



Shropshire Hills Discovery  
Centre Advisory Board

7 March 2013

10.00am

Item / Paper

**3**

Public

## **SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE, NOVEMBER 2012 TO MARCH 2013**

**Responsible Officer** Michael Turner

e-mail: Michael.turner@shropshire.gov.uk

Tel: 01588 767060 Fax 01588 676030

### **1. Introduction**

Since the last meeting of the Advisory Board in November 2012, the work of the Centre has continued, introducing some of the developments and proposals outlined in that meeting. To this end, the most recent format adopted for this document has been used again. During the period under review, the Centre moved to being closed on Mondays without too much upset and instituted a planned fortnight closure to help address financial pressures.

### **2. Updates on highlights from the last report**

#### **2.1 Craven Arms Library**

Use of the service continues with the late opening on Wednesdays proving to be quieter than once was the case. Discussions over the future format of the Library continue.

#### **2.2 Secret Hills Exhibition, Café and Retail**

Receipts through core winter months continued to be slightly depressed, however, the decision to move the originally planned closed fortnight from before Christmas to after is felt to have been more fruitful, as the introduction of pre-Christmas lunches and linked activities were well received. Further to an overarching review from outside the service, some new initiatives have been introduced which are, thus far, proving to be popular with visitors. The Centre unfortunately had to be closed for a day during one of the snowy periods in January due to staff being unable to get to work safely.

#### **2.3 Education and Events**

Despite the Centre being closed to the public on Mondays, the Education Team have delivered sessions on all weekdays to schools taking up the Discovery Centre education offer. Education delivery for the future has been part of the overarching review.

## **2.4 Onny Meadows and Outdoors**

Maintenance of the Meadows has been undertaken when the weather has allowed, and much time has been spent getting the boundaries with the road tidier. Work has been undertaken to secure funds from Natural England for the upkeep of the Meadows, while progress is being made on the introduction of a Red Kite feeding station.

## **2.5 Craven Arms Local History Group**

The activities of the group continue to flourish through their regular weekly sessions and monthly talks. There was an excellent Exhibition in January which was very well received despite the weather doing its best to undermine the situation.

## **2.6 Craven Arms Community Food (CACF) and Grow Cook Share (GCS)**

The Centre's management continue to work closely with the CACF committee to encourage the on going success and growth of this important facility for the Centre and the community.

# **3. Future Development Plans for the Centre**

## **3.1 Events and Activities**

The management of the Centre continue to work with the staff to take their ideas and aspirations for the Centre forward at a time when financial pressures are challenging. Nevertheless, some of these ideas are already coming to fruition.

## **3.2 Task and Finish Group**

The Task and Finish Group for the Centre has met since the last Advisory Board meeting and has progressed matters relating to the consultation on the future of the Centre and its operation. Plans are in place to seek interest from the private and other sectors to run the Centre for the future and a timetable of actions to support this is being rolled out.

# **4. Considerations regarding the operation of the Discovery Centre in 2013 -14**

## **4.1 Marketing and Promotion**

A review of marketing and promotion is underway for 2013 – 14 to make best use of the financial resources available from the budgeting process.

## **4.2 Business plan and budget**

After exhaustive research and review, an operating model for 2013 – 14 is now in its final phase of delivery and development. This aims to come as close to 12 – 13 opening as possible while meeting the savings that the Centre has to deliver.

## **5. Staff changes and systems review**

### **5.1 Staff changes etc**

Since the last Advisory Board meeting two members of staff have left the service one to retire the other to a new post elsewhere. The management of the Centre has set in train a series of staff meetings to allow a free flow of information and discussion of the Centres operation to help in informing the process of looking to a new operating model for the future.

### **5.2 Systems review**

An on going review and updating of the Centre's administrative systems has made significant progress through the winter. The milestones set for improvement are on target making the Centre well placed for an out-of-service review from within the Council.

## **6. Conclusions**

The challenges for the Centre referred to at the last meeting are still present. However, there is now coming together a better understanding of those challenges and a plan to tackle them. The consultation organised by the Task and Finish Group in the late autumn of 2012 proved that the services delivered at the Centre are welcomed by the community. The next 12 months will see the Centre its management and staff working with other in the Council, and outside, to arrive at a model of operation and management through which the Centre will be made more sustainable for the future. To this end I would like to commend the staff on the work they are doing during a period of some uncertainty.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

**Human Rights Act Appraisal**

No issues

**Environmental Appraisal**

Future developments for the Centre and Onny Meadows will encompass the principles of sustainable development

**Risk Management Appraisal**

The management is informed by the process of business, marketing and budgetary planning.

**Community / Consultations Appraisal**

User and offsite surveys are ongoing with new developments receiving wider consultation

**Cabinet Member**

Cllr Mike Owen

**Local Members**

Cllr David Evans & Cllr Lee Chapman

**Appendices**

**Decision(s)**