



Shropshire Hills Discovery
Centre Advisory Board

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Item / Paper

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Public

SHROPSHIRE HILLS DISCOVERY CENTRE, FEBRUARY 2012 TO NOVEMBER 2012

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 February 2012, the work of the Centre has continued, introducing developments and proposals outlined in that meeting. Nevertheless, with there having been changes in management and further progress on positioning the Centre effectively for the future, the usual format of this report has been altered to outline these points for the Board

2. Updates on Highlights from the Last report

2.1 Craven Arms Library

Use of the service has dipped slightly on the previous year, with factors such as the poor weather and people's limited disposable income being prime factors.

2.2 Secret Hills Exhibition, Café and Retail

Receipts through the spring and summer for the Exhibition have been under target due to poor weather and people's limited disposable income. New ways of packaging the various offers available at the Centre are under consideration to encourage increased footfall. With the weather being such a significant factor (recognised nationally, in light of the spring and summer rain), a good spring in 2013 will undoubtedly have a significant positive impact. The performance of the café, while under expectations, is nevertheless robust, as is the retail operation.

2.3 Education and Events

The summer has seen the Education Team deliver a first-rate programme of activities under the Xplore theme, with take-up of, and feedback on, sessions being excellent. The new sustainability sessions are close to delivery. A number of well-attended small-scale events and activities have been offered through the spring and summer, the latest one of which took place at Halloween.

2.4 Onny Meadows and Outdoors

The poor weather has been challenging in the maintenance of the Meadows. However, a programme of maintenance has been undertaken, while new facilities have been introduced to help develop opportunities for additional activities and income growth.

2.5 Craven Arms Local History Group

The activities of the group continue to flourish through their regular weekly sessions and monthly talks.

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

The new storage shed for CACF has been erected and the work of the group and the GCS project continues successfully, with many of the programmed Farmers' Markets having been lucky to coincide with the occasional days of good weather.

3. Future Development Plans for the Centre

3.1 Events and Activities

The staff team have proposed a number of options for 2013 -14 and are currently working them up for financial viability review.

3.2 Task and Finish Group

A Task and Finish Group has been convened, chaired by Neil Willcox, involving stakeholders in the Centre, along with Councillor and Officer representatives. The Group has met twice to consider the future positioning of the Centre, to achieve a firm and sustainable financial operating model for the future. To this end, a consultation is being undertaken with a wider group of stakeholders, industry professionals, local business people and Centre users in mid-November, the results of which will feed in to the future-planning process. Due to the close proximity of the consultation sessions to the Advisory Board Meeting, the results (which will have been assessed and worked up in the meantime) will be reported on at the spring 2013 Advisory Board Meeting.

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

It has been agreed by Council that the Discovery Centre needs to find savings of £40,000 in 2013 – 14.

To meet these savings, and further to those for the current financial year, a review of a range of subjects, including the following, will be undertaken to achieve the best fit between budget and service delivery:

- Opening hours
- Community activity support
- Re-deployment of services to other delivery points
- Self-service opportunities, leading to a reduction in staff costs

5. Staff Changes and Systems Review

5.1 Staff changes

In late February 2012, Zoe Griffin left the Council to explore a new career and Andrea Stanger took over the management of the Centre. Zoe was not replaced. In early summer 2012 a management restructure took place within the Visitor Economy Team within which the Centre operates. This resulted in Michael Turner (Manager at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm) assuming line manager responsibilities for Andrea and taking on a strategic role in terms of the Centre's ongoing development. In August, Andrea Stanger left the Council for personal reasons, whereupon Michael Turner assumed operational management of the Centre, before appointing Krissi Rochelle, in September, on a secondment from elsewhere in the Council to the post of Manager.

5.2 Systems review

During the summer, a review of many of the Centre's administrative systems was begun, to strive for as efficient an operation as possible. Cost efficiencies have been achieved through the adoption of proven systems from other similar sites, which are being applied at the Centre.

6. Conclusions

With new management having now been in place for around six weeks, the Centre is geared up for what will be a very challenging period of its history. The current, national economic climate will continue to have an effect on the Centre's fortunes. It is, of course, hoped that a change in weather will allow the Centre some financial respite too. It is worth noting that, with these challenges to meet, the staff at the Centre continue to deliver an excellent service and are themselves participating in finding a model of operation through which the Centre can continue to play a beneficial role in the local and wider community it serves.

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)