

Committee: Scrutiny

Date: 14th April

Title: Tourism Development

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Agenda Item

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Information
item

Summary

- 1 The Council's involvement in tourism effectively ceased by 31st March 2008. During the weeks prior to this time responsibility for management of the Tourist Information Centre (TIC) was taken over by Saffron Walden Town Council, while staff responsible for the tourism development service were redeployed or had taken early retirement. Concern has been expressed that the tourism service has declined and no longer serves the whole District.
- 2 The tourism development service operated by the Council is non-existent and there obviously has been a decline, anticipated at the time it was decided to stop providing the service. In particular the Visitor Guide is no longer produced. The TIC continues to offer the same level of service, which it continues to develop but no longer distributes the visitor guide. It will however provide a new on line District-wide tourist accommodation website. The TIC operates to standards set by Visit Britain. There are many on-line sources of information about attractions in Uttlesford and the surrounding area.

Recommendations

That the Committee note the report

Background Papers

Report to Finance and Admin Committee 31st January 2008

Impact

Communication/Consultation	The TIC and Saffron Walden Town Council have been involved in compiling this report
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Finance	There would be a significant financial impact were the tourism development

	service re-instated. No budget exists and resources would need to be diverted from elsewhere
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	None

Situation

- 3 The TIC has been operating in Saffron Walden since 1978. Until April 2008 it was part of the tourism service run by Uttlesford District Council – the other part was the tourism development function, operated from the council offices.
- 4 The tourism development team consisted of two members of staff, one of whom was line manager for the TIC before moving into a more strategic tourism development role. That Officer took early retirement and the post was deleted. The remaining post was also deleted and the post-holder redeployed.
- 5 The primary function of the tourism development team was to produce the annual Visitor Accommodation Guide, which was then distributed by the TIC. This is now being replaced by a district-wide tourist accommodation website.
- 6 During a restructuring in 2006, the two sides of tourism were split, with the TIC moving into the customer services function and tourism development going to the economic development team.

The TIC's current functions

- 7 For many years the TIC has enjoyed the status of being an official, networked TIC. This meant that, for an annual fee payable to East of England Tourism, it was allowed to use the internationally recognised TIC branding and benefit from access to resources of information, marketing, and training providing it met certain basic criteria.
- 8 In 2007 the accreditation system changed and the TIC had the opportunity to become an official partner of Visit Britain, which gives it increased promotional and marketing benefits along with mystery shopping opportunities.
- 9 There are more stringent criteria which have to be met for qualification, such as its own shop frontage and a way of measuring unique visitors. The refurbished TIC meets these criteria.

The TIC's role in Uttlesford at the time of the handover

- 10 The main roles ones were:

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- Supplying local public transport information, and onward travel information for tourists
- Promotion of the district at exhibitions (organised for individuals and tour organisers)
- Maintaining stocks of the Visitor Guide at Stansted Airport to encourage tourists to stay longer in the district
- Supplying information on local events, including the production of the bi-monthly "What's On" publication
- Acting as the main box office for Saffron Screen and other local events
- Supporting and boosting the local economy by distributing the annual Uttlesford Visitor Guide to visitors, locals, and other TICs to promote the attractions and activities in the area, and to attract business for local accommodation establishments
- Local accommodation booking service for Uttlesford, and book-a-bed-ahead (BABA) service for other areas of the UK
- Advice for locals and tourists on Uttlesford attractions and leisure activities
- Holiday information on other parts of the UK
- Education, through the supply of information on the general history of the area, and through liaison with local partners such as the Blue Badge Guides
- The compilation of a local clubs, organisations and societies list, to promote all leisure/hobby activities in the district, and to provide contacts for local charities/action groups
- The sale of UDC recyclable kitchen waste and garden refuse sacks
- The sale of Saffron Walden and Uttlesford books, DVDs and a wide range of souvenirs
- The distribution of the SW Directory of shops/services
- The provision of social/welfare information, eg availability of marriage guidance services, job centre locations, hospital transport information
- The provision of all relevant information to new/prospective new residents in Uttlesford
- Information on activities and services for specific community groups, eg the elderly, children

The TIC's role today

- 11 The service supplied today is similar, although clearly the distribution of the printed visitor guide has diminished as it is no longer produced by the District Council. It was the district council's decision to delete the tourism development function that stopped the production of the visitor guide, not the town council taking on the TIC. Nonetheless the TIC continues to serve the whole District and the wider area. It would lose its accreditation if it did not.
- 12 The TIC and the Town Council, in conjunction with the Official partner of the East of England Tourist Board, are in the process of creating a new on-line district tourism accommodation guide. Other town and parish councils were offered the opportunity to be part of the guide and publicise their own areas, but all refused to make any financial contribution. Notwithstanding this, SWTC have proceeded with this and the TIC is in the process of writing to all the accommodation providers who were in the accommodation guide last year asking if they would like to be on the website.

- 13 The TIC premises is in the process of being upgraded. There is no service level agreement with the town council over the operation of the TIC largely because it operates to standards set outside the Council. The District Council has never set terms of reference for the TIC.

The Tourism development service

- 14 This was effectively abandoned when the Council had to radically reduce staffing last year. There are no resources to re-establish the service: it is not a priority in the Corporate Plan and the Audit Commission’s advice is not to invest in services which are not priorities. As well as the TIC, tourism advice for Uttlesford can be gained from a variety of sources: there is Visit England, East of England Tourism, visit Essex as well as individual parishes and town councils. The imposition of a further tier of advice at a time of public spending constraint would be a challenge to justify, and questionable as to its effectiveness. The industry itself has a duty to continue to develop and to generate its own publicity.

Risk Analysis

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The District Council is unable to offer a tourism development service	4 – this is already the case	1 – the case for tourism in the district, towns and parishes is well made by other organisations, and a further tier is considered unnecessary	None.
The District Council reinstates a tourism development service	1 – see “impact” above	3 – resources would need to be diverted from elsewhere and other services would suffer	None

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.