

NORTH LINCOLNSHIRE COUNCIL

**REGENERATION
CABINET MEMBER**

WATERS' EDGE VISITOR CENTRE TOURIST INFORMATION PROVISION

1. OBJECT AND KEY POINTS IN THIS REPORT

- 1.1 In February 2013 Brigg Tourist information Centre (TIC) closed temporarily for building works. We ran a TIC out of the Waters' Edge Visitor Centre at Barton upon Humber.
- 1.2 This was well received by our customers. We think a TIC in Barton would bring in more visitors. This report asks for agreement in principle to developing a fully networked TIC at Waters' Edge.

2. BACKGROUND INFORMATION

- 2.1 Waters' Edge Visitor Centre is open seven days a week. The free admission Visitor Centre is set in an 86-acre country park on the Waterfront at Barton upon Humber. It has plenty of free car parking, a café, gift shop and toilets.
- 2.2 In 2011 the main tenant in the business units relocated to a new head office, leaving a number of empty offices. We are marketing these to businesses in Lincolnshire and East Yorkshire, but in the current economic climate they are proving difficult to fill. We are therefore looking at new ways to bring in more visitors and increase spend at the site.
- 2.3 Since the reduction in Humber Bridge tolls we have attracted more visitors from across the river. We have seen a significant increase in visitors with HU postcodes of around 15%. We now regularly attract visitors from Anlaby, Hessle, North Ferriby, Melton, Cottingham, Kirk Ella and Beverley.
- 2.4 In January 2013 the Brigg Tourist Information Centre (TIC) closed for four weeks to allow a refurbishment to take place and a new lift to be installed. We temporarily relocated the service to two locations, Brigg Heritage Centre on the first floor of The Angel and Waters' Edge Visitor Centre.

- 2.5 In Brigg we found that visitors were reluctant to go into The Angel for tourist information and the number of people using the service declined as a result.
- 2.6 At Waters' Edge, the opposite happened. We stocked information on places to visit across the UK alongside local places to visit. This attracted a significant number of new visitors who came to combine a day out with planning their UK holiday. Sales in the gift shop increased and the café was busier.
- 2.7 During the week commencing 10 February we asked visitors for their comments on our temporary TIC and gathered postcodes for analysis. There were no negative comments and the majority asked if we could continue to stock this new literature.
- 2.8 Brigg TIC reopened on Thursday 14 February. However, we have kept a modest stock of the most popular literature at Waters' Edge. Following the refurbishment the amount of literature storage space and the available 'back room' work area has reduced in size.
- 2.9 Brigg TIC is the only networked TIC in North Lincolnshire. A 'networked' TIC is subject to a national accreditation. This means that it must run to high standards and be staffed by trained professionals. Put simply it is an assurance to the customer of high service standards and impartiality. Until this accreditation is met, the service can only operate as a Tourist Information Point (TIP), stocking mainly local information.
- 2.10 The nearest TIC to Waters' Edge is located at the north bank Humber Bridge car park in Hessle. This is a small networked TIC with limited café and toilet facilities.
- 2.11 Brigg TIC is currently open Monday to Friday and for four hours on a Saturday. It is staffed by two full time and one part time member of staff.
- 2.12 Waters' Edge opens seven days a week. It is staffed by two full time employees and one part time employee. There is also an additional part time member of staff shared between the two venues.
- 2.13 As part of the proposed review of the Tourism and Town Centres Team (now part of the wider review of Planning and Regeneration) we were looking at how the front line staff could work closer together to simplify rotas, improve customer service and also work life balance for staff.
- 2.14 If we made small changes to the job descriptions of the front line staff and enrolled them on an on-line training course, we could easily achieve networked TIC status for Waters' Edge.

2.15 This would allow us to provide two networked TICs in North Lincolnshire, giving our customers professional seven days a week service. We would need to install new display racking at a cost of approximately £3,000. This could be met from existing budgets and offset by increased revenue for the gift shop, agency bookings and ticket sales.

2.16 We would like to offer this improved service to our customers.

3. **OPTIONS FOR CONSIDERATION**

3.1 There are three options to consider

Option 1: To only have one TIC as at present, located in Brigg

Option 2: To develop a TIP at Waters' Edge

Option 3: To increase customer service by making Waters' Edge a networked TIC to supplement the current provision in Brigg

4. **ANALYSIS OF OPTIONS**

4.1 **Option 1** - We would still need to look at staffing as part of the review as cover is difficult at both venues during periods of staff leave and other absence and we are not making the best use of our limited resources. The refurbishment of the TIC and the new lift to the upper floor of the Buttercross means that Brigg TIC has lost most of its storage space. We are storing most of the literature at Waters' Edge.

4.2 **Option 2** - Again, we would still need to look at staffing as part of the review as cover is difficult at both venues during periods of staff leave and other absence and we are not making the best use of our limited resources. This would go some way towards improving customer service. However, the TIP would not be part of the national network. It therefore would not be publicised as well.

4.3 **Option 3** - This improves customer service, makes the best use of limited resources and maximises income. As part of the national network the TIC would be extensively publicised by Visit Britain and Enjoy England. It has the potential to bring in new customers who are touring through the area, especially on route between Lincoln and York. Waters' Edge also has the storage space required for bulk literature.

4.4 Option 3 is therefore suggested as the best option.

5. **RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS (FINANCIAL, STAFFING, PROPERTY, IT)**

5.1 Changes to job descriptions will be looked at as part of the review. This aims to make savings, provide a better service to our customers and improve the work life balance of staff.

5.2 The harmonisation of front line services will make for more efficient working and cost savings.

5.3 The IT systems are already in place at Waters' Edge to deliver this service. There is also a suitable till and card payment machine available.

6. OUTCOMES OF INTEGRATED IMPACT ASSESSMENT (IF APPLICABLE)

6.1 Officers have completed an Integrated Impact Assessment. It shows no negative effect. We believe that the training given to staff in meeting the needs of customers will help us better meet the needs of all sections of the community. Our preferred option also brings TIC services closer to more towns and villages.

7. OUTCOMES OF CONSULTATION AND CONFLICTS OF INTERESTS DECLARED

7.1 We asked the visitors to the temporary TIC for their comments. These were all positive. Some visitors had heard from a friend that we have a broader range of leaflets and came in specifically to pick-up a brochure. Others said they were regular visitors and were impressed with our new display of national leaflets, taking brochures to plan their main holiday. Others commented on how good it was to have all the brochures as most attractions only have a handful of which most are out of date.

7.2 The proposal has also been discussed in staff meetings within the team. Front line staff and their line managers support the development of the new TIC.

8. RECOMMENDATIONS

8.1 That the development of a fully networked TIC at Waters' Edge (option 3) is agreed in principle, to be implemented as part of the review of the Planning and Regeneration division.

DIRECTOR OF PLACES

Civic Centre
Ashby Road
SCUNTHORPE
North Lincolnshire
DN16 1AB
Author: Christine Edwards
Date: 25 February 2013

Background Papers used in the preparation of this report: None