

**PERTH AND KINROSS COUNCIL****Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee****2 April 2014****“The Perth Experience” – A Visitor Information and Orientation Initiative for Perth****Depute Director (Environment Service)**

The purpose of this report is to outline the proposal for the development of a visitor information, orientation initiative for Perth that encompasses the relocation of the Information Centre to 45 High Street and the fit out as a contemporary visitor hub. This also includes the implementation of a complementary signposting and interpretation scheme for attractions and visitor facilities in Perth.

**1. BACKGROUND/MAIN ISSUES**

- 1.1 In a report to the Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee in November 2013 (ref 13/549) the proposed changes to arrangements for the network of VisitScotland Information Centres (VICs) were outlined. Approval was given to these as the basis of the 2014/15 Partnership Agreement between the Council and VisitScotland. The Committee also approved continued negotiations between the Council and VisitScotland regarding the relocation of the Perth VIC, currently accommodated within Lower City Mills, to a more central, higher footfall location and to establish this as an orientation centre for the city and wider area. This had been identified as a priority action within the Perth City Plan. Accordingly, this report updates the progress in relation to identification and establishment of this facility along with the financial and operational considerations.
- 1.2 The Council and VisitScotland have been negotiating in relation to the premises at 45 High Street, which is the only site in the city centre which has been identified presently as suitable for the purpose. It is Council owned but has been vacant since the former tenant Jessops vacated it. The property had been held on the Housing Revenue Account (HRA) but Legal Services and Finance have confirmed the property is a general fund asset.
- 1.3 VisitScotland is enthusiastic about the site and the opportunity it presents to reach a wider market as well as deliver a more inspirational experience for visitors to the city.
- 1.4 In addition to the Information Centre, there is an opportunity to develop a more seamless experience for visitors to the city by addressing signage and interpretation materials, on both the approaches and within, the city. Current signage and interpretation panels in locations such as car parks are in some cases outdated and carry old branding. In addition, there are gaps in provision at certain sites.

- 1.5 Through the 2014/15 budget review process, the Council approved additional budget resource to support the development and implementation of the new VIC project as part of an integrated project that also comprises investment in improved signage and interpretation for visitors.

## **2. PROPOSAL**

### **VisitScotland Information Centre**

- 2.1 45 High Street will be developed as a dynamic, inspiring hub for visitors and residents that highlights the attractions, activities, events and cultural life of the City of Perth and the Perth and Kinross area. The new VIC will be designed to provide a “Perth Experience” – acting as a hub for information and bookings, and for themed trails within the city and wider area while providing a one stop service for information and inspiration on what to see and do in the area. The purpose of the centre is to inspire visitors to stay longer in the area, to spend more while they are here and to return in the future.
- 2.2 VisitScotland will address its additional overheads (staffing, rates, premises, costs) by undertaking retail and commercial functions including event ticketing and retail of merchandise including locally sourced crafts, thereby creating an outlet for local artists and makers. The Centre will also comprise interactive displays, exhibition space and offer free public WiFi. Imagery and messaging within the Centre will be agreed with the Council.
- 2.3 VisitScotland has indicated that it feels that this is a favourable location but is faced with having to reduce its operational overheads Nationally. In order to secure the necessary Scottish Government approval for relocation, this opportunity will have to be cost neutral to VisitScotland. This could be achieved only in part by the enhanced retail and commercial performance. Therefore VisitScotland is still faced with the overheads for its management offices at Lower City Mills, albeit with an opportunity to sublet the ground floor space vacated by the VIC. Currently, approximately 18 management and administration posts are accommodated at Lower City Mills.
- 2.4 Accordingly, VisitScotland is seeking to operate the facility in partnership with the Council. VisitScotland will fund the operational cost of the centre (additional staff costs, rates, utilities etc). The Council would remediate the building to make it fit for purpose and make it available on a rent free basis to VisitScotland for 3 years from 2014/15. Following this the success of the venture would be evaluated. VisitScotland and the Council will share the one-off fit-out costs which are estimated at £80,000. The premises also require some remedial work to the fabric of the building which is being accommodated within current budgets for property remediation.
- 2.5 The financial implications for the Council from the development of this new centre are noted below:
- 3 years’ rent free @ £20,000 per annum from 2014/15 = £60,000
  - Contribution to fit out (50% of estimated costs) in 2014/15 = £40,000

- 2.6 For its part, VisitScotland is projecting increased income from retail and commissions but is also faced with increased staff and property costs including the business rates for 45 High Street. All current Information Centre staff (2 permanent posts) will transfer to the new site. Normally, two additional part time/seasonal staff would be recruited for Perth VIC. However, it is anticipated that 1 additional permanent member of staff and 2 additional part time/seasonal members of staff will be required for the High Street location to take account of longer opening hours and increased footfall. Even taking account of a rent free period, VisitScotland is projecting net operating costs of approximately £44,000 for 45 High Street – an increase of approximately £4,000 on the present VIC location.
- 2.7 In terms of timescales, further to the Council's confirmation of its approval of the project and its financial support, VisitScotland is accelerating its own internal approval process, with a view to beginning works in May 2014. The direction of travel for the change has already been approved by VisitScotland management. The fit out contract period is estimated at 12 weeks with a view to opening in late summer, subject to the completion of remedial works on the building.

### **City Signage and Interpretation**

- 2.8 It is also planned that the improvements to the VIC will be complemented by additional investment throughout the city. This will improve access and information on key attractions and facilities within the city and link with new City of Perth branding and promotion at entry points. The project will focus on the visitor journey - from the approaches to the city, to city centre car parks and to key attractions and facilities such as the Concert Hall. In the first instance, this project will focus on entry signs incorporating new branding and promoting the city followed by a phased programme of complementary improvements to visitor signage and interpretation.
- 2.9 Through the 2014/15 budget process, the Council has approved funding towards investment in new signage and interpretation. This figure will be enhanced by contributions from operators of eligible attractions and other external funding sources.
- 2.10 In addition, through the budget process, the appointment of a support post has been approved to support the development and implementation of projects. This is a fixed term, two year appointment graded at TAS4 and will provide support to project officers working across key economic sectors including tourism.

### **Anticipated Outcomes**

- 2.11 Currently the Perth VIC receives approximately 20,000 visitors per year and VisitScotland estimates that this could rise to approximately 100,000 in the High Street location. In terms of economic impact, VisitScotland undertook a study in 2010 to assess the new income generated as visitors change their expenditure patterns following a visit to a VIC. This pointed to an average

expenditure increase of £5.35 per person as a result of the visit to a VIC. Based on this research, VisitScotland estimates an economic impact of £535,000 per annum from a footfall of 100,000 persons equating to an additional economic impact of £428,000 compared with the current location at Lower City Mills. It is also anticipated that there will be potential supply chain opportunities in relation to both the development of the office and through the retail of local crafts and merchandise. The increased staffing requirement for the new centre also means there will be additional local employment opportunities.

- 2.12 The creation of the centre as a visitor hub as outlined in this report will also help to regenerate further the east end of the High Street and drive additional footfall to this part of the city centre. Visitor surveying would measure increased visitation and expenditure levels within Perth. In addition, the performance of the VIC will be the subject of ongoing monitoring in relation to visitor numbers, accommodation bookings, and satisfaction levels.
- 2.13 Additional monitoring of visitor numbers within the city centre and to visitor attractions will assess the impact of investment in signage and interpretation in promoting access and information.

### **3. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION**

- 3.1 It has long been recognised that the Information Centre is in a less than optimum location at Lower City Mills. Since the visitor attraction element of the Mills closed, visitor numbers have declined and the present office does not provide the type of welcome to visitors or inspiration about the city and the wider area that one would expect.
- 3.2 In line with the City Plan, which articulates a strong vision for Perth as a destination, the Council has been working with VisitScotland to find an improved location for a centre which will offer a much more dynamic and contemporary visitor experience from a more central site and which, in turn, will contribute to growth in the local visitor economy. It is envisaged that this new centre, at the Council owned premises at 45 High Street, will have a stronger city and area focus, will act as a hub for trails and provide a range of services including event and transport ticketing.
- 3.3 The Council and VisitScotland have assessed the financial model required to develop the new VIC location while also allowing VisitScotland to retain its offices at Lower City Mills where some 18 staff are accommodated. Accordingly, provision has been made through the budget review process to cover the cost of rent for a three year period as well as a contribution to the fit out of the office.

- 3.4 In order to deliver an integrated approach to visitor orientation and interpretation, a complementary project will see new gateway and tourism signs and interpretation materials installed within the city at key sites and on approaches to Perth. The objective of this integrated “Perth Experience” is to deliver a high quality destination experience and to inspire our visitors to stay longer, to spend more and to return.
- 3.5 The lease disposal to VisitScotland at a rent of £20,000 per annum for 3 years is within the delegated authority of the Executive Director.
- 3.6 The Committee is asked to:
- i) Note the budget provision from 2014/15 in relation to the development of a new Information Centre facility and the investment in new tourism signage, support officer, interpretation materials, and an additional economic development support officer.
  - ii) Note the anticipated outcomes from the investment in the initiative.
  - iii) Approve the project which encompasses the relocation of the Information Centre from Lower City Mills to 45 High Street and the investment in signage and interpretation as the basis of an integrated visitor information and orientation “Perth Experience” initiative.

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#### Approved

Name	Designation	Date
Jim Valentine	Executive Director (Environment)	21 March 2014

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## 1. IMPLICATIONS, ASSESSMENTS, CONSULTATION AND COMMUNICATION

<b>Strategic Implications</b>	
Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement	<b>Yes</b>
Corporate Plan	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Resource Implications</b>	
Financial	<b>Yes</b>
Workforce	<b>None</b>
Asset Management (land, property, IST)	<b>None</b>
<b>Assessments</b>	
Equality Impact Assessment	<b>Yes</b>
Strategic Environmental Assessment	<b>None</b>
Sustainability (community, economic, environmental)	<b>None</b>
Legal and Governance	<b>Yes</b>
Risk	<b>Yes</b>
<b>Consultation</b>	
Internal	<b>Yes</b>
External	<b>None</b>
<b>Communication</b>	
Communications Plan	<b>None</b>

### 1. Strategic Implications

#### Community Plan / Single Outcome Agreement

- 1.1 The Perth and Kinross Community Planning Partnership (CPP) brings together organisations to plan and deliver services for the people of Perth and Kinross. Together the CPP has developed the Perth and Kinross Community Plan which outlines the key things we think are important for Perth and Kinross.
- i) Giving every child the best start in life
  - ii) Developing educated, responsible and informed citizens
  - iii) Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy
  - iv) Supporting people to lead independent, healthy and active lives
  - v) Creating a safe and sustainable place for future generations
- 1.2 It is considered that the strategy and related actions will contribute to the following objective: Promoting a prosperous, inclusive and sustainable economy.

## Corporate Plan

- 1.3 The Council's Corporate Plan 2013-2018 outlines the same five Objectives as those detailed above in the Community Plan. These objectives provide a clear strategic direction, inform decisions at a corporate and service level and shape resource allocation. It is considered that the actions contained in the report contribute to objective (iii) outlined in paragraph 1.1 above.

## **2. Resource Implications**

### Financial

- 2.1 As part of the 2014/15 budget process, the Council approved total additional funding of £300,000, £150,000 for 2014/15 and 2015/16, to enhance tourism and support economic investment including this initiative.
- 2.2 The proposed expenditure on signage, interpretation, remedial work and staff, will be met from this budget.

### Workforce

- 2.3 There are no staff resource issues for Perth and Kinross Council. VisitScotland anticipates additional staffing requirements for the new High Street centre and employment opportunities will arise as a result.

### Asset Management (land, property, IT)

- 2.4 VisitScotland will enter a lease for three years for 45 High Street.

## **3. Assessments**

### Equality Impact Assessment

- 3.1 An Equality Impact Assessment needs to be carried out for functions, policies, procedures or strategies in relation to race, gender and disability and other relevant protected characteristics. This supports the Council's legal requirement to comply with the duty to assess and consult on relevant new and existing policies.
- 3.2 The function, policy, procedure or strategy presented in this report was considered under the Corporate Equalities Impact Assessment process (EqIA) with the following outcome:
- (i) Assessed as **relevant** and the following positive outcomes expected following implementation:
- The needs of equality groups to be addressed in the operational arrangements for the new VIC and in the design of signs and interpretation materials such as information panels

### Strategic Environmental Assessment

- 3.3 The Environmental Assessment (Scotland) Act 2005 places a duty on the Council to identify and assess the environmental consequences of its proposals. However, no further action is required as the proposals do not qualify as a PPS as defined by the act and are therefore exempt.

### Sustainability

- 3.4 Under the provisions of the Local Government in Scotland Act 2003 the Council has to discharge its duties in a way which contributes to the achievement of sustainable development. In terms of the Climate Change Act, the Council has a general duty to demonstrate its commitment to sustainability and the community, environmental and economic impacts of its actions.

### Legal and Governance

- 3.5 The consideration of the report is in line with the Council's Scheme of Administration and specifically the role of the Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee in developing measures to support and promote economic activity and to plan and promote tourism development activity.

### Risk

- 3.6 Risks and the controls required to mitigate any risks will be reported through the Council's risk management process where the Council is the lead on individual projects.

## **4. Consultation**

### Internal

- 4.1 The Head of Planning and Regeneration and Head of Finance have been consulted in the development of the report.

## **2. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

The following background papers, as defined by Section 50D of the Local Government (Scotland) Act 1973 (and not containing confidential or exempt information) were relied on to a material extent in preparing the above report.

- VisitScotland Partnership Agreement 2014/15 – Report by the Executive Director (Environment) to the Enterprise and Infrastructure Committee (ref: 13/549)