

REPORT OF THE SERVICE DIRECTOR, YOUTH, FAMILIES AND CULTURAL SERVICES**SHERWOOD FOREST VISITOR CENTRE AND COUNTRY PARK PROCUREMENT PROCESS****Purpose of the Report**

1. This report seeks Culture Committee approval for:
 - the procurement process to be followed in order to secure a partner to build and manage the Visitor Centre and Country Park ; and
 - the outline capital and project costs required.

Information and Advice**Background**

2. On 1 July 2014, Culture Committee considered a report that outlined the current position in relation to the replacement of the visitor centre at Sherwood Forest. At that meeting Members agreed to:
 - note the decision to end the procurement process and the Council's work with Discovery Attractions
 - re-engage with potential partners to deliver a procurement project to replace the existing outdated visitor centre
 - receive a further report seeking approval for the commencement of the procurement process and to update Members on progress to date.
3. The Council remains committed to replacing the existing visitor centre facilities that support the visitor experience at Sherwood Forest, recognising the significant role the site plays in tourism in the north of the County. The Council is also aware of its obligation to Natural England to remove the existing infrastructure from the National Nature Reserve (NNR), a European Special Area for Conservation (SAC) designated under the Habitats Directive, by 2016/17. These have been used to shape the Council's vision and key objectives for the project which are shown below.

Overall Ambition and Key Objectives for Sherwood Forest

4. The proposed ambition for the Council's involvement with Sherwood Forest is:

"To protect, preserve and enhance the ecology and heritage of the world famous Sherwood Forest for all visitors; to promote and enhance the national and international reputation of the Forest and the legend of Robin Hood; and to have a modern visitor offer that reflects the status of Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood."

5. In delivery terms, this means that the achievement of a number of key objectives will drive the procurement process. These are summarised below:-

- the creation of a replacement visitor centre and associated visitor facilities that will:
 - provide a modern visitor offer befitting the international status of Sherwood Forest
 - operate on a year round basis
 - as a minimum, support and accommodate current visitor numbers (including car parking requirements)
 - have a minimum life span of 20 years
 - support free public access to the Sherwood Forest National Nature Reserve (NNR)
 - effectively promote Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood and the wider Nottinghamshire tourism offer
 - be connected safely to the NNR for all-ability visitor access
 - effectively support the management of visitor impact on the habitat of the NNR
 - provide appropriate interpretation/visitor information on Sherwood Forest and Robin Hood
 - as a minimum, provide sufficient car parking facilities for current visitor numbers
 - model environmental and sustainable good practice in respect of the design, development and operation of the centre
 - allow for the accommodation of increased visitor numbers into the future.
- compliance with the Council's obligation to Natural England to remove the existing infrastructure from the National Nature Reserve (NNR).
- the provision of accommodation and equipment storage facilities for ranger and site management personnel and their equipment, including communication facilities
- the delivery of a significant medium/long term reduction in the level of revenue subsidy required of the Council for the operation of Sherwood Forest Country Park and Visitor Centre. Ideally, the Council wishes the site to be operated with no revenue budget subsidy.
- the establishment of effective and complementary arrangements for the long term operation of the Country Park's green space, including the retention of free public access.

Procurement Routes

6. To secure an appropriate partner, for a project of this nature, there are two usual methods of procurement:
- The first involves the Council setting out in great detail its requirements, with potential partners being asked to bid against a detailed specification for the contract. Whilst simpler, this limits the scope for true innovation from bidders.
 - The second is a procedure called Competitive Dialogue. This process allows for the final solution to be influenced by bidders during a process of dialogue with potential partners. It is this process that is being recommended as the most appropriate route for this project as it encourages potential partners to look for and identify more innovative solutions within the constraints of the capital costs and their projected revenues.

Soft Market Testing

7. The Council has met a number of potential partners over the summer period through a process known as “soft-market testing”. This market testing has demonstrated serious interest in the procurement process from potential partners, which come from a variety of organisational backgrounds.
8. The soft-market testing discussions have been positive in helping to shape the Council's overall approach to the process, its thinking about the procurement process to be followed and the timescales involved. For example, potential partners:
- wanted the Council to be clear about its broad requirements whilst giving them the opportunity to innovate
 - did not want an extended process of dialogue but for it to be focused so reducing the overall timescales and limiting the cost of bidding
 - wanted sufficient opportunities to explore their proposals with the Council before finalising them.
9. Potential partners have also stressed the importance of the Council contributing an appropriate level of capital funding to ensure the successful delivery of the project. The precise level of required capital funding will be confirmed through the procurement process. The evaluation criteria will give credit to bids that require lower levels of capital funding from the Council.

Proposed Timescales

10. The current project procurement timescales for the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre are shown in the table below.

Activity	Timescale
<i>Prior Information Notice (PIN) Stage</i>	August –November 2014
<i>Pre-Qualification Questionnaire (PQQ) Stage</i>	November – December 2014
<i>Outline and Detailed Solutions Stages</i>	January – April 2015
<i>Best and Final Offer Stage</i>	April – July 2015
<i>Formal award of contract</i>	July/ August 2015

Evaluation Criteria

11. It is proposed that the bids are evaluated on the basis of:
- The quality of the operational management and technical skills to deliver the proposal. This will carry a weighting of 55%.
 - The commerciality of the proposals in terms of deliverability and the best mix of capital/revenue up-front and ongoing costs to the Council. This will carry a weighting of 45%.

Capital Costs

12. The County Council is committed to the replacement of the current visitor centre facilities at Sherwood Forest and recognises that in order to achieve this objective a significant initial capital contribution will be required. The Council is confident that by working in partnership with a third party the project will benefit from other sources of capital funding that will either enhance or reduce the level of capital funding required from it. Weightings will be used during the assessment of bid solutions that support the Council to reduce both capital and ongoing revenue cost. An allocation of £4.3m is proposed to support the capital elements of the project. This figure includes the cost of demolition of the existing built infrastructure and reinstatement of the land within the NNR.
13. The capital programme currently contains an allocation of £1.836m of the £4.3m required. A further £2.464m of capital allocation for the project will be required. This will be subject to the normal corporate approvals.

Revenue Costs

14. The estimated costs that have been identified to support the procurement process are set out below:

Item	Cost
Internal and external legal advice	£75,000
External consultant support (leisure sector specialist)	£15,000
Actuarial reports, preparation and publication of tender documents, contingency	£5,000
Total	£95,000

15. External legal advice and sector specialist consultancy costs will be funded from the Council's Strategic Development Fund. Other costs will be met from within the Culture Committee's revenue budget.

Other Options Considered

16. Having ownership of suitable land adjacent to the forest, and a commitment to capital finance, it is conceivable that the Council could procure a solution to building and managing a new facility as an in-house operation.

17. However, recent soft market testing has indicated that a properly constructed procurement process is likely to be more successful in delivering the core requirement of the Council to replace the current outdated visitor centre and improve the overall visitor offer, as well as reducing long term revenue costs to the Council.

Reason/s for Recommendation/s

18. Procuring a third party partnership via a competitive tender process is the most cost effective and lowest risk option facing the Council to develop a new visitor centre at Sherwood Forest and operate the Park's green space into the future.

Statutory and Policy Implications

19. This report has been compiled after consideration of implications in respect of crime and disorder, finance, human resources, human rights, the NHS Constitution (Public Health only), the public sector equality duty, safeguarding of children and vulnerable adults, service users, sustainability and the environment and ways of working and where such implications are material they are described below. Appropriate consultation has been undertaken and advice sought on these issues as required.

Financial Implications

20. The financial implications are detailed in paragraphs 12 to 15.

Human Resources Implications

21. In the event of the Council procuring a managing partner for the new visitor centre and adjacent forest, relevant staff would be subject to TUPE considerations. The Council would comply with statute and its Human Resource policy framework in dealing with these considerations.

Implications for Service Users

22. The delivery of the Council's vision for the Centre will support increased customer numbers and enhance the customer experience significantly through the establishment of a range of new and enhanced facilities.

Implications for Sustainability and the Environment

23. The contractual arrangements envisaged by the Council will require its operating partner to ensure the effective management and conservation of the Park's green space. The replacement visitor centre will be required to embody best practice in terms of sustainable/environmental good practice building solutions.

RECOMMENDATION/S

That approval is given:

- 1) to procure a partner for the Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre and Country Park;;

- 2) for the project expenditure required to support the procurement process set out in paragraph 14.

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Constitutional Comments (initials SSR 13/10/14)

24. The Culture Committee may approve the recommendations set out in this report.

Financial Comments (SEM 30/09/14)

25. The financial implications are set out in the report.

Background Papers and Published Documents

Except for previously published documents, which will be available elsewhere, the documents listed here will be available for inspection in accordance with Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972.

Future of Sherwood Forest Visitor Centre – report to Culture Committee on 1 July 2014.

Electoral Division(s) and Member(s) Affected

All.

C0497