

<u>Committee and Date</u>
Cabinet
Date 16 th March 2016

RE-DESIGN OF VISITOR INFORMATION SERVICES IN NORTH-WEST SHROPSHIRE

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1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report provides background on the re-design of Visitor Information Services in North-West Shropshire.
- 1.2 Shropshire Council is working with partners to re-design existing face to face Visitor Information Services, to create places where visitors and local residents can easily get information and advice that both helps them and contributes to the wider tourism economy of the county. This is to help us to create and maintain resilient facilities at a time of reducing public service budgets.
- 1.3 The proposal is to decommission the Visitor Information Centre at Mile End Service Area near Oswestry and commission Oswestry Borderland Tourism Association to deal with enquiries from visitors by email, telephone and post. Alternative sources of information for personal callers would be signposted from the Service Area.
- 1.4 Cabinet agreement is sought to implement the proposal outlined above.

2.0 Recommendation

It is recommended:

2.1

- a) That the Visitor Information Centre at Mile End Service Area is decommissioned as soon as possible;
- b) That the Council endeavours to hand back the lease to the landlord in a condition that meets the requirements of the lease; although there is no provision for an early surrender therefore this would be subject to negotiation.
- c) That a display board is erected on the site to guide visitors to other sources of information;
- d) That Oswestry Borderland Tourism Association be commissioned via a three year Contract for Services to deal with enquiries from visitors by email, telephone and post.

e) And to delegate to the Director of Commissioning in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure, responsibility to take any further decisions and actions to implement the recommendations

REPORT

3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1 The recommendations contained within this report are compatible with the provisions of the Human Rights Act, 1998.

To assess the impact of the proposals on groups with Protected Characteristics and social inclusion a Shropshire Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) was completed and is appended at Appendix A to this report.

Two consultation exercises have been carried out: firstly to ascertain if there was an organisation that wished to continue to deliver the Visitor Information Service at the current Mile End site and secondly to ask users and stakeholders for their views on the proposed new arrangements for delivering the service. The consultations are discussed in more detail in section 6.0 and in Appendix B and C.

4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 The net running cost for the Visitor Information Centre in 2014-15 was £35,995, excluding central support services costs. This year's net controllable budget is £22,660, although the outturn controllable cost is likely to be approximately £30,000.

4.2 The proposal to commission Oswestry Borderland Tourism Association to deal with email, post and telephone enquiries will cost £4,000 in year one, £3,000 in year two and £1,000 in year three. This would generate an annual saving on current controllable budget of £18,660 from the outset of the agreement.

4.3 Transition costs will include the cost of staff redundancies and any costs of returning the premises to the condition required under the lease. If the landlord was to submit a dilapidations claim, following agreement to hand back the building, it is likely to be in the region of £20,000. The actual figure would depend on the future use of the building and would be lower if the landlord did not require all of the fittings to be removed. Any dilapidations cost would need to be met within Commissioning's 2016/17 revenue budget.

4.4 The provision of a new display board on the site to advise personal callers will cost up to £2,000. This cost will be met from 2016/17 service area revenue budgets.

5.0 Background

5.1 During 2015, Shropshire Council, with key local partners has been discussing new ways of delivering the Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire where the Council currently operates the Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre on the service area next to the A5 trunk road. An initial soft market testing exercise was undertaken during July. Some interest was expressed in providing information services to visitors in the area but not on the current site.

5.2 The Oswestry Mile End VIC is run by the Library Service and is open 5 days a week providing a range of visitor services including free and saleable information leaflets and books, souvenirs, bed booking facility and also answers enquiries by post, phone and email. It provides services to less than 30,000 visitors per year, a significant decrease on the peak number of 76,000 in 2008.

The office is rented from the landlord and the Council covers other costs such as business rates, staffing, energy and the costs of supplies for re-sale.

The Council owns the freehold of the Mile End site and leaseback the VIC, on a lease with 96 years left to run, at a peppercorn rent. The lease restricts the user to the VIC and states we are to hand back in the same condition as at the start of the lease.

The current landlord is a property trustee company in Jersey, previously Travel Lodge Hotels Ltd. The Council will have to enter a dialogue to hand the lease back. There is currently no provision within the existing lease to allow the building to be handed back so an early surrender can only progress by mutual agreement. There may be a dilapidations cost depending on the Landlord's future intentions.

- 5.3 Visitor Information is available at the Heritage Centre in the town centre next to St. Oswald's Church. It is open all year, Monday to Saturday and deals with enquiries in person, by letter, email and telephone. The service is operated with paid staff by Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd.
- 5.4 Local tourist attractions and accommodation providers offer information services to their customers including free leaflets and assistance by staff. Increasingly visitors are using smart phones and portable computers such as i-pads to access information. 71% of UK residents have access to an internet connected mobile phone. Popular websites for this part of Shropshire are provided by Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd, Shropshire Tourism and Virtual Shropshire in addition to national sites like TripAdvisor and many others.
- 5.5 The main recommendation for the future delivery of Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire is to transfer the responsibility for enquiries by personal callers, email, telephone and post to Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd at the Heritage Centre and to decommission the facility at the Mile End Service area.

An area and town map information board would be provided at the Mile End Service Area promoting the availability of local Visitor Information Services in Oswestry and at nearby tourist attractions. The board would include the telephone number of Oswestry Heritage Centre VIC, local websites, local visitor amenities and other helpful information. This would result in the service continuing to be delivered in north-west Shropshire but at a reduced cost to the Council. A Service Level Agreement with Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd would provide financial support to provide Visitor Information Services to remote enquirers by email, phone and post for a period of three years.

6.0 Consultation

During the summer of 2015 a soft market testing exercise was undertaken to see if any organisation wished to take over the management of the service on its current site. None came forward but one business did express an interest in providing an enhanced visitor information facility on its site adjacent to the A5 trunk road.

A further consultation was conducted in the autumn/winter from mid-November to late December via the Council's website, with printed questionnaires available from the Mile End VIC and the Heritage Centre in Oswestry Town Centre. 26 responses were received with 27% of respondents in favour of the Council's principal proposal and 73% against. The full text of responses can be found in Appendix C.

The public were asked to respond to 2 questions:

Q1: Preferred option: To transfer the responsibility for dealing with enquiries from visitors and local residents by telephone, email and post to Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd which will run the service under a 3 year Service Level Agreement. The current Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre will close and the office handed back to the landlord. A map display board will help to orientate visitors and inform them of local information services provided at Oswestry Heritage Centre and local visitor attractions. Details of telephone numbers and websites will be displayed together with full details of local attractions and other services. Do you agree with this option?

A total of 26 responses were made to the 'preferred option': 7 respondents agreed with the preferred option and 19 disagreed.

The majority of the consultation respondents who disagreed with the preferred option commented that the current location of the Visitor Information service at the Mile End site was the best location for a 'strategic' service due to:

- Volume of passing traffic and location on a major trunk road
- Ease of Access
- Free Parking

The location of, access to, and parking for the Oswestry Visitor Information Centre was raised as an issue by a number of the respondents who disagreed with the preferred option and were concerned that potential visitors to the area would be lost.

In response to Q2 a number of suggestions were made. In summary:

- Find a better more accessible location for the VIC.
- Invest in the current provision rather than cut it.
- Have touch screen kiosks that could also be used across the County.
- Discuss opportunities with partner organisation.

Shropshire Council has discussed a number of options with key stakeholders and partner organisations both within and outside of the County. The discussions did not result in any sustainable alternative delivery or funding solutions.

A Shropshire Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) was completed which can be found at Appendix A. The conclusion of this was that the changes proposed would not have a detrimental effect on Protected Characteristic groups and other groups in Shropshire.

A copy of the consultation paper is found in Appendix B.

7.0 Next steps

Subject to the approval of the recommendations the following tasks need to be undertaken to reach a successful conclusion of the re-design of Visitor Information Services in this part of Shropshire.

- 1) Commence consultation with the staff affected by the decision.
- 2) Plan to hand the building back to the landlord in the condition stated in the lease.
- 3) Enter into a Contract for Services with Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Association to deal with telephone, email and post enquiries for a three year period.

- 4) Arrange for the re-direction of these enquiries from Mile End to the Heritage Centre.
- 5) Commission a display board to be located on the Mile End service area promoting other visitor information facilities nearby.
- 6) Communicate the changes to stakeholders, users and the wider community.
- 7) Make changes to the highway signposting around Mile End roundabout.

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

North Shropshire and Oswestry Visitor Economy Strategy

Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder)

Councillor Stuart West

Local Members Cllr Joyce Barrow

List of Appendices

- A. Shropshire Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA)**
- B. The consultation paper – autumn/winter 2015**
- C. Report of responses to the consultation paper.**

Appendix A



Shropshire Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA)

Contextual Notes 2014

The What and the Why:

The Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment (ESIIA) tool replaces the Equality Impact Needs Assessment (EINA) tool previously in use by Shropshire Council. It is a tool to help us to identify whether or not any new or significant changes to services, including policies, procedures, functions or projects, may have an adverse impact on a particular group of people, and whether the human rights of individuals may be affected.

What we are now doing is broadening out such assessments to consider social inclusion. This is so that we are thinking as carefully and completely as possible about all groups and communities in Shropshire, including people in rural areas and people we may describe as vulnerable, as well as people in what are described as the nine 'protected characteristics' of groups of people in our population, eg Age, eg Gender Reassignment. We demonstrate equal treatment to people who are in these groups and to people who are not, through having what is termed 'due regard' to their needs and views when developing and implementing policy and strategy and when commissioning, procuring, arranging or delivering services.

It is a legal requirement for local authorities to assess the equality and human rights impact of changes proposed or made to services, such as through a new policy or a change in procedure. Carrying out ESIIAs helps us as a public authority to ensure that, as far as possible, we are taking actions to meet the general equality duty placed on us by the Equality Act 2010 to have what is called *due regard* to the three equality aims in our decision making processes. These are: eliminating discrimination, harassment and victimisation; advancing equality of opportunity; and fostering good relations.

The How:

The assessment comprises two parts: a screening part, and a full report part.

Screening (Part One) enables energies to be focussed on the service changes for which there are potentially important equalities and human rights implications. If screening indicates that the impact is likely to be positive overall, or is likely to have a medium or low negative or positive impact on certain groups of people, a full report is not required. Energies should instead focus on review and monitoring and ongoing evidence collection, enabling incremental improvements and adjustments that will lead to overall positive impacts for all groups in Shropshire.

A **full report (Part Two)** needs to be carried out where screening indicates that there are considered to be or likely to be significant negative impacts for certain groups of people, and/or where there are human rights implications. If you are not sure, a full report is recommended, as it enables more evidence to be collected that will help you to reach an informed opinion.

Shropshire Council Part 1 ESIIA: initial screening and assessment

Please note: prompt questions and guidance within boxes are in italics. You are welcome to type over them when completing this form. Please extend the boxes if you need more space for your commentary.

Name of service change

Please use this box for the full formal name of the service change, whether policy, procedure, function, project, etc. The term “service change” is used in this form as shorthand for whatever form the changes may take.

The Re-design of Visitor Information Services in NW Shropshire

Aims of the service change and description

Please use this box to describe the aims and purpose of the service change. Include any background that you think is helpful for someone reading this ESIIA, eg if there is a new policy, why is it being introduced? If there is a change to an existing service, what are the reasons for this? For example, a redesign and rationalisation of Customer Service Points may seek to concentrate provision strategically on areas where there is a mix of population density and customer need. Further details giving context could also be helpful here.

Shropshire Council is working with partners to re-design existing face to face Visitor Information Services, to create places where visitors and local residents can easily get information and advice that both helps them and contributes to the wider tourism economy of the county. This is to help us to create and maintain resilient facilities at a time of reducing public service budgets.

In Shropshire’s market towns our vision is that traditional Visitor Information Services will be delivered, in some cases, through community enterprises that are already active within those communities. A community enterprise is the same as a social enterprise, i.e. an organisation trading for social purpose with any profits reinvested rather than going to shareholders. A community enterprise is based in, and provides benefits to, a particular local neighbourhood or community and is an organisation run for the community. These enterprises are best placed to utilise their links into communities and therefore maximise every contact that is made with them.

This work is also linked to savings, and therefore we are working to ensure that through redesign we find ways to continue to deliver high quality services, at a lower cost.

During 2015, Shropshire Council, with key local partners has been discussing new ways of delivering the Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire where the Council currently operates the Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre on the service area next to the A5 trunk road.

Intended audiences and target groups for the service change

This box relates to stakeholders, people concerned, interested parties, etc. For example, if the change will affect people receiving adult social care services and their families and carers, please say so here. If the change will affect the whole population, please say so here. If the change will affect cross-border working, for example by the Marches Local Enterprise Partnership (LEP), please mention such partnerships as well.

The proposals will see a change in location of the provision of Visitor Information Services which will impact mainly on personal callers to Mile End VIC. There will be some impact on stakeholders including businesses but this will be mitigated by the availability of alternative services in Oswestry and the introduction of a centralised business support service The Marches Growth Hub with a phone based service.

It is proposed that Shropshire Council will transfer the responsibility for dealing with enquiries from visitors and local residents by telephone, email and post to Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd which will run the service under a 3 year Service Level Agreement.

As a result of this change, the current Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre will close and the office handed back to the landlord. A new map display board will help to orientate visitors and inform them of local information services provided at Oswestry Heritage Centre and local visitor attractions. Details of telephone numbers and websites will be displayed together with full details of local attractions and other services.

Evidence used for screening of the service change

This box relates to use made of evidence in developing the change to the service. This could be Census 2011 analyses, community demographic profiles, results of surveys, or previously collected evidence material. For example, if the change relates to a stage of county-wide Site Allocation and Management of Development consultation process, the evidence used would include data collected at previous stages and in development and adoption of the Local Plan. If the evidence is on the Council website, hyperlinks could usefully be inserted here. Please comment on the use of evidence, and whether as a consequence there were any adjustments to what was originally proposed.

The Visitor Information service holds data on the numbers of existing users, including the method by which they access the service. There is no data on the proportion of users that fit in to the categories of people listed with protected characteristics.

Specific consultation and engagement with intended audiences and target groups for the service change

This box relates to use made of any specific consultation with the audiences for the service. This could be online surveys, use of social media, one off focus groups, events, drop in sessions, etc. Please comment on the headline results, and whether as a consequence there were any adjustments to what was originally proposed.

An initial soft market testing exercise was undertaken with key stakeholders in the summer of 2015 to assess if there was demand from other organisations to take over the operation of the service. One interested party expressed an interest in providing a service to personal callers at the location from which the business is operated.

A six-week consultation is being launched in mid-November 2015 to include users, stakeholders and other interested parties. The consultation will ask for views on its preferred proposal and suggestions for alternative approaches.

The council's preferred proposal is included in the consultation document, together with the

opportunity for consultees to put forward their own ideas on how Visitor Information Services could be delivered in the future.

Option One

Shropshire Council's preferred proposal for the future delivery of Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire is to transfer the responsibility for enquiries by personal callers, email, telephone and post to Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd at the Heritage Centre and to close the facility at Mile End Service area.

An area and town map information board would be provided at the Mile End Service Area promoting the availability of local Visitor Information Services in Oswestry and at nearby tourist attractions. The board would include the telephone number of Oswestry Heritage Centre VIC, local websites, local visitor amenities and other helpful information. This would result in the service continuing to be delivered in north-west Shropshire but at a reduced cost to the Council. A Service Level Agreement with Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd would provide financial support to provide Visitor Information Services in the area.

Option Two

Whilst Option One is the Council's preferred option, it does not have a closed mind to other proposals or suggestions that are made through this consultation period.

This period of consultation will run from 16th November until 28th December 2015.

Consultation forms are available at the Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre and Oswestry Heritage Centre and may be returned to both locations.

Potential impact on Protected Characteristic groups and on social inclusion

Guidance notes on how to carry out the initial assessment

Using the results of evidence gathering and specific consultation and engagement, please consider how the service change as proposed may affect people within the nine Protected Characteristic groups and people at risk of social exclusion.

1. Have the intended audiences and target groups been consulted about:
 - their current needs and aspirations and what is important to them;
 - the potential impact of this service change on them, whether positive or negative, intended or unintended;
 - the potential barriers they may face.
2. If the intended audience and target groups have not been consulted directly, have representatives been consulted, or people with specialist knowledge, or research explored?
3. Have other stakeholder groups and secondary groups, for example carers of service users, been explored in terms of potential unintended impacts?
4. Are there systems set up to:

- monitor the impact, positive or negative, intended or intended, for all the different groups;
 - enable open feedback and suggestions from a variety of audiences through a variety of methods.
5. Are there any Human Rights implications? For example, is there a breach of one or more of the human rights of an individual or group?
 6. Will the service change as proposed have a positive or negative impact on fostering good relations?
 7. Will the service change as proposed have a positive or negative impact on social inclusion?

Guidance on what a negative impact might look like

High Negative	Significant potential impact, risk of exposure, history of complaints, no mitigating measures in place or no evidence available: urgent need for consultation with customers, general public, workforce
Medium Negative	Some potential impact, some mitigating measures in place but no evidence available how effective they are: would be beneficial to consult with customers, general public, workforce
Low Negative	Almost bordering on non-relevance to the ESIIA process (heavily legislation led, very little discretion can be exercised, limited public facing aspect, national policy affecting degree of local impact possible)

Initial assessment for each group

Please rate the impact that you perceive the service change is likely to have on a group, through inserting a tick in the relevant column.

Protected Characteristic groups and other groups in Shropshire	High negative impact <i>Part Two ESIIA required</i>	High positive impact <i>Part One ESIIA required</i>	Medium positive or negative impact <i>Part One ESIIA required</i>	Low positive or negative impact <i>Part One ESIIA required</i>
Age (please include children, young people, people of working age, older people. Some people may belong to more than one group eg young person with disability)				√
Disability (please include: mental health conditions and syndromes including autism; physical disabilities or impairments; learning disabilities; Multiple Sclerosis; cancer; HIV)				√
Gender re-assignment (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				√
Marriage and Civil Partnership (please include associated aspects: caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				√
Pregnancy & Maternity (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				√

Race (please include: ethnicity, nationality, culture, language, gypsy, traveller)				√
Religion and belief (please include: Buddhism, Christianity, Hinduism, Islam, Judaism, Non conformists; Rastafarianism; Sikhism, Shinto, Taoism, Zoroastrianism, and any others)				√
Sex (please include associated aspects: safety, caring responsibility, potential for bullying and harassment)				√
Sexual Orientation (please include associated aspects: safety; caring responsibility; potential for bullying and harassment)				√
Other: Social Inclusion (please include families and friends with caring responsibilities; people with health inequalities; households in poverty; refugees and asylum seekers; rural communities; people you consider to be vulnerable)				√

Decision, review and monitoring

Decision	Yes	No
Part One ESIIA Only?	√	
Proceed to Part Two Full Report?		√

If Part One, please now use the boxes below and sign off at the foot of the page. If Part Two, please move on to the full report stage.

Actions to mitigate negative impact or enhance positive impact of the service change

Check: for the groups affected, what actions will you now take to mitigate or enhance impact of the service change? For example, if you are reducing a service there may be further use you could make of publicity and awareness raising through social media and other channels to reach more people who may be affected.

Alternative service provision to the current manned office will include a new noticeboard at Mile End Service area pointing visitors to the new services as well as providing information and maps, the availability of manned services at Oswestry Heritage Centre (in person, by phone, by post and email). Businesses will be able to use this service and the new Marches Growth Hub.

Actions to review and monitor the impact of the service change

Check: what arrangements will you have in place to continue to collect evidence and data and to continue to engage with all groups who may be affected by the service change, including the intended audiences? For example, customer feedback and wider community engagement

opportunities, including involvement of elected Shropshire Council councillors for a locality.

The SLA will be regularly monitored to ensure that Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd carry out the functions agreed under the Service Level Agreement with Shropshire Council.

Scrutiny at Part One screening stage

People involved	Signatures	Date
<i>Lead officer carrying out the screening</i>		
<i>Any internal support</i>		
<i>Any external support</i>		
<i>Head of service</i>		

Sign off at Part One screening stage

Name	Signatures	Date
<i>Lead officer's name</i>		
<i>Head of service's name</i>		

Appendix B The Consultation Paper

Visitor Information Services in North-West Shropshire - Consultation

Introduction – what is this consultation about?

Shropshire Council is working with partners to re-design existing face to face Visitor Information Services, to create places where visitors and local residents can easily get information and advice that both helps them and contributes to the wider tourism economy of the county. This is to help us to create and maintain resilient facilities at a time of reducing public service budgets.

In Shropshire's market towns our vision is that traditional Visitor Information Services will be delivered, in some cases, through community enterprises that are already active within those communities. A community enterprise is the same as a social enterprise, i.e. an organisation trading for social purpose with any profits reinvested rather than going to shareholders. A community enterprise is based in, and provides benefits to, a particular local neighbourhood or community and is an organisation run for the community. These enterprises are best placed to utilise their links into communities and therefore maximise every contact that is made with them.

This work is also linked to savings, and therefore we are working to ensure that through redesign we find ways to continue to deliver high quality services, at a lower cost.

During 2015, Shropshire Council, with key local partners has been discussing new ways of delivering the Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire where the Council currently operates the Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre on the service area next to the A5 trunk road. An initial soft market testing exercise was undertaken during July. Some interest was expressed in providing information services to visitors in the area but not on the current site.

Shropshire Council is now seeking responses to proposals relating to the future delivery of Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire. These proposals are detailed in this consultation document. We want to stress that as no formal decision has yet been made, there is also an opportunity for alternative proposals to be made. The information we receive through the consultation will be used to inform any decision making on the future delivery of Visitor Information Services and the management of the Oswestry Mile End VIC.

The potential impact of the proposals on VIC users, particularly those who might be impacted more by any change is being assessed through the completion of an Equality & Social Inclusion Impact Assessment.

This period of consultation will run from 17th November until 29th Dec 2015. Completed forms can be returned to the Oswestry Mile End VIC and Oswestry Heritage Centre.

Comments can also be submitted online by going to www.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved and searching for Visitor Information NW Shropshire Consultation.

Background to existing Visitor Information Services in NW Shropshire

Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre

The Oswestry Mile End VIC is run by the Library Service of Shropshire Council and is open 5 days a week providing a range of visitor services including free and saleable information leaflets and books, souvenirs, bed booking facility and also answers enquiries by post, phone and email. It provides services to less than 30,000 visitors per year, a significant decrease on the peak number of 76,000 in 2008.

The office is rented from the site owner at a peppercorn rent and the Council covers other costs such as business rates, staffing, energy and the costs of supplies for re-sale.

Oswestry Heritage Centre – Visitor Information Centre

Visitor Information is available at the Heritage centre in the town centre next to St. Oswald's Church. It is open all year, Monday to Saturday and deals with enquiries in person, by letter, email and telephone. The service is operated with paid staff by Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd.

Other Information Outlets

Local tourist attractions and accommodation providers offer information services to their customers including free leaflets and assistance by staff. Increasingly visitors are using smart phones and portable computers such as i-pads to access information. Popular websites for this part of Shropshire are provided by Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd, Shropshire Tourism and Virtual Shropshire in addition to national sites like TripAdvisor and many others.

What the consultation is for - what proposals are being made?

A main proposal is included in this consultation document, together with the opportunity for you to put forward your own ideas on how Visitor Information Services could be delivered in the future.

Option One

Shropshire Council's preferred proposal for the future delivery of Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire is to transfer the responsibility for enquiries by personal callers, email, telephone and post to Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd at the Heritage Centre and to close the facility at Mile End Service area.

An area and town map information board would be provided at the Mile End Service Area promoting the availability of local Visitor Information Services in Oswestry and at nearby tourist attractions. The board would include the telephone number of Oswestry Heritage Centre VIC, local websites, local visitor amenities and other helpful information. This would result in the service continuing to be delivered in north-west Shropshire but at a reduced cost to the Council. A Service Level Agreement with Oswestry Borderland Tourism Ltd would provide financial support to provide Visitor Information Services in the area.

Option Two

Whilst Option One is the Council's preferred option, it does not have a closed mind to other proposals or suggestions that are made through this consultation period.

This period of consultation will run from 17th November until 29th December 2015.

Consultation forms are available at the Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre and Oswestry Heritage Centre and may be returned to both locations.

Details of the Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information centre

		DETAIL
Management organisation		Shropshire Council
Hours that the Visitor Information Centre is open		1 April to 30 September Monday: 9am - 5pm Tuesday: 9am - 5pm Wednesday: Closed Thursday: 9am - 5pm

		Friday: 9am - 5pm Saturday: 10am - 4pm Sunday: Closed 1 October to 31 March Monday: 9.30am - 3.30pm Tuesday: 9.30am - 3.30pm Wednesday: Closed Thursday: 9.30am - 3.30pm Friday: 9.30am - 3.30pm Saturday: 10am - 2pm Sunday: Closed
Parking		Public parking on site.
Direct running costs for Shropshire Council		£36,527 excluding re-charges in 2014-15

Preferred option – transfer responsibility for visitor enquiries by email, post and telephone to Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd at Oswestry Heritage Centre. Promote alternative sources of local information via a map board at Oswestry Mile End Services including area and Oswestry town centre maps, telephone numbers, websites and more.

Shropshire Council will transfer the responsibility for dealing with enquiries from visitors and local residents by telephone, email and post to Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd which will run the service under a 3 year Service Level Agreement.

The current Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre will close and the office handed back to the landlord. A map display board will help to orientate visitors and inform them of local information services provided at Oswestry Heritage Centre and local visitor attractions. Details of telephone numbers and websites will be displayed together with full details of local attractions and other services.

	PROPOSED DETAIL
Management organisation	Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd
Hours that the Visitor Information Centre at Oswestry Heritage Centre is staffed	Summer: April to Sept: Mon - Sat 10am - 4.30pm. Sundays closed. Winter: Oct to March: Mon - Sat 10am - 4pm. Sundays closed.
Parking	Town centre car parks
Distance from Mile End to Heritage Centre	1.6 miles
Direct costs for Shropshire Council per annum	SLA to be agreed
Cost of new Service Level Agreement	To be agreed.
One off cost of new map display board(s)	To be determined.

1. Do you agree with the Council's preferred option described above?

Yes

No

If you answered no please give your reasons why here...

2. Please indicate if there are other alternatives Shropshire Council should consider for the delivery of Visitor Information Services in north-west Shropshire, which would assist the Council in meeting its required outcomes in reducing costs and delivering a sustainable Visitor Information Service.

This period of consultation will run from 17th November to 29th December 2015. Completed forms can be returned to the Visitor Information Centres at Mile End, Oswestry or Oswestry Heritage Centre.

Comments can also be submitted online by going to www.shropshire.gov.uk/get-involved and searching for Visitor Information Centre NW Shropshire Consultation.

If you would like to be kept informed about this work as it progresses, please complete your name and contact email address below.

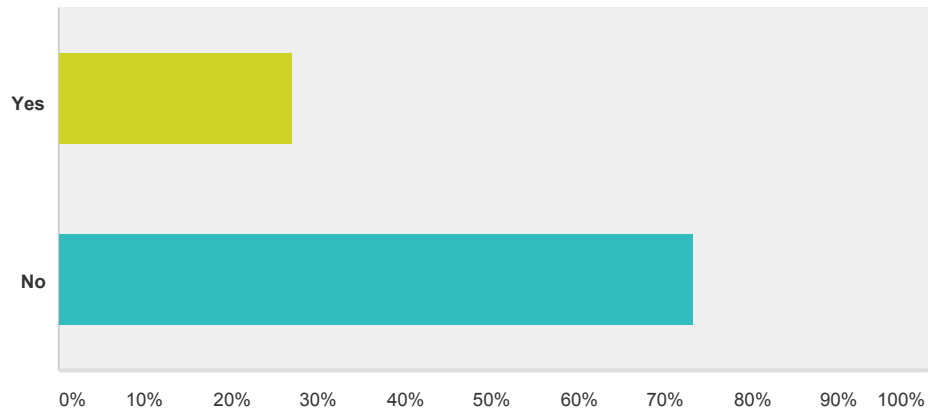
Name.....

Email address.....

Appendix C - Responses to Consultation

Q1 Preferred option reminder: To transfer the responsibility for dealing with enquiries from visitors and local residents by telephone, email and post to Oswestry Borderlands Tourism Ltd which will run the service under a 3 year Service Level Agreement. The current Oswestry Mile End Visitor Information Centre will close and the office handed back to the landlord. A map display board will help to orientate visitors and inform them of local information services provided at Oswestry Heritage Centre and local visitor attractions. Details of telephone numbers and websites will be displayed together with full details of local attractions and other services. Do you agree with this option?

Answered: 26 Skipped: 0



Answer Choices	Responses
Yes	26.92% 7
No	73.08% 19
Total	26

#	Use this space to make any comments about this:	Date
1	I have read through the information but feel ill equipped to agree or disagree. Why do visitors visit or contact that particular VIC? A quick search online reveals 4 different websites for Oswestry on the first page of Google. (1. www.visitoswestry.com/ 2. www.visitoswestry.com/tourist-information-centre/ 3. https://www.shropshiretourism.co.uk/oswestry/ 4. www.oswestry.com/). All offer information about what to do in Oswestry, but not in an easily digestible form. The TripAdvisor page for Oswestry is much more compelling http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Attractions-g504106-Activities-Oswestry_Shropshire_England.html with the top 10 attractions rated by visitors.	12/22/2015 11:21 PM
2	We have one of the most comprehensive tourist information centres outside London at Mile End, providing both local and national information. The Heritage Centre does not have the capacity to replicate the range of material Mile End provides, and has no parking facilities.	12/22/2015 2:52 PM
3	Attached to hard copy please find letter published in the Shropshire Star.	12/22/2015 2:50 PM
4	This location is ideal and a reason why many people choose to stop here. This will impact on other businesses too 1. Impact the ones in the same location and 2. Businesses that are promoted by the centre with products and word of mouth.	12/22/2015 2:45 PM
5	Mile End was the TIC for a large area of north Shropshire and North Wales, not only Oswestry! It attracted over 70-80 thousand visitors a year before council cutbacks, and provided a good service to visitors travelling up or down the A5. with information from across boundaries, not restricted to information about Oswestry town as would be the result of the projected arrangement.	12/22/2015 10:12 AM
6	Even in the modern digital age, people still like face to face contact especially where leisure decisions are concerned. Help and advice delivered in an informed and enthusiastic chain of high street travel agencies.manner can only help all aspects of the tourism industry in the area which obviously has positive effects on the parts of the local economy. If personal contact was not important then leisure giants such as Thomson Holidays would sell all their products online and close their extensive	12/20/2015 9:26 AM
7	If the brief was to design an ideal site for a Visitor Information Centre it would be somewhere like Mile End which is adjacent to Major Trunk Roads with Pit stop etc. You are suggesting that potential visitors need to drive into Oswestry, find a car park pay for the privilege of parking to visit the information centre. I feel that most visitors would just drive straight on.	12/18/2015 12:34 PM
8	if this option is agreed then the whole signposting into Oswestry for Visitors should be looked at including the brown Tourism Signs. Every major road should clearly sign the way into Oswestry to the Town TIC which is located at Oswestry Visitor & Exhibition centre(not Oswestry Heritage centre) Signage in town should be improved too.	12/17/2015 6:24 PM

9	<p>Visitor numbers have dropped coinciding with the considerable development of the other parts of the site, i.e. the PFS at the front of the site. This has reduced visitors stopping at the rear area where the VIC is located. No effort appears to have been made to overcome this. This VIC was is at a major visitor transit point in the Borderlands, the potential of this site to promote the wider area to visitors and other locals from outside Oswestry will be lost. None face to face contact will be the only replacement, which is not a good PR move. Anyone venturing into Oswestry for Tourist Information will have to pay for the 'pleasure' when parking.</p>	12/16/2015 10:08 AM
10	<p>It is important for people to have a reason to stop and be directed into Oswestry and regions beyond - we need to catch the passing trade and promote Shropshire and North Wales.</p>	12/15/2015 11:27 AM
11	<p>The Mile End VIC is ideally placed out of town for passing vehicle, with no car parking fees to pay. I have used it on many occasions for information, maps, booking, souvenirs without the need to go into Oswestry.</p>	12/7/2015 10:48 AM
12	<p>The Mile End office firstly cannot be handed back to 'the landlord', as the landlord is Shropshire Council who currently, and have always occupied the premises. There is a covenant on the centre stating that it can only be used as a Tourist Information Centre which was put in place by Oswestry Borough Council. This fact is widely known and would incur a cost to Shropshire Council to break this covenant. The falling visitor numbers have been manipulated by Shropshire Council. The numbers fell because opening hours were slashed, the centre was forced to close two days per week, and the staff were ordered to close on bank holidays, and between Xmas and New Year - traditionally days of high footfall and raised income. Visitor numbers have also fallen because of the poor signage to the centre and its services, and the fact that Shropshire council failed in its duty as site owner to ensure that the leaseholders on that side of the service area maintained the complex to a high standard as befits the gateway to Oswestry, as stated in the terms of their lease. Despite all this the Mile End Centre continues to attract 30,000 visitors per annum, which is still 20,000 more than the 10,000 anticipated when it was originally opened in 1987. This figure is huge compared to the number of visitors to the Oswestry Heritage Centre, and closing Mile End would result in a total loss of these visitors and the revenue that they bring to the local economy. Closure would not result in increased visitor numbers to the Heritage Centre, because despite it being a well run, attractive building it is in totally the wrong position for a visitor centre. Locals are unable to find it, so visitors would have little chance. It does not have adjacent free parking, or the wheelchair access that Mile End does. Mile End is also perfectly placed to help visitors staying in the Travelodge and Premier Inn, it acts as a shop window selling maps and local crafts to visitors in transit as well as those staying in the area. This brings more revenue to the local economy from outside which would be lost. Mile End also services many of the local tourist points, ordering and distributing literature. The Heritage Centre does not have the capacity to continue with this service. Shropshire Council states that it costs £36,527 to run the centre but states that part of this cost is buying stock. It also states that this figure excludes recharge. The stock is purchased is for resale at a healthy profit, and if shown, this would greatly reduce the actual amount that the centre costs to run. I think that any savings made by closing Mile End would be minimal, there would be a loss of revenue to the local economy, a reduction in the profile of Oswestry and the Welsh Borders as a tourist destination and would leave an empty building at the gateway to the town</p>	12/3/2015 1:47 PM
13	<p>It is incredibly short-sighted to close what is one of the best VICs in the area. Not only does it offer a great service to tourism-related venues/activities in the area, it is also on the main route into North Wales and therefore encourages tourists who stop for fuel and food to investigate what is on offer in the area. While Oswestry Heritage Centre does a great job it is not easy to find, has limited parking and is not a place likely for the average passing tourist to find. Only folk definitely making Oswestry their destination are likely to visit. I am involved with the Llanymynech Heritage Area and have first-hand experience of visitors who casually dropped in to Mile End VIC, discovered what NW Shropshire had to offer and then decided to spend time in the area. Tourism is important for this area but it must be promoted and advertised and people need to be able to discover it. Mile End VIC is brilliant at promoting the area and must be allowed to continue</p>	11/30/2015 11:46 PM
14	<p>The only site for Tourist Information is at the Mile end roundabout. The passing traffic is enormous and to withdraw this service is absolute madness. It is a central hub for Mid Wales, North Wales and the West Midlands and should be expanded rather than withdrawn. The Heritage Centre is fine for people who have parked up and are already within Oswestry town centre but totally hopeless in raising awareness of the various opportunities available for traffic which avoids Oswestry. I very strongly object to proposal that the British Ironworks Centre should be part of the new offer, it is a commercial enterprise which would require people travelling from the West Midlands to cross a dangerous road; then having got past the objectionable man on the gate; would then have to travel up the driveway before being subjected to a sales pitch for the site! It is in the wrong place, misses out on promoting Oswestry for traffic coming from Mid and North Wales routes.</p>	11/27/2015 7:39 PM
15	<p>Mile End Tourist Information Centre is exactly where it is needed - ie where tourists/traffic are - on the cross roads of A5/A483 - town centre = no good. Tourists need to stop = information/toilets/snacks and be on their way. No time to spend trying to find info tucked away.</p>	11/27/2015 11:40 AM

16	The site is ideal for passing tourism both for the Shropshire area and the gateway to Wales. It is easy to find, easy to park where as the Heritage site is difficult to find and NO parking. The Heritage site is so small it would not be able to house the array of literature that is so useful for tourists as at Mile End. Why not close the Heritage Centre Tourism Dept. and combine it all at Mile End. Since it is a cross border tourism site can you not seek part funding from Wales. I am both a user of Mile End as a Tourist and use it and send my holiday let tourists to this site.	11/27/2015 11:37 AM
17	The existing Centre is a necessary visual introduction to Oswestry, at a major point of arrival near the town, encouraging visitors, providing a welcome (the staff there are so helpful and friendly to callers), as well as being a shop for people to buy locally sourced gifts, maps and local literature. The Mile End Travelodge is always busy. I hate to think what the location will look like without the Information Centre to keep standards of cleanliness and brightness at a reasonable standard. This is the first impression many people will have of Oswestry and district.	11/26/2015 12:13 PM
18	A budget will be required to maintain the map and list of attractions and keep this information up to date. Use QR codes will help visitors get quick access to on-line information. The funding with the SLA to OBT must be enough to cover all their costs.	11/25/2015 7:19 AM
19	Oswestry is not well known on the tourist map and in order to maximise possible tourism potential, I believe it is important to have an office on the outskirts of town with adequate parking where people can call in and see what Oswestry has to offer. That way they can filter tourists into town. If they have to go all the way in to town first, park-up and then find the TIC, it is likely a goodly number will not bother and drive on. While the Heritage Centre is a fantastic place, it is too far from the main car parks.	11/24/2015 12:23 PM
20	It is not necessary to have 2 Tourist information offices in one town	11/20/2015 11:47 AM
21	No, it cuts down options for tourists and means it is less likely anyone stopping at Mile End for another means will become interested in the area as they can't get information about it.	11/19/2015 11:04 PM
22	An already established visitor attraction is a better way to pass on information to the visitors to Oswestry.	11/19/2015 9:50 PM
23	The murderous redesign of the Mile End roundabout and the terrible state of the service area roads means you take your life in your hands to visit the current TIC. Its location is also not very obvious. Add the very restricted hours and sadly this looks the only option. If I were visiting Oswestry I would also expect visitor info to be in the town centre. the new centre should be open good long hours, especially at weekends.	11/19/2015 2:55 PM
24	We will lose all the traffic from the A5/A483 which currently stop at Mile End. People will drive on to Llangollen or Wrexham. How many customers have used Mile End in the last 12 months? How many mystery shopper awards have Mile End won? Why close an excellent service?	11/18/2015 8:41 PM
25	If you move visitor information services visitors will drive past Oswestry like they did in the past	11/18/2015 6:57 PM

Q2 Use this space to let us know about any ideas you might have for alternative solutions that we should consider for the future delivery of visitor information services in North West Shropshire which would assist us in meeting our required outcomes to reduce costs and deliver a sustainable service.

Answered: 21 Skipped: 5

#	Responses	Date
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1	Decide *exactly* what services the VIC will provide and how it will benefit the local businesses. Locate the gift shop/leaflets for local businesses in a highly trafficked easy to find shopfront. Do a deal with TripAdvisor to publish their review engine on the official Oswestry Tourism website. Subscribe to an accommodation booking service/platform that can accommodate manual entry (taken over the phone by a member of VIC staff, visitor enquiries and visitor direct bookings). Include info on the website organized into a database so users can search by activity, attraction, history, distance, walkable, day-trip etc. I would have lots more ideas, too, but not tonight. I was president and head of web content and media operations for a Silicon Valley marketing and media company. Moved back to the area because it's lovely. Grew up in Llangollen but now in Llansilin on the Shropshire side of the border. Given that the objective is reduce costs further from £36,500 I believe a more user-friendly and useful website (invest in one of the ones that's live already) would be a good use of funds with minimal spend on a bricks and mortar presence.	12/22/2015 11:21 PM
2	No suitable alternative comes to mind.	12/22/2015 2:52 PM
3	There are none in the same class as the existing Centre. Please see letter attached to hard copy regarding the Heritage Centre. The Ironworks has been suggested. The exit from there - especially when turning right across the busy and fast A5 is dangerous as witnessed by the fact that a camera van is often parked there.	12/22/2015 2:50 PM
4	This centre is an asset to your council, I think it's absurd that you are even considering closing it. How about investing in the centre and making it much more of what it has the potential for. I work at this location as a site manager and the number of unhappy people that have stopped for just tourist information is immense but unhappy that the place is closed on a Sunday and Wednesday, and also that the hours are shortened, in fact at times when people are more likely to travel. No wonder there are less visitors this year. You seriously need a rethink!	12/22/2015 2:45 PM
5	Take a wider view to find solution to providing support to tourism industry in North Shropshire and Wrexham... joined up service supported by several local and county wide organisations?	12/22/2015 10:12 AM
6	The solution is to increase revenues at the Mile End Visitor centre and thereby reducing the net cost to the council. Obviously, in order to do this visitor levels need to be increased back to the levels achieved back in 2008. The first part of the plan has to be improved signage. There are no finger posts on Mile End roundabout showing which exit to use and the new configuration of the roundabout is so stressful to use, especially for visitors to the area who are not familiar with it, that they can easily miss the correct exit and as a result do not visit the centre.	12/20/2015 9:26 AM
7	I am led to believe that since 2008 opening hours were cut. Would that not be a reason why footfall is down. I suggest that it is open for longer on a Saturday and open Sunday. More visitors would be able to use it, perhaps closing on a Monday & Tuesday. This VIC is vital for this area. Not everyone has the internet!	12/18/2015 12:34 PM
8	In Oswestry, Oswestry Borderland Tourism works closely with Oswestry Town Council but the location of Oswestry Visitor & Exhibition centre, and signing to it, makes it difficult for visitors to find. Future options should consider a better location and closer partnership working with both Shropshire Council and Oswestry town Council. The option of adapting the toilets on the main car park would give many more visitors easy access to information.	12/17/2015 6:24 PM
9	Shropshire Council should have considered the effects of the recent changes at the Mile End Services when dealing with Planning Applications, etc for the site and made conditions to protect and improve the provision of the VIC and contacts from passing travellers at that time. Yet again Shropshire Council has demonstrated a lack of joined up thinking when dealing with change. Reallocate some of the reduced funding to growing tourist areas such as Ellesmere to boost visitor numbers and facilities.	12/16/2015 10:08 AM
10	Please leave it where it is with the friendly helpful staff who go out of their way to provide information and advice.	12/7/2015 10:48 AM
11	The sensible solution would be for Borderland Tourism to relocate their office to Mile End, fulfilling the terms of the covenant. Where the Heritage Centre is located, it does not fulfil its function as a visitor centre. Oswestry Borough Council won the Mark Henig Award for the design and location of the information centre at Mile End. Any firm of consultants state that a centre should be located at a point of arrival, or a car park, bus stop etc. The Heritage Centre doesn't fulfil any of those criteria, there is no parking and it is not accessible, it has minimal visitors and the office would benefit from a more high profile location. If Shropshire Council worked in partnership with Borderland Tourism and spent a little money on better signs and improvement to the roads on site, there is no reason why it couldn't be hugely successful once again for all concerned. If Mile End has to close, the visitor information still needs to be located in a better position such as the central car park, but again you would lose the shop window selling Oswestry and all it has to offer to passing visitors	12/3/2015 1:47 PM
12	Improve and extend the services available at Mile End, link it with a cafe/restaurant and involve people from businesses within the town, plus volunteers, to take turns in supporting the employed staff. Investment rather than cutting back with result in increased trade going into the town rather than it being bypassed completely as it is now and would be worse with the new proposals. Support the town local and county councillors not run it down or offer to friends.	11/27/2015 7:39 PM
13	Maybe savings not even considered such as volunteers on closed days.	11/27/2015 11:40 AM
14	Why change what is already a success? Please look for savings elsewhere, not cut such a necessary, visual advert for the town and district.	11/26/2015 12:13 PM

15	This proposal makes fiscal sense and our understanding of the visitor profile using the current site is that the residents and visitors looking for information on Oswestry and the North West of Shropshire can be served effectively through this solution.	11/25/2015 7:19 AM
16	How about putting it in what was the Youth Cafe in the Qube building on Oswald Road	11/24/2015 12:23 PM
17	Close the in town centre and place it in a corner of a large business e.g. a bank in town	11/19/2015 11:04 PM
18	Touch screen kiosks that can be updated from a central place. This could also be used across the county. Technology based - apps / podcast etc. More tourist information in Oswestry itself eg car parks, at toilet block etc.	11/19/2015 9:50 PM
19	remember to keep the sign board updated and add QR codes. And please bring the current TIC staff to the new venue, they are excellent.	11/19/2015 2:55 PM
20	Has anyone asked North Shropshire, or Wrexham Borough or even Powys if they would like to help promote the area. Partnership Working? Closing a VIC on a main European Trunk Road is a lost opportunity. Why not a safe overnight Truck stop at night and a Vistors centre during the day? Has anyone consulted with The British Ironworks ? How many cars stop at the service station? Has a survey been carried out on these drivers as where they come from and what they would use?	11/18/2015 8:41 PM
21	Get people that know about tourism and get rid of all the dead wood	11/18/2015 6:57 PM

