

Committee: SCRUTINY 1
Date: 19 January 2005
Agenda Item No: 4
Title: STOCK OPTIONS APPRAISAL/DECENT HOMES
Author: Rod Chamberlain (01799) 510508

Summary

- 1 This report advises the Committee of the current position regarding the Stock Options Appraisal process.

Background

- 2 It is a requirement of the Government that all stock owning councils carry out a Stock Options Appraisal which has to be signed off, in the case of Uttlesford, by Government Office Eastern Region by the end of July 2005.
- 3 The purpose of the exercise is to establish whether or not individual councils can remain as a viable landlord and achieve the minimum Decent Homes Standard by 2011.
- 4 It is a requirement that councils obtain independent advice and the process has to be tenant lead. Accordingly, in accordance with Council policy, the Council has appointed an Independent Tenant Adviser (ITA) to advise tenants, via the Tenant Forum and Steering Group, and to ensure that the process is managed in accordance with Government guidance. In addition, consultants have been appointed to assess the Council's financial projections to ensure that the proposed work to the stock can be financed.

The Way Forward

- 5 Part of the process will involve some tenant workshops, a tenant survey of the work they would welcome and meetings in sheltered housing schemes.
- 6 When the exercise has been completed to the satisfaction of the ITA a report will be issued by the consultants outlining what they see as the way forward for the Council. It is expected that projections will be supplied for several options.

- 7 When the report is issued it is expected that a Members/Tenant Forum Workshop will be held where the consultants and the ITA will outline the outcome of the work undertaken. The workshop will be followed by a report to Committee and Council.

RECOMMENDED that the Committee notes the current position regarding the Stock Options Appraisal.

Background Papers:- Government Guidance 2003/4
Quality of Life Corporate Plan 2004

Committee: SCRUTINY 1
Date: 19 JANUARY 2005
Agenda Item No: 5
Title: TOURISM INITIATIVES
Author: Gaynor Bradley (01799) 510348

Summary

- 1 This report aims to update Members on various tourism initiatives currently being undertaken.

Background

- 2 The Quality of Life Plan highlighted an emphasis on tourism development and in order to ensure that resources were available to further this work funding was allocated for the Tourism Officer to increase her part-time hours of work from 22 hours per week to 30 hours per week. Additional funding was also allocated to employ a part-time administrative person to assist with the day to day workload.
- 3 Currently the Tourism Officer and Leisure Manager are working on a number of specific initiatives that aim to enhance the profile of the district as briefly outlined in the following paragraphs.

Tourism Signage

- 4 The Council has recently been awarded match funding by the Rural Renaissance Fund to provide Tourist Routes Browns Signposting to cover all four main towns in the Uttlesford District and an assortment of villages and other rural hamlets.

- 5 The Tourist routes signposting scheme is based on three main types of signboards:
- A) Large scale white on brown boards inviting visitors to follow the Uttlesford Tourist Routes (mostly the B1383 and the B184) to be placed at strategic entry points such as on the A11 at Stumps Cross and on the A120 at Birchanger.
 - B) Large to medium size white on brown signs at the approaches to all four main towns to indicate attractions and facilities within those towns and as continuation signs for the "Tourist Route".
 - C) Small continuation "Tourist Route" signs with arrows placed at appropriate junctions along the B1383 and B184 and, where appropriate, incorporated within black on white directional signs (e.g. in Thaxted for B1051).
 - D) Additionally it may be possible to have a board erected on the Airport site to offer optional "Tourist Routes" to Uttlesford on the A120.
- 6 This scheme meets one or more of the following identified priorities under the Rural Renaissance Funding projects:
- Promotion of sustainable rural communities
 - Development of a diverse, vibrant and dynamic rural economy
 - Achievement of an enhanced rural environment
- 7 Essex County Council Highways Department is currently assessing the locations and designing the signs. It is anticipated that the signs will be erected during the Summer of 2005.

On-line Accommodation Booking Service

- 8 Under the e-government strategy local authorities are required to ensure services are available on-line. Work has been undertaken with the East of England Tourist Board and a company named Tiscover to develop an on-line accommodation booking service as well as a destination management system for the Uttlesford area.
- 9 The service will provide immediate access to subscribing accommodation providers to enable bookings to be made and confirmed. The web-site will contain visitor information about the Uttlesford district and will also have hyperlinks into the Uttlesford web-site. For any accommodation bookings made via the web-site Uttlesford District Council will receive a percentage share of the booking value.

- 10 However, whether or not the service is comprehensive in Uttlesford depends upon the willingness of accommodation providers to participate in the system. At recent Uttlesford Tourism Forum meetings the system and requirements have been communicated to the accommodation providers. Although, it has to be acknowledged that a number of providers are concerned about participating because they operate small establishments and do not have the capacity to be able to administer immediate internet bookings for long periods of time. A number of issues will be worked through in order to achieve the maximum number of accommodation providers participating in the scheme and training days will be provided in partnership with the East of England Tourist Board. The aim is that the service will be available by June 2005.

Visitor Guide

- 11 For a number of years the tourism service has published an accommodation guide, however, this year a new development is being pursued by the introduction of a Visitor Guide. The new guide will contain accommodation information but will fulfil the role of promoting the district by providing information on places to visit (attractions), events, airfields, churches, gardens as well as countryside and leisure opportunities.
- 12 Accommodation, attraction providers and other advertisers will be paying a fee for advertising in the guide that will contribute towards the production costs. The intention is to produce 30,000 copies of the guide for distribution via tourist information centres, the overseas marketing scheme and at exhibitions as well as at the Visit Britain Travel Centre in Regent Street, London.

Stansted Airport Guide

- 13 Uttlesford is working in conjunction with BAA, East Herts District Council, Hertfordshire and Essex County Councils on the production of an accommodation guide specifically for Stansted Airport. The combined accommodation guide will remove the need for the Airport to stock and distribute a number of different accommodation guides and offer the visitor a comprehensive list of accommodation available in the areas surrounding Stansted Airport. The production of the guide is being funded by the local authorities and BAA. It is intended to publish 20,000 copies of the guide.

Poster Campaign

- 14 Poster sites have been booked at Liverpool Street and Stansted Airport Railway Stations for the Spring of this year. The poster is currently being produced and will be a compilation of four very striking pictures

of the district with a very simple caption of “Need a break – try Uttlesford first”.

- 15 The web-site address will be displayed on the poster. The rationale behind this approach is that previously the four main towns have always been promoted but using the name of Uttlesford might actually encourage people to question where it is and to try to find out more about the area.

Cycling Discovery Maps

- 16 This is another collaborative initiative being undertaken with East Herts District Council, Hertfordshire and Essex County Councils and the East of England Tourist Board. Two tourist cycling routes have been devised that link together on the border between the East Herts and Uttlesford districts. The local authorities are contributing towards the production of 10,000 maps that will be available for sale via tourist information centres and also be given out at exhibitions. The maps will be published in the Spring of this year.

Turpin’s Trail

- 17 The introduction of a series of walks under the “Uttlesford Country Walks” banner is being developed. The Leader of the Council has devised a walk that is comprised of three smaller walks linking together to form Turpin’s Trail. The overall walk starts at Thaxted and ends in the village of Hempstead, Dick Turpin’s birthplace. As well as the standard waymarking signs special Dick Turpin waymarkers have been produced and Essex County Council is currently erecting the signs.

Cultural Tourism

- 18 The Council contributes towards East England Arts in conjunction with other Essex local authorities. A proposal has been agreed upon to utilise three year’s contributions for the whole of Essex as match funding to raise a larger pot of money to embark on a cultural tourism project for the County. The investment in this project is anticipated to reach £620,000 in the final year 2007.
- 19 A company of arts consultants named “Circling the Square” have been engaged to develop this project in conjunction with arts and tourism officers. A business plan is being produced and schemes will be drawn up in consultation with the local authorities and other partners.
- 20 The project is entitled INSITE and is comprised of the following three strands:

Strand 1	New Perceptions	Ideas for high profile countrywide
----------	-----------------	------------------------------------

		programmes of work
Strand 2	Innovations	Ideas for projects for increasing internal tourism in Essex
Strand 3	Resources	Ideas for developing the capacity of Essex Arts/Cultural Sector

21 The aims of the project are

- ❑ Further develop Essex as a cultural destination of choice.
- ❑ Challenge current perceptions by increasing awareness of Essex as a vibrant and diverse county.
- ❑ Celebrate Essex's distinctiveness and convey positive images through a diverse programme of arts & cultural tourism initiatives.
- ❑ Profile Essex as a place for artists to live, work and thrive and for visitors to engage with creative activity.
- ❑ Further support the skills development of young people, artists, teachers, creative industries, arts and cultural organisations.
- ❑ Develop the capacity of Essex Local Authorities to deliver ambitious partnership initiatives.

22 A Project Manager and Marketing Agency are to be appointed to work on behalf of the INSITE partnership.

Conclusion

23 The above are some of the projects currently being worked on and as can be seen the approach is very much one of working in partnership to maximise the resources available for the development of leisure and tourism in the district.

Background Papers: Quality of Life Plan
Tourism Forum Minutes
INSITE Project Plan

Committee: SCRUTINY 1
Date: 19 January 2005
Agenda Item No: 6
Title: COMMUNICATIONS
Author: James Sadler (01799) 510619

The existing communications strategy is a brief document and was introduced approximately four years ago.

What I have included is a draft communications strategy which indicates how I feel communications at Uttlesford district council should progress.

In late October I worked with Sarah McLagan to agree the direction for a new strategy. Below is what was agreed and submitted into the corporate plan.

We aim to...

Communicate and consult effectively with visitors, residents and businesses in the district about services/service development, needs and concerns.

We will...

Develop a new communications and consultation strategy and an action plan to deliver that includes details on how we will market and promote our assets and heritage and how we will engage and consult effectively, including with hard to reach groups, on major issues, service delivery etc

Consult, redraft, consult and publish.

The attached document is the draft communications strategy that will be the basis of a consulted communications strategy.

Communications Strategy 2004 – 07

SECTION	TITLE	PAGE
1	INTRODUCTION	2
2	OBJECTIVES	3
3	WHO ARE WE COMMUNICATING WITH?	4
4	WHAT INFORMATION DO WE COMMUNICATE?	4
5	WHAT ARE OUR KEY MESSAGES?	5
6	EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION	6
6.1	Printed communication	
6.2	Media relations	
6.3	E-communications	
6.4	Other forms of external communication	
7	INTERNAL COMMUNICATION	
7.1	Surveys	
7.2	Publications	
7.3	Team briefings	
7.4	E-communications	
7.5	Other forms of internal communication	

1 INTRODUCTION

In order to meet the new changes facing the council and the district it serves it is vital that communication becomes a core activity that is a part of every member of staff and elected member's repertoire. To achieve this our communications strategy must address communication from the heart of the organisations activities.

Why is this so important?

Firstly, MORI research consistently shows that local council's are perceived as the worst communicators in the public sector. But, there is a clear correlation between knowledge of what a council provides, and satisfaction with actions.

Secondly, our communication channels have to reflect new ways of working. They must encourage better communication not only between member and officer structures and our many different services, but also with our partner organisations and beyond.

Thirdly, central government targets for all public services to ensure local people can contact the council in new ways and make use of the latest technology.

To meet our corporate objectives and the many new challenges facing us openness and honesty in all our communications is essential. We all share a collective responsibility in this.

The aim of this communications strategy is to bring a corporate approach to communications, both internal and external. The work programme which evolves from this strategy is detailed in the communications element of the corporate plan.

This strategy does not exist in a vacuum and has been written to be consistent with other council plans already in place, or under development.

2 OBJECTIVES

Communications has a central role in enabling the council to achieve its corporate objectives.

Objective 1: High Quality, Accessible, Value for Money services – by enabling residents to know about council services, means of accessing them and standards of services.

Objective 2: Quality Village and Town Life – by supporting communities with the information needed to improve community life – for example through information about grants; better links with parish magazines; and information about events and activities.

Objective 3: A Sustainable Future – by informing the public of the council's championing of environmental issues and providing information to enable people to live more sustainable lives.

Objective 4: Partnership – by enabling the public and partner organisations to be aware of council issues and contribute to decision making; stimulating democratic participation; and creating a sense of community.

The capacity to achieve our objectives can be created by improving communication and learning within the council and developing awareness of our values.

The purpose of this strategy is to maximise the contribution that communications makes to achieving council objectives - and in particular to:-

Develop awareness of the council's objectives and values within the council and with the council and stakeholders.

Build a strong image and identity for the council to enable it to develop effective partnerships to work in the interests of the district.

To **encourage** people to see the council as relevant to their lives and to be **involved** in democratic processes.

To achieve **increased levels of satisfaction** of the public, organisations, parish councils and staff with the quality, honesty, timing and accessibility of the information they receive from the council and about its services.

To be **innovative** in the use of new technology and means of communication to achieve the council's communication aims **cost-effectively**.

3 WHO ARE WE COMMUNICATING WITH?

The community in Uttlesford is made up of many smaller groups who have specific interests. They may represent, for example, small neighbourhoods or parishes, business and industry, commuters, low income groups, different age groups, unemployed people, families, people who suffer disadvantage, people with or without computers and people with special needs such as the disabled or minority groups.

Provision of council information needs to be orientated to these audiences so it's preferable to think of user groups, many of whom we already work in partnership with.

Residents in general

Tenants

People who use our services

People who do not use our services, but who may wish to do so

Travellers

Organisations we work with or which have a particular interest in a service

Business community

Interested/representative groups

Health service providers

Voluntary organisations

Emergency services

Parish councils and other local authorities

Schools and youth groups

4 WHAT INFORMATION DO WE COMMUNICATE?

Our aim is to keep people informed of our

- Objectives and priorities
- Services we provide
- Decisions that could affect services
- How we spend money
- What decisions have been made and why
- What performance standards can be expected and whether we actually meet them.
- When we're holding meetings
- How to contact local councillors
- Choices to improve services based on consultation
- Office moving plans and new contact details

We also work with other public services wherever possible to coordinate our messages and to produce information i.e. Essex CC, Essex Fire and Rescue, Uttlesford Primary Care Trust & Essex Police.

5 WHAT ARE OUR KEY MESSAGES?

To achieve our objective of a strong image and identity for the Council we will seek to put across key messages, in all our communications, which support our objectives and values

A **modernising** council - using ICT to make services accessible and convenient to users

A **customer focused** council doing its best to provide a good service to people using council services

A **cost effective** council – working efficiently for its residents and avoiding waste

A council **committed to improving village life**

A council working in **partnership** with the public, parish councils and organisations from all sectors

A council working towards a **sustainable future** for the district which protects the quality of life for the next generation

Within the council we will continue to communicate our corporate values.

Customer focus

Working together and teamwork

Encouraging initiative and learning from mistakes

Politeness and respect for others

Simple, clear ways of doing things

Doing what we say

6 EXTERNAL COMMUNICATION

6.1 Printed Communication

Uttlesford Life

A high quality, four colour magazine produced twice a year and delivered to all residents and business addresses throughout the district. Production costs have been off-set in the past by partnership funding from Uttlesford PCT and Essex Police, but may include selected, minimal advertising in the future.

Where do we want to be?

- Continue improving editorial and design. A draft editorial and advertising policy, which addresses the results of readers surveys, resident feedback and the council's objectives needs to be commissioned.
- Explore advertising sales towards self-financing
- Promote active involvement with the magazine by developing sponsorship and partnership editorial packages
- Increase the reach of the magazines messages by developing magazine web pages
- Encourage feedback about Council services and contribution from communities and other organisations.

Underpinning all of this is the very real drain on time and resources the production makes. It is hoped that this form of communication will be the subject of a possible internal audit later in the year.

Other section's magazines and newsletters

Of varying quality, there are other print magazines produced on behalf of the council. Building Surveying and Housing have done or do their own print productions. Neither of these, nor any other production are currently under the editorial management of the Communications and PR Officer. There are a number of leaflets that are likewise produced outside of my remit.

Where do we want to be?

- All publications to adhere to a corporate brand identity and style guide. This will be supported by the graphics team and rolled out to all departments via an easy reference guide.
- A welcome pack will be made available to all residents moving into and within the district. It will cover all our services and those of our partners.

6.2 Media Relations

Newspapers, radio, television and magazines provide a mass media forum for conveying information and receiving resident's views.

Uttlesford's media service involves:

- Issuing news releases, statements and quotes
- Setting up interviews
- Officer and member media training
- Updating UDC's web site 'news' page

Monitoring media coverage, including managing press cuttings are currently delivered outside of the communications and public relations team but within the council.

Where do we want to be?

- At the moment the media monitoring service is in-house but needs updating as it is service that grew out of the planning officers' needs and not those of the entire council.
- There is also an argument for more robust monitoring of the broadcast media. This need is greater in light of the council's new responsibilities under the civil contingencies bill which will come into affect in April 05.

6.3 e-commuincations

www.uttlesford.gov.uk

remains as part of IT. Editorially I have a responsibility to ensure that the news front page is up to date, but technically I owe all of the success of the site to Adrian Webb and his team. The question remains as to whether the entire management of the site is best delivered through communications or through IT.

Where do we want to be?

- At the moment the relationship between communications and IT is a healthy co-operative one that is delivering an excellent product. I see no reason to change the status quo.
- There is an option to assess this arrangement when an overall audit of communications takes place later in the year.

6.4 Other forms of external communication

There is a real need for a communications strategy which has at its heart a protocol for communicating with Uttlesford during a crisis. The first draft strategy is listed below: -

Where do we want to be?

- **AIMS AND OBJECTIVES** – To inform, advise and reassure the people of Uttlesford. To promote public confidence and maintain essential services.
- **AUDIENCE** – the public, staff, media, local and national politicians, voluntary organisations, agencies and the business community
- **KEY MESSAGES** – To be decided in consultation with category 1 responders during the risk assessment phase of the crisis. **FACTS, THREE Ps (pity, praise, promise), HONESTY**
- **MEDIA STRATEGY** – to keep staff informed as soon as possible, to disseminate information to the press via a regular, speedy, accurate drip-feed method. Saying “I don’t know” is acceptable as long as the spokesperson commits themselves to answering the question as soon as they can.
- **SPOKESPERSON** – to be decided as soon as the lead organisation is decided during the risk assessment phase. These can be GPs, heads of voluntary organisations, senior officers from local authorities, senior officers from PCTs and other regional agencies such as the regional resilience director.
- **MEDIUM** – to be decided as soon as the type of crisis is agreed otherwise it will be as many and varied as possible. Such mediums could include, websites, mobile phone SMS, local radio, mailshot and voicebox messages (a recorded message accessed via a specific telephone number).

7 Internal communication (to be completed)

Surveys
Publications
Team briefings
E-communications

Other forms of internal communication