

THURSDAY, 27 SEPTEMBER 2018

REPORT OF THE PORTFOLIO HOLDER FOR ENVIRONMENT AND CULTURE**CASTLE REVIEW****EXEMPT INFORMATION**

n/a

PURPOSE

To update Members on the continued review of the Castle, methods of operation of the Castle and seek permission to commence the implementation of the recommendations from the review.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Cabinet approve the proposed changes as detailed in the report to the general public opening hours of the castle and that they commence in April 2019.
2. Cabinet give approval for the Assistant Director Growth and Regeneration to develop a new staff structure and operating method for consideration and approval by Appointments and Staffing Committee.
3. Members endorse the commencement of formal consultation with staff / trade unions with regards to the implementation of a new staffing structure.
4. Cabinet agrees that any investment requirements for the castle will be considered as part of the Capital Budget process on a return on investment basis.
5. Cabinet give approval for the Assistant Director Growth and Regeneration to prepare and enter into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Friends of Tamworth Castle and Museum

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Castle Service is responsible for the management, development and operation of Tamworth Castle and the management and care of the object and archive Collection.

Tamworth castle is open to the public as a heritage attraction and general tourist facility

assisting in the promotion of tourism and educational standards.

In addition the castle is a scheduled ancient monument and is therefore of national heritage importance. The aim of scheduling is to preserve the best examples of monuments and archaeological remains in England for the benefit of current and future generations. Therefore, the management, development and operation of the Castle has to be carried out in keeping with this status.

In 2014 the Council initiated reviews of all of its services. The conclusions from the review of the Castle Service were that the Castle should continue to operate but a more in depth review should be undertaken that would analyse those areas identified as a concern (Operational Hours / Staffing / Marketing and Commercialisation). The original purpose of the review was :

- To review staff roles and responsibilities to ensure an improved focus on commercialisation at both a strategic and operational level;
- To identify areas of the service which would provide greater opportunity to increase income;
- To ensure that conservation and preservation are maintained as a priority.

Since then the Leisure Services manager has undertaken an in depth analysis of visitor and financial data, reviewed staff roles and responsibilities, considered options for delivery including the services offered and considered experience from elsewhere.

Officers have reported progress to Scrutiny committee on several occasions including 2 site visits, who have driven the direction of the work, and have advised that the Council should pay particular attention to seeking to reduce the net cost of the service to the Council, and have asked officers to investigate options for delivery. All feedback has been acknowledged and taken on board as part of the ongoing review process.

Staffing

It is considered that the current staffing structure does not match the current needs of the business. More day to day operational supervision of staff is required so it enables other staff to be more strategic and to develop the business to ensure future proofing and entrepreneurial development to increase visitor numbers. The staffing structure needs to be able to operate the service to a high standard whilst retaining drive to develop the product, its overall offer and commercial ability.

Authorisation is sought to start the progress of reviewing the staffing structure with the commencement of formal discussions with staff and trade unions.

Visitors, costs, income and Operational Hours

The review of financial and visitor data shows that 59% of all income comes from day to day admission by the general paying public although that income varies depending on the day of the week and time of the year. A full breakdown of total % income types as at the end of last financial year 2017/2018 is as follows:

Weddings 2%
Retail 14%
Schools 25%
Admission 59%

Within the retail income the average spend by schools in the shop, accounts for just under a third (29%) of all shop income.

Number of school children visiting the site remains fairly static with an annual figure of between 10,500 to 11,000 school children visiting. There is no further scope for the

expansion of this. On every viable school day during term time, there is a school booking in place. These bookings accommodate on average a maximum of 90 children on site at every visit. The historic nature of the site and the need to rotate groups of children around the building on the day of the visit to accommodate workshops and lunches means that it is not possible to take higher group numbers.

The Castle has regularly reviewed opening hours and opening days as part of its ongoing management and service delivery. Historically the Castle used to open Thursday to Sunday in the winter season, but after analysis of visitor data in 2007 the step was taken to reduce this to just Saturdays and Sundays. There was no detrimental effect on visitor numbers as visits from the Thursday and Friday shifted to the weekend days instead. It is now felt that the hours should be changed again as they do not reflect current customer demand. The review has analysed customer visiting times and the number of customers visiting the castle at designated times. It is clear there are times when visitor numbers are low (particularly mid-week and early season). This places a financial burden on the Castle (as costs are fixed whether 1 or 100 people visit but income is not) and impacts on the visitor experience.

Further advice from Visit England has suggested the option to bring forward opening hours on the days the Castle is open by 1 hour. This would allow the capture of additional morning family visits, instead of just afternoon family visits. The review has sought to establish the optimum times for visiting and visitor numbers, and the proposed changes to opening hours reflect this. It is recommended that the opening hours to the general public be amended to bring the attraction in line with similar national attractions and also to control the demand made on the Castle.

This will also enable maintenance works to take place more effectively without disruption to customers.

The proposed general public opening hours are as follows:

January – closed weekdays and weekends

February – open Half term week and following weekends following half term 10.30 – 3pm

March – open weekends only 10.30-3pm (open Easter holiday weeks if applicable)

April – open weekends only 10.30 – 3pm and open Easter holiday weeks if applicable
10.30 -3pm

May – open Half term Whitsun week holiday and then weekends only 10.30 – 3pm

June – open weekends only 10.30 – 3pm

July- open Monday – Sunday 10.30 3pm

August - open Monday – Sunday 10.30 – 3pm

September – open weekends only 10.30 -3pm

October –open Half term holiday and then weekends only 10.30 -3pm

November -closed weekdays and weekends

December – closed weekdays and weekends

The castle will remain open for all school holidays / bank holidays/ special events and continue to offer its educational service all year round

There is likely to be a minor but positive impact to operating costs if the proposed opening hours are changed. Whilst building costs (such as utilities etc) remain the same whether the castle is open or not, there is likely to be a small saving on staffing costs as not as many staff will be required for non-public open days.

Commercialisation, IT, Marketing and promotion

The historical nature and size of the site do present a unique set of circumstances for the day to day operations. These have been identified through the review and ideas for how to address them have been identified. However, it is felt that until the changes to opening hours and staffing structure have been undertaken then progression of these ideas is unable to happen due to lack of staff resources and finance.

Some of the identified issues include:

- Hosting private events, such as weddings, alongside general public opening is challenging operationally and not attractive to private users due to the visitor route around the castle needing to access spaces or in close proximity to those spaces that private users wish to use.
- The visitor route filters everyone through one prescribed and compact entrance area which can result in queues at busy times;
- The café is small and only holds 8 tables resulting in only 8 families at a time being able to use the area which could have a real impact on income unless there is a faster through-put of visitors or alternative areas to seek refreshment on a very compact site.
- During school term time, paying day to day visitors have to sidestep around the school visits when school groups occupy rooms for their workshop delivery. While this is communicated and managed with few complaints, it should be acknowledged that competing income streams must coexist with each other in order to deliver a full range of services to achieve the current income levels.
- Attractiveness for private events is limited due to the lack of on-site catering facilities. All food must be prepared off site and then along with drinks be transported up the ramp. This is time consuming and can pose difficulties for suppliers.
- The current IT/ Marketing package offered by the Castle does not reflect the business needs in relation to data collection and the ability to sell tickets on line. The system is out of date and unable to sell on line tickets. Work has started to address this as part of a wider corporate ICT systems review.
- Further work on the marketing and promotion will be undertaken as part of a corporate review with a focus on the development of the successful themed events.

Wider links

The Castle attracts 43,000 visitors per year to Tamworth, so there is an opportunity for local town centre business to capture additional spend from linked trips, and vice versa. The Councils events programme brings in large numbers of visitors and work is needed to try and capture more of those attending to also visit the wider town centre and the castle. The Council is currently preparing a series of work related to the town centre that will consider how best to maximise visitor numbers to the town in general and the attractions within it, such as the castle.

Friends of Tamworth Castle and Museum

Tamworth Castle benefits from The Friends of Tamworth Castle and Museum, an external support organisation who exist to “advance the education of the public by promotion, support, assistance and improvement of Tamworth Castle and Museum in co-operation with its management and staff”. The Friends work hard to fundraise for the Castle and work in partnership to deliver an annual Halloween event. It is felt that there are opportunities to strengthen the relationship and deliver better engagement and authority is sought to prepare an SLA or appropriate agreement to formalise the relationship and set out clear outcomes and outputs.

OPTIONS CONSIDERED

1. Do Nothing – doing nothing will create a high risk to the Castle in terms of its ability to protect its heritage and excellent customer package that it offers. In turn this could have a negative effect long term on Tamworth general tourism package. The current staffing structure present operating issues and staff are at full capacity which in turn could lead to poor staff retention and a reduction in employee engagement that also

in turn damages the reputation of the castle and Tamworth Borough Council as employers.

2. Different operating models – As part of the review a number of operating models were considered ranging from closing the castle to restricting its services. Each model has been analysed in relation to the future of the castle, its ability to adapt and ability to reduce its overheads whilst improving its service and maintaining its future.

RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

It is anticipated that changes to staffing structure and operating method may lead to a small saving. However, until the process of consultation and development of a model has begun it is not possible to detail any changes.

LEGAL/RISK IMPLICATIONS BACKGROUND

1. The Castle runs the risk of standing still and losing custom and confidence of the market without the investment in online ticket sales and comprehensive IT infrastructure.
2. Loss of confidence and lack of investment could lead to lower customer visits and loss of income
3. Without continued growth the infrastructure of the Castle and its preservation could become an issue.
4. The review of the castle has been ongoing for some time and further delays could affect staff morale and retention.
5. Developing and implementing the proposals could impact on staff morale. This will be mitigated through briefing staff and engaging with them through the process.
6. The change in operating hours does not lead to demand shift. This will be mitigated through marketing and promotion activity.

SUSTAINABILITY IMPLICATIONS

The Castle needs to make necessary changes to the way it operates to ensure it remains competitive in its field and maintains and if possible increase the number of visitors. Increased visitor numbers and secondary spend will ensure the Castle can provide security, greater longevity as an attraction and the potential to deliver ongoing conservation of the building.

Increasing opportunities for the public to visit and ensuring that the service is run effectively and cost efficiently will enable the Castle over time to reduce its subsidy by Tamworth Borough Council as in the past years with increased customer numbers.

BACKGROUND INFORMATION

On Thursday 5th September, Infrastructure, Safety and Growth Scrutiny Committee considered a report that outlined the proposed contents of this report. The Committee fully endorsed the proposed recommendations which have been carried forward into this report. The Committee recognised the practical difficulties a historic building presents but wished to see the cost to the Council reduced in future. They also discussed ideas for improvements to the experience and offer including improvements to the gift shop, opportunities to sell online and upsell through online bookings. The Committee felt that the Castle should maximise its income including for example, not providing free entrance for Heritage Open Day. The formal recommendations of the Committee will be presented at Cabinet.

REPORT AUTHOR

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LIST OF BACKGROUND PAPERS

Information and formal responses to scrutiny committee questions have been presented at 5 scrutiny meetings commencing on 17th January 2017 when a briefing note from the Castle provided answers to questions posed by the committee. A walkabout question and answer meeting at the Castle with the then portfolio holder was undertaken on 10th February 2017 followed by further responses to an additional set of questions from the committee on 11th April 2017. Further meetings were also held in both September and November of that year. Report to Infrastructure Safety and Growth Scrutiny, 13th September, 2018

APPENDICES

None