relation to BVPI 178 'the percentage of total length of footpaths and public rights of way which were easy to use by members of the public' a view was expressed that many of the county's footpaths were in a poor condition and that this should be addressed due to the high number of visitors that they attracted to the county. The Head of Economic and Community Services agreed that footpaths were an important feature of the County's tourism attraction and highlighted that £25,000 had been awarded from the Local Transport Plan funding for footpaths and public rights of way. It was also noted that footpaths were now under the management of the Parks, Countryside and Leisure Development Manager.
- It was stated that the target for 'number of working days/shifts lost annually to sickness absence per full time equivalent employee' needed consideration and that a private sector business would strive for a target much lower than the current target of 9 days per employee per annum.
- It was noted that the Chamber of Commerce and Advantage West Midlands had assisted with 45 business start up grants which had been awarded.

RESOLVED: That the report be noted.

24. CALL-IN OF JOINT CABINET MEMBER (COMMUNITY SERVICES AND RESOURCES) DECISION TO RELOCATE LEDBURY TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

The Committee considered the joint decision of the Cabinet Members for Community Services and Resources to relocate Ledbury Tourist Information Centre (TIC) which had been called in by three Members of the Committee.

The stated reason for the call-in was: 'in view of public concern to seek confirmation that appropriate consultation had been carried out about the proposed relocation of the TIC and that the proposal was feasible, financially viable, value for money and the best solution.'

The report to the Cabinet Members setting out the basis for the decision to relocate the TIC from the Homend to the Masters House at St Katherine's was appended to the report together

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

with the associated decision notice.

The Chairman explained the Scrutiny Committee's role for the benefit of the public present, emphasising in particular that the Committee did not have the power to take decisions. Having listened to the evidence presented to it the Committee would decide whether or not to make recommendations to the Cabinet Members, who it would expect to take account of the Committee's comments in revisiting their decision. He explained that, as indicated in the report, having heard the evidence presented to it, it was proposed that the Committee would adjourn and reconvene at 12.45 pm on Friday, 20th October, 2006 at the Council's offices at Brockington, 35 Hafod Road, Hereford. He made clear that that meeting too would be open to the public.

He outlined the order in which he proposed to invite speakers. He added that having received a number of questions, covering a range of aspects, from members of the public he did not intend to invite further questions at the meeting. An answer would be given during the meeting to the principal points raised in the questions which had been received and each person who had submitted a response would receive a written reply in due course. The principal comments made by each of those invited to speak is set out below.

Natalia Silver, Head of Economic and Community Services

The Head of Economic and Community Services reported that the Council wanted to be in a position to act when the lease of the current TIC premises expired on 31st August, 2007. The plan was to start work in December/January so that the TIC would be closed during a quieter period. The importance of the TIC to Herefordshire and to Ledbury was recognised and the Council's proposals were intended to enhance it.

She said that there were three main reasons for the proposed relocation:

- The Council rented the current property but owned the Masters House to which it was proposed the TIC should relocate. The saving on rent and reduced rates amounted to £24,000 pa.
- The relocation would bring part of the Masters House back into use. There had been criticism of it in its current, boarded up state. By using part of it the building would be brought back to life. Vandalism would also be reduced as a consequence, resulting in a cost saving.
- The nature of tourism was changing. The use of the internet for tourism was increasing as evidenced by the increase in useage of the Visit Herefordshire website year on year. Powys and Welsh authorities generally had reduced the number of TICs considerably and Devon County Council only operated one strategic TIC. She still believed there was value in a TIC in Ledbury and the personal contact that this could offer, noting the age profile of visitors to Herefordshire. However, market forces would require the Council to address its investment in TICs. The need to consider the position in Ledbury now had become pressing because of the expiry date of the lease on its current premises.

She then replied to the principal points made in the questions received from members of the public. Copies of letters received had been provided to Members of the Committee and the Public. The questions and responses minuted below have been summarised.

Mr Barnes, Ledbury Resident, asked:

Will the Committee please provide details of the investment appraisals of all the options considered for the future of Ledbury Tourist Information Centre and indicate the savings that it expects to achieve from its preferred option?

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

The following breakdown of costs was provided and circulated to all those present at the meeting:

TIC costs in current location Actual 2005/6 £		Costs for based at Masters House Annual £	
Rent	27,350.00	-	
Rates	8,094.00	5,000.00	estimate
Energy	1,035.98	1,000.00	estimate
Water	584.68	584.00	
Staffing	61,857.00	61,857.00	
Building cleaning	2,970.00	2,970.00	
Insurance (premises)	260.00	260.00	
Postage	950.00	950.00	
Telephone	320.00	320.00	
Repairs and main of equipment	1,200.00	1,200.00	
Equipment lease	256.00	256.00	
Refuse	160.00	160.00	
Purchase of stock	21,500.00	21,500.00	
Total	126,537.66	96,057.00	
Income	18,461.00	18,461.00	
Rent contribution	6,350.00	-	
Stock	12,271.00	12,271.00	
Total	37,082.00	30,732.00	

Total costs **89,456.00** **65,325.00**

Saving moving to Masters House **24,131.00**

Note:

Repairs on current TIC	£500 approx per annum
Emergency repairs on Masters House	£10,000 to date for whole building
Likely future repairs for Masters House	£3,500 for the whole building

Mr Ward, Chairman of Ledbury and District Tourist Association, asked:

Why is the TIC having to move in January when the lease on the existing building runs to the start of September 2007?

Who is Herefordshire Council Sub letting the building to from January to the start of September 07 and perhaps longer if the lease is extended?

Why has Cllr Stockton verbally given the main reason for moving the TIC from existing premises as rent increases, when the landlord has offered to freeze the rent for 3 years?

Our members are greatly concerned that if the TIC is moved into the Masters House without the promised refurbishment Herefordshire Council will be endangering Ledbury's future yet

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

again?

The reason the TIC was relocating in January when the existing lease on the current site still had time to run was to move the TIC before the start of the new tourist season. The new address of the TIC could then be included in all relevant publications. The Council would not be sub-letting the current premises to another tenant but would continue to use the building in order to redirect people to the Master's House and promote businesses in the windows. No confirmation had been received from the current TIC's landlord that the rent would not rise when it was reviewed in the summer of 2007. It was also not possible to guarantee a full refurbishment of the Master's House as the full costs were likely to be in the region of £2-4m as it was a Grade II* listed building.

Mr Eager, Ledbury Resident and Retailer, asked:

Have any other locations other than the Master's House been investigated as possible locations for the TIC, particularly the Barrett Browning Institute or the site of the former Jobcentre?

The Master's House has been empty for four years and Herefordshire Council has not put any funds aside for major refurbishment or change of use. It seems that Herefordshire Council has no intention of investing in this building to bring it back into community use. Why has Herefordshire Council abandoned this building and fed the local public with misinformation?

At a Town Council meeting, Natalia Silver, Head of Economic & Community Services, made two comments that I would like explaining. Firstly, how is the Master's House an 'Historical Asset' and secondly, what is meant by the building could be used for 'Community Heritage'? The loss of the Master's House would be insignificant and it should be replaced in the form of a new library with community services.

Will the Committee admit that there has never been any intention to restore the Master's House or to act in the wishes of local bodies opposed to the TIC relocation?

Will the Committee also agree that the consultation process being held is merely a 'democratic exercise' to pacify objectors?

It was explained that the reason other buildings had not been considered was because the Master's House was owned by the Council and if one of the suggested buildings was used then no saving would be made with regard to rent. The Council was committed to the Master's House and had housed the Info Shop in there for many years. In addition a Heritage Lottery Fund application to improve the Master's House was in progress but this was a phased approach and would take time to deliver. The Master's House was a 'historical asset' as evidenced by the fact it was a Grade II* Listed building by English Heritage. 'Community Heritage' was one of the many activities which could take place in the Master's House in the future but this would be part of the consultation process with local people and interested parties. It was not possible to replace the Master's House as it was a listed building.

Sue and Barry Sharples, Ledbury Residents, submitted the following question:

It makes sense to sell the Master's House to a developer and for the Council to purchase another building in the heart of Ledbury.

Pat Strauss, Ledbury Resident, submitted the following similar question:

To what extent has the Council investigated the financial viability of selling the Master's House?

It was anticipated that it would be difficult to sell the Masters House to a developer due to the

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

many restrictions placed on its development by English Heritage. Some walls in the Master's House were not even allowed to have nails in them.

Susan Stone, Ledbury Resident, asked the following question:

Do not relocate the TIC until the Master's House has been renovated. If the long term plan is not to relocate the TIC to the Master's House then what is in store for it?

Market forces have dictated that the TIC should relocate. It is the long term plan to relocate the TIC to the Master's House and any future development could include a tourism provision that attracts both visitors and local people.

Elizabeth Wreford, Ledbury Resident, asked:

What informal and formal surveys of visitors have been carried out? Have parking, routes for pedestrians including the disabled and access been considered?

No formal surveys have been carried out on where people would like the TIC located. A wider visitor survey was currently on going covering the whole of the County. There are 12.5m visitors to the County each year and only 300,000 use TIC's therefore the majority of visitors don't use TIC's. Parking, including disabled parking would be greatly improved if the TIC relocated to the Master's House as there is on site parking for disabled people in the St Katherine's car park.

Tony Bradford, Ledbury Resident, asked the following question:

Why was Ledbury Jobcentre closed and not provided the promised facilities in the Master's House? The only promised facility provided, a telephone, is presently not working.

The closure of the Jobcentre+ was not a local authority decision but one that was made at Jobcentre+ regional offices who decided not to take up the offer of a space for face to face interviews in the Master's House. Sympathy was expressed about the situation.

In response to requests to comment on the replies given the Chairman advised that as he had indicated at the outset he did not intend to invite further question or comment from the public. Some dissatisfaction was expressed by Members of the public at this approach.

Mr Clive Jupp - Mayor of Ledbury Town Council

Mr Jupp explained to the Committee that the TIC was vital to the economic future of Ledbury. He understood that the internet was an increasingly used source of tourist information but commented that in his personal experience TIC's delivered local knowledge that could not be communicated on-line.

He commented that the Master's House had been empty for too long. The Council had promised a new library in the Master's House but this had not come to fruition.

He regarded that this meeting was the first time the people of Ledbury had been consulted about the relocation of the TIC into the Master's House.

Mr Roger Payne – Ledbury Development Trust

Mr Payne explained that the Trust was a Company Limited by Guarantee, incorporated in January 2005, with the aim of benefiting the people of Ledbury. An example of its work was the successful plan to develop the redundant Cottage Hospital building for affordable housing and working space.

He did not consider that the approach to the development of the Masters House and the

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

relocation of the TIC had been handled as well. However, his intention was to offer a constructive way forward in the belief that the development of the Masters House represented a great opportunity. He outlined a four point approach:

1. To request the Council to do nothing for three – four months. This meant neither relocating the TIC nor doing anything else to the Masters House during this time.
2. The Development Trust would use this time to take the lead and work with other key organisations to develop a Business Plan for the TIC and the Masters House. There were 385 Development Trusts across the Country and several good examples to draw from in preparing a business plan for the Masters House. The business plan would examine how to fund the £3-4 million needed to develop the Masters House and what income generating activities it could develop. It would be a practical document into which the community as a whole would have an input.
3. That the Council should indicate that if the business plan was successful it would be willing to transfer the asset to a formally constituted community organisation. Such an approach would be consistent with the Government's indication of support for transferring assets to local communities, expected to be set out formally in a White Paper in the Spring of 2007.
4. That the Council should make a significant contribution to the estimated £30,000 it would cost to fund the Business Plan.

He added that the TIC was very successful in its current location with some 80,000 visitors. He was concerned at the prospect of the TIC moving on a temporary basis. The best approach was to look at its future as part of the business plan. He had an office in the Masters House and believed that the cost of the refurbishment necessary to facilitate a relocation would be considerable. It would also only be a partial refurbishment and it would be unlikely to be sufficient to make the building attractive to visitors.

Mr A Ward – Ledbury Tourist Association

Mr Ward commented on the important role played by the TIC positioned in the heart of the Town. He said that the window displays in the TIC had been a lifeline/of great benefit to a lot of small businesses. The TIC had been visited by 80,000 in the previous year and many more drew information from the window displays.

He was concerned that a move to the Masters House in a partially renovated state would give the wrong impression and diminish something which, had to date, worked well.

He had contacted Salisbury TIC as winner of the Centre for Excellence South West Tourism awards. That building was situated just off the market square in a pedestrianised area with a stopping off point for coaches and he thought there were a number of ideas they had that could be applied in Ledbury. However, that TIC had only received 156,000 visitors which he suggested was drawn from a far bigger base than Ledbury.

If it were concluded that a move was necessary, rather than move in haste, he said the relocation should take place when it was confirmed that it would be feasible for it to be a permanent rather than a temporary move and when the Masters House had been properly renovated.

Mr K Francis – Ledbury and District Civic Society (LDCS)

Mr Francis said that many of the points he would have made had already been made. The LDCS' AGM in April had attracted 120 people showing the strength of feeling against the relocation of the TIC. This was supported by a petition opposing the move signed by 3,000 people.

The TIC had had 80,000 visitors last year and 70,000 this year to date, which was 10,000 visits higher than the same time last year.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

He reiterated the importance of the display windows to local craftsmen and businesses.

The development of the Market House as a Community Project was an attractive option. It was noted that consideration of the building's use had been ongoing now for a number of years. The Ledbury Regeneration Partnership, operating under the Market Towns Initiative, had commissioned a Strategic Implementation Plan from Staffordshire University to inform development from 2005-2011. This was available on the website of the Development Trust and Staffordshire University.

This had identified three areas for consideration: accessing and developing future employment; developing retail and the visitor economy; and involving youth and community.

The Development Trust had pursued these ideas and the development of the redundant Cottage Hospital building for affordable housing and working space was an example.

A Civic Society Working Group had met Mr Payne and fully supported a major renovation scheme.

An integrated and overarching vision for development was required rather than the piecemeal approach to moving the TIC, whose current location had contributed significantly to its success.

The Chairman congratulated the Development Trust on its success in the development of the former cottage hospital site.

Councillor R.V. Stockton (Cabinet Member – Community Services)

Councillor Stockton said that his aim was to improve Ledbury. Circumstances did change. He welcomed the ideas advanced by Mr Payne and was happy to discuss a way forward with the relevant associations.

He noted that funding from national level, for example, the National Heritage Lottery Fund would be required if a major scheme were to be undertaken. However, he believed that the complex of buildings, of which the Masters House formed a part, was unique in England.

Councillor R.M. Wilson - Cabinet Member (Resources)

Councillor Wilson explained that expenditure on Education, Social Care and Highways accounted for some 80% of the Council's expenditure. This left 20% to finance all the other services the Council provided. A number of these other services had statutorily to be provided. This meant that expenditure on non-statutory services was looked at particularly closely. Government funding did not favour rural areas and Herefordshire Council was funded at 21% below the average of other unitary authorities. There were therefore pressures on the Council's finances

He added that a commitment had been given not to sell any of the County's iconic buildings which would include the Masters House.

He was willing to listen to ideas put forward but had to be mindful of the financial constraints within which the Council was operating.

In the ensuing discussion the following principal points were made:

Asked whether the Council would be prepared to let another organisation take over the TIC Councillor Stockton replied that he would be prepared to ask Cabinet to consider any such proposal.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

Asked whether the Town Council and the Tourist Association would be prepared to take over the lease of the current TIC site the Mayor said that the Town Council would consider the position but no formal decision had been taken and this would need time.

The question of the lease on the current TIC premises was discussed. It had been suggested that the landlord would be prepared to freeze any rent increase.

The Property Services Manager reported that no freeze had been offered during negotiations. In the current market a rent increase of between 5-8% might be expected to be discussed. He added that the current lease was for 12 years.

It was asked why the Council had not come up with a Business Plan itself. In reply the Head of Economic and Community Services referred to the three-stage process for securing funding from the National Heritage Lottery Fund. The next stage of that process was what was called an Audience Development Plan, which is similar to a business plan, and would explore potential usage of the building.

On the question of whether the TIC were relocated to the Masters House now would this be temporary, the Property Services Manager said this would not be known until the renovation plan was produced whether the TIC would have to move out of the Masters House during these works.

It was suggested that since the Masters House had been boarded up for 4 years there now appeared to be a panic to bring it back into use with an interim solution which would not serve the TIC well.

The Head of Economic and Community Services commented that it would take up to 2 years to undertake a complete refurbishment. There was a question as to whether bringing the building back into partial use was preferable to leaving it boarded up during this time.

The Cultural Services Manager was asked whether any alternative locations for the TIC had been considered. She said that none had been because for the last four years the intention had been to locate the TIC in the Masters House as part of a cultural package.

Asked about the location of other TICs she noted that in 1996 a purpose built TIC for Brecon had been constructed in the Town's main car park, not on the main street, which contained both long-term and short-term car parking.

In relation to the provision of TICs in Devon she clarified that a decision had been taken to create one strategic TIC for the County. A number of the TICs which were to close had been taken over by Development Associations.

It was suggested that there had been a lack of consultation about the proposed relocation. The Head of Economic and Community Services referred to a number of meetings at which the proposed relocation had been discussed and correspondence on the matter including:

- Presentation to Civic Society AGM on 21 April 2006 – attended by 120 people
- Community Services Scrutiny Committee meetings on 5 October and 20 December 2005
- Tourism Association meeting attended by 40 people on 16 November 2004
- Open day at the TIC for approximately 30 operators in the Ledbury area on 26 February 2004.

However, whilst noting that the issue had been in the public domain for a number of years, representatives present maintained that this had not been in the form of a proper consultation exercise.

The Chairman of the Ledbury and District Tourism Association noted that the Association had been presented with a scheme involving the full scale £3-4 million redevelopment of the Masters House of which the relocation of the TIC formed part. It had agreed with the complete

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

scheme in principle. What was now being proposed was something entirely different.

The Mayor of the Town Council said that whilst the matter had been discussed many times it had never been presented with plans and options. Only one option was now being proposed, and this was at the last minute.

The meeting was advised that the revenue saving generated by the relocation would be retained within the relevant service budget but that budget as a whole would be subject to review in preparing the Council's budget for 2007/08.

A question was asked about the implications for the Council's balance sheet of transferring the Market House to a Community Organisation. In reply Mr Payne said he did not have the precise practical details of how such transfers were arranged. However, as he had stated earlier the principle was one which the Government was advocating. He also gave the example of Galleria, at Caernarfon as a thriving example of where an asset had been transferred to a Development Trust, and where the success of that project had led to redevelopment of other buildings.

Further concern was expressed that the Council was in danger of taking a short term view.

Ledbury TIC was congratulated on the fact that its visitors accounted for 30% of all visits to TICs in the County.

Mr Payne was asked to elaborate on his proposal. He reiterated that his intention was to propose a way forward which would generate community involvement and leadership in developing a firm Plan which would also set out how funding would be secured and future income generated. He added that he would envisage part of the funding for the Plan's preparation being raised locally, with contributions from the Development Trust Association and Advantage West Midlands. However, he would look to a significant contribution, say 50%, from Herefordshire Council.

In relation to funding for the Plan, a suggestion was made that Ledbury Town Council might wish to consider increasing its precept to fund a Plan designed to benefit Ledbury. The Mayor replied that the Town already made a significant contribution to the County Council's finances as a whole.

Mr Payne was pressed on the suggested 3-4 month timescale for producing a business plan and for an indication as to what it might contain.

He replied that he considered the timescale realistic and reasonable. The Plan was far more complex than that for the redevelopment of the Cottage Hospital which had involved far fewer partners and had taken about 1 month to complete. He had not started work to date because funding was not in place to support the Plan's preparation. He did have some thoughts as to what the Plan might contain but considered that the proper approach was to produce the Plan. There would be reports at interim stages during the 3-4 month period to enable the proposed direction to be checked with partners.

He confirmed that the Plan would address all aspects of the use of the Masters House and the TIC including taking over the lease of the TIC. He repeated that he thought any relocation should be put on hold pending the completion of the Business Plan.

He added that Development Trusts were well aware of the potential for transferred assets to become a liability which would be why proposals for income generation would be such an important part of any Business Plan.

The Head of Economic and Community Services observed that if a Business Plan were to be produced and completed in March 2007 the implication was that the TIC could potentially face a move in the middle of the Tourist Season given the expiry of the current lease in August 2007.

Mr Payne commented that on the basis of a meeting with the Landlord he believed that there would be some flexibility. The Property Services Manager indicated that he had had no indication to that effect. The Committee requested that clarification be requested from the landlord before the Committee reconvened on 20th October.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

It was noted that the Council was being presented with a request for £15,000 which would also entail the loss of the saving it was intended to achieve by the proposed relocation. In total therefore some £40,000 was involved. The Committee needed some assurance that if it were to recommend that a business plan were to be produced it had sound reasons for doing so and it therefore required some information from Mr Payne on his proposals.

Mr Payne agreed to provide some proposals to the Committee in time for its meeting on Friday.

It was noted that the cost of the conservation report on the Masters House which the Council had commissioned had been just under £10,000.

Asked about staffing matters the Head of Economic and Community Services said that it would be envisaged that current staff would move to work at the Masters House. Customer feedback on the current TIC was very good and the intention would be to maintain that quality of service. She noted also that it was important not to overlook the fact that the Council's Info shop was located in the Masters House.

Invited to sum up the Mayor thanked the Committee for the opportunity to debate the issues. He suggested that if the Council did not support the development of a business plan as proposed it would have to commit money to a plan of its own in any event.

He commented that the TIC service was excellent but the recent decision that rather than continue to have its own dedicated supervisor, a supervisor should be appointed to cover both Ledbury and Ross-on-Wye TICs, already represented a diminution in service.

He supported the views expressed by Mr Payne about the comparative scale of the projects to develop the former Cottage Hospital and the Masters House.

He would be happy to raise the option of the Town Council taking over the running of the TIC but would expect the Council's current level of committed expenditure on running the TIC, aside from the lease and rent to be maintained were that option to be pursued.

He thanked those Associations who had already voluntarily given a lot of time to finding alternatives.

Mr Payne referred to his earlier four proposals which he had intended to offer as a constructive way forward and confirmed that he would submit further information to the Committee by Friday.

The meeting adjourned at 9.02 p.m.

The meeting reconvened at 12.45 p.m. on 20th October 2006 in the Council Chamber, Brockington 35 Hafod Road, Hereford.

The Chairman referred Members to the pack of papers which had been circulated to them which contained:

1. Additional proposals from Ledbury and Area Development Trust
2. Information from Colin Birks, Property Services Manager, with regard to extending the lease on the current location of Ledbury TIC and details from Mick Morris, Parking Manager on the level of income raised from St. Katherine's car park.
3. Minutes of Tourist Association Meeting from 14 June 2006 as referred to earlier in the meeting.
4. Executive Summary of the *Strategic Implementation Plan for Ledbury Market town Area 2005-2011* also referred to earlier in the meeting.
5. Letter from Mr. Peter Onions.

The Chairman referred to paragraph 7 of the new proposals from Ledbury and Area Development Trust where the proposal was made that the Development Trust take over responsibility for the barn, car park area and walkways in St. Katherine's as well as consider taking over the building which had once occupied the Jobcentre. It was explained that the car

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

park had been added to the proposal as a possible source of income generation.

The Committee noted that it was right that the Development Trust included the car park in their proposal but felt that there was little chance that it would be handed over to the development trust as it contributed £50,000 a year towards the Council's budget.

Mr Payne, took the Committee through his additional proposals document highlighting his breakdown of the estimated costs of developing a business plan which totalled £30,815. He explained that as well as the Council he would be approaching Ledbury Town Council, Ledbury District Civic Society, the Development Trust Association and Advantage West Midlands for help with raising the necessary funds to pay for the production of the business plan. If funding was granted he anticipated working with Council Officers to ensure that the plan was suitable to be submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund as a formal bid for funding.

He explained that he anticipated putting together a small team to progress the proposal which would include the Chairmen of Ledbury and Area Civic Society and Ledbury Tourist Association.

Mr Francis, Chairman of Ledbury and Area Civic Society, stated that he would be pleased to be involved with the production of the business plan and that whilst he could not speak for all his Society's Members he hoped that the Society would be able to make a substantial contribution to the production of the Plan. He stated that his organisation had a record of making donations to other organisations.

Mr Ward, Chairman of Ledbury Tourist Association, informed Members that he would also be pleased to be involved with the production of the business plan and that he had been involved with the production of Mr Payne's report that was currently before the Committee.

After clarification from a Member of the Committee Mr Payne confirmed that if Council budgets were not flexible enough this financial year to grant the £15,000 requested then as the business plan was to a multi funded piece of work the Development Trust would be prepared to wait until the start of the next financial year to receive the Council's contribution.

In response to a comment that the Masters House was becoming dilapidated and prone to vandalism the Property Services Manager informed the Committee that £13,000 had recently been spent on repairs to the Masters House and that CCTV cameras has been added to prevent vandalism. The Committee was informed that 3 people were currently being prosecuted for committing vandalism to the Masters House.

It was proposed and seconded that the Committee recommend that the relocation of the TIC to the Masters House be deferred for 12 months and that the lease on the current TIC premises at the Homend be extended until 28 February 2008. It was also proposed that the Committee recommend that the £15,000 being requested by the Ledbury and Area Development Trust to formulate a business plan be granted.

It was suggested that the second part of the recommendation be altered. It was suggested that the Committee should recommend that the Council pay 50% of the cost of the formulation of a business plan by Ledbury and Area Development Trust up to a maximum of £15,000. This way if the cost of the business plan was less than the £30,000 predicted then the Council would not have to spend as much money.

This proposed recommendation and subsequent amendment was accepted by the Committee. The Committee noted the hard work which had gone into the proposal but felt the proposals put forward by the Ledbury and Area Development Trust were worthy of further investigation and this investigation would be completed by the business planning process and reviewed once it was complete.

COMMUNITY SERVICES SCRUTINY COMMITTEE WEDNESDAY, 18TH OCTOBER, 2006

Mr Payne thanked the Committee for hearing his presentations and for the making their recommendations in favour of his proposals.

RESOLVED:

THAT it be recommended that the Cabinet Member (Community Services) and the Cabinet Member (Resources) consider:

(a) the relocation of Ledbury Tourist Information Centre to the Masters House be deferred for twelve months and the lease on the Centre's current premises in the Homend be extended until 28th February 2008;

and;

(b) that 50% of the cost towards the development of a business plan, up to a maximum of £15,000, be granted to the Ledbury and Area Development Trust.

The meeting ended at 1.25 p.m.

CHAIRMAN