



REPORT TO EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO AREA: ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT AND ENTERPRISE

Date of Meeting: 17th December 2007

Public

Key Decision: Yes

Recorded in Forward Plan:

No

Inside/Outside Policy Framework

Title: POTENTIAL RELOCATION OF THE TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

Report of: Director of Development Services

Report reference: DS.128/07

Summary:

As part of the Council's budget considerations, officers have been requested to investigate the feasibility of relocating the Tourist Information Centre from its present site in the Old Town Hall into Tullie House. This preliminary report outlines the key issues and implications of such a move along with some indicative savings.

Recommendations:

That the Executive considers the implications set out in the report

Contact Officer: John Bell

Ext: 7160

Note: in compliance with section 100d of the Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 the report has been prepared in part from the following papers: None

1. **BACKGROUND INFORMATION**

- 1.1 The City Council runs two Tourist Information Centres (TICs), Carlisle at the Old Town Hall (open all Year) and Brampton at the Moot Hall (April to Oct) and makes a contribution to and provides information for Southwaite TIC on the M6. It operates and pays for a destination management system as required by Cumbria Tourism. The Carlisle operation is an award winning, officially networked information centre. It provides all the display space that is required for event advertising, the promotion of attractions, and of other UK destinations (all standard requirements of a networked TIC). It also provides Carlisle residents with a valuable source of information and services, ticketing, timetables, nationwide holiday information etc, in a central location at the heart of the pedestrian network.
- 1.2 The Old Town Hall also includes a meeting room facility at the Assembly Rooms. This is let out at a small charge, primarily to local interest groups and charitable organisations for meeting and fundraising events.
- 1.3 The Carlisle operation is an award winning, officially networked information centre. It has received very favourable comments in annual surveys of visitors. Whilst the Old Town Hall is in a superb location, operationally as an older building it has its limitations. As a Listed Building, potential for alterations is restricted and costly. Meeting the requirements of the Disability Discrimination Act has been a challenge and further work in this area would be desirable. The cost of running the building forms a significant proportion of the current tourism budget and the letting of the Assembly Rooms has not met the set income targets for some time, due to the quality of the space on offer.
- 1.4 Tourism makes a significant contribution to the Carlisle economy and enhancement of the opportunities in this sector is a key priority for Carlisle Renaissance. Although numbers visiting TICs nationally are declining on an annual basis, Carlisle does generate over 140,000 users per year. Information on the internet, on-line bookings and an increased availability of accommodation has reduced the need to visit TICs. But Cumbria Tourism and others in the industry favour the continuation of a face to face service and TICs still have a very important role to fulfil in promoting the visitor destination and its attractions, increasing lengths of stay and managing visitors' itineraries.
- 1.5 The Executive is considering a range of efficiency savings as part of the budget process for 2008/09 and beyond and it requested at its meeting on 28 November, more information on the potential to achieve savings in the Tourist Information

Service. This needs to be seen in the context of continuing to provide a high quality service to help boost tourism numbers and achieve the associated economic benefits. So officers have begun to consider whether it would be possible to maintain a good service in another location, achieve savings and upgrade the service operationally in potentially a more modern premises. The starting point is an examination of Council owned premises and particularly Tullie House, due to the synergy between the services offered and the opportunities associated with enhancing Carlisle's historic quarter. There may also be other locations to be examined in more detail.

- 1.6 To sustain the Tourist Information Service at its present level, savings would need to occur as a result of a reduction in the level of overheads, efficiencies in operation at an alternative premises and through the generation of income by a commercial letting of the upper floor of the Old Town Hall. The report also assumes that no alternative provision will be made for the loss of use of the Assembly Room.
- 1.7 This report brings more details as requested, but there is much work still to be done to develop a full business case for a move, should the Executive wish to pursue this further. To inform the discussion and assist debate, some of the issues raised by a potential move are set out in the following section, together with the opportunities presented by Carlisle Renaissance and a raised tourism profile for Carlisle.

2. CURRENT OPPORTUNITIES

- 2.1 The Carlisle TIC is in the process of receiving 'strategic' TIC status from Cumbria Tourism ('strategic' TIC's are the highest level of information provision within Cumbria, and will be eligible for capital grant assistance for improvements to their premises). Further clarification is being sought from Cumbria Tourism on the implications of this designation and an update will be given at the meeting.
- 2.2 The North West Development Agency is in early discussions with the Council about a potential bid to be one of 3 pilots in the North West to examine the potential for growth in the Visitor Economy.
- 2.3 The remit of the Carlisle Renaissance Historic Quarter study includes consideration of the needs for visitor reception within the Historic Quarter, together with opportunities to promote and interpret the historic quarter and the findings of that work will begin to emerge early in the new year. There are likely to be recommendations in the Study for enhancing the provision of visitor information.

- 2.4 The Council is working with Hadrian's Wall Heritage Ltd to explore opportunities to promote and interpret links to Hadrian's Wall in Tullie House and the wider City Centre.

3. ISSUES RELATING TO LOCATION AT TULLIE HOUSE

- 3.1 Tullie House has a visitor reception facility and a shop and there are opportunities to explore efficiencies and joint benefits arising from co-location. Shared use of premises will result in energy/maintenance savings. Visitors to each service may be encouraged to make more use of both the museum, shop and visitor information service.
- 3.2 Works are already planned for improvements to the Tullie House reception, to be undertaken in January/February and completed before the new tourism season. These do not take account of any co-location with the TIC and there is no current budget to cover any additional works. The costings report for any refitting for the TIC is attached as Appendix 1.
- 3.3 From a preliminary assessment, space currently available in Tullie House for the TIC's operational requirements appears to be limited. Space for the requisite displays/brochures/information/storage will be very limited, whilst space for a back office, and a meeting room is not available. A list of these required spaces/facilities/displays is attached as Appendix 2.
- 3.4 Space at the Old Town Hall is used to undertake the distribution function of the tourism service, eg enquiries for promotional literature generated through advertising and marketing campaigns are sent out via the TIC where there is space to do so. No such space appears to be available in Tullie House, so the work may need to be contracted out to a distribution company, incurring an additional cost.
- 3.5 If the TIC shop is to be retained there would need to be further changes in the Tullie House reception area, either identifying additional space or making different use of the space that exists. There is currently inadequate space for the two shops as they now exist so further work would be needed to assess this. Each shop has a different product range. If it cannot be accommodated the existing stock from the TIC would need to be disposed of and the cost would depend on the timing of disposal.
- 3.6 Currently, Tullie House is not as well located for a TIC as the Old Town Hall. Although it is better served by car parks and vehicle access it is more remote from

rail and bus stations and not as visible. There is already a recognition through the Carlisle Renaissance work that Carlisle's 'historic quarter' is under exploited and interpreted. As a result Tullie House appears relatively remote from the main retail area and its location is not obvious. This should improve significantly with the programmed work for Castle Street, and in time when the opportunities in the historic quarter are developed and the potential of the Castle is fully realised.

- 3.7 Cumbria Tourism recognises this present drawback and suggests that it would expect to see improved signage, prominent both inside and outside the building and throughout the city centre, in order to meet the partner/networking status. There would be a cost associated with this, which has not been budgeted for.
- 3.8 Cumbria Tourism also suggests that it is unlikely that a TIC relocated in Tullie House in the present circumstances would receive 'Strategic' status. It would however meet the criteria for becoming a 'destination' TIC, which would retain its networking and partnership status with CT and Visit Britain. The opportunity however to be one Cumbria's leading flagship TIC's now, (with an official 'Strategic' designation) would be lost along with the benefits of that. The discussions with Cumbria Tourism have been on an informal basis to date and they would need to be consulted formally on the budget proposals following any decision of the Executive. Any further comments received by the date of the Executive will be reported at the meeting.
- 3.9 Staffing issues will need detailed consideration as part of any further stage of work and when any actual proposals become clearer. There are two issues known now. One relates to different pay scales and conditions between Tullie House and TIC staff. The outcome of the Job Evaluation process and the implementation of the Pay and Workforce Strategy should clarify this. The second issue relates to opening hours and the hours which staff are currently contracted to work. This relates particularly to Sunday opening and would need to be resolved.

4. ALTERNATIVE USE OF THE OLD TOWN HALL

- 4.1 The Old Town Hall could be let for alternative uses. The listed building status, upgrading work required and poor DDA compliance would impact on the potential use and level of rental income. Any new use would be subject to planning Permission and Listed Building consent. Subject to such consents, there may be a market for A2 office use, such as estate agents, or A3 restaurant and café use. A1 retailing is unlikely due to the constraints of the building. There would also have to be a negotiation on the required refurbishments and any impact on rental income

that could be achieved in the short term. An estimate has been made on rental income but for commercial reasons is not set out in this report. However a broad estimate on the potential net savings is set out later in the report.

- 4.2 In a previous Charges Review report, the Council did give some initial consideration to an investment into the Old Town Hall and particularly the Assembly Rooms to enable wider use and an increase in potential income. This was not pursued at the time on cost grounds. There is still an option to explore beneficial, complementary uses and income generating opportunities to cover the cost of the investment but clearly this would have a longer timescale for implementation.

5. ALTERNATIVE LOCATIONS

- 5.1 At this stage no detailed work has been done on any alternative locations. The other Council owned option is the Civic Centre but at present there is no available space in a suitable location. Other locations would be on the basis of commercially rented premises or to co-locate with other organisations on a partnership arrangement.

6. ESTIMATED POTENTIAL SAVINGS

- 6.1 At this stage it is only possible to make outline estimates. On the basis of savings on overheads and a commercial letting of the Old Town Hall premises there could be a net saving of around £44,700 per annum. For 2008/09, it would be more realistic to assume a six months lead-in time to achieve a satisfactory letting. This would make the potential saving for 08/09 £32,000. This figure does not take into account the additional costs associated with works to Tullie House, additional signage, and the quick disposal of shop stock, which would be one off, and Sunday opening and operational costs such as distribution of documents, which would be recurring. All these will need to be investigated in more detail and will depend on the operation arrangements that could be agreed. Budget provision for these costs has not yet been identified.

7. OTHER KEY CONSIDERATIONS

- 7.1 It is essential that Carlisle TIC operates effectively as a networked facility so that it can continue in partnership with Visit Britain and Cumbria Tourism, thus enjoying their back up services. It must as such provide a quality information service for the public. This report highlights some of the key issues to move the debate forward but any potential to move to Tullie House needs significant further work to assess

both the practicality and the value for money of such a move, in the light of the potential savings to be made.

8. CONSULTATION

8.1 Consultation to Date.

Cumbria Tourism

8.2 Consultation Proposed.

Users of the Assembly Room

City Centre interest groups

Carlisle Tourism (Industry partnership)

Further discussions with Cumbria Tourism

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive considers the implications set out in the report

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

To assist the budget discussions

11. IMPLICATIONS

- Staffing/Resources – The implications of co-location will need further assessment
- Financial – The amount of £46k per annum from 2008/09 has been included as a recurring revenue saving in the Summary Revenue Estimates Report elsewhere on the agenda.
- Legal – n/a
- Corporate – Any co-location at Tullie House would require ongoing corporate working between Development Services and Community Services
- Risk Management – The report has set out some of the risks but a full analysis would be done as part of any business plan.
- Equality and Disability – There are practical difficulties and costs involved in making the Old Town Hall fully accessible

- Environmental – n/a
- Crime and Disorder – n/a
- Impact on Customers – The arrangements as discussed at present are likely to limit the potential to be a Strategic TIC. However customers at Tullie House could benefit from an enhanced service if facilities there were widened.

Requirements for TIC to Tullie House

- ❑ 4 Computer Spaces
- ❑ Booking area (Separate)
- ❑ 200 leaflet Spaces
- ❑ 100 UK brochure Spaces
- ❑ Counter space for display of Carlisle accommodation guides and ptv
- ❑ Store Cupboard to hold all leaflets/brochures
- ❑ Office for meetings /catching up (close to counter)
- ❑ Till area/ safe
- ❑ Large map area (close to counter)
- ❑ Fax machine/ photocopier space available
- ❑ Out of office area – Display of accommodation/maps/opening times/contact numbers
- ❑ Advertising boards for services available
- ❑ Wall space for awards
- ❑ Sales area ~ Walking books
- ❑ ~ Hadrains Wall
- ❑ ~ Carlisle Souvenirs
- ❑ End point of Cumbria way, space for walkers book
- ❑ Local events board/ local events leaflet racks
- ❑ Space for TV to show local films
- ❑ 2 spaces for touch screens
- ❑ Smiths Hotel advertising space
- ❑ Ibis Hotel advertising space

TULLIE HOUSE RECEPTION ALTERATIONS AND RELOCATION OF TOURIST INFORMATION CENTRE

Nov-07

No	ITEM DESCRIPTION	COST	COMMENTS	FUNDING
1	Carry out structural alterations to the existing partitions in the shop store area	£3,000	Out of normal hours work	Tullie
2	Carry out electrical and mechanical alterations to the existing partitions in the shop store area	£2,000	Out of normal hours work	Tullie
3	Manufacture and fit new reception desk to shop side of reception	£15,000	Out of normal hours work to fit new desk	Maintenance budget £5k, rest Tullie
4	Construct new ceiling bulkhead above desk	£1,500	Normal hours in screened off area	Tullie
5	Electrical and Mechanical alterations to reception desk area	£3,000	Out of normal hours work	Tullie
6	New carpet at new reception desk	£600	Normal hours in screened off area	Tullie
7	Alterations to shop display fittings	£1,000	Normal hours in screened off area	Tullie
8	Alterations to existing desk and transfer of ticket machines, PC's IT connections etc to new reception desk	£4,000	Out of normal hours work	Tullie / TIC
9	Alterations to baby change area / pram store room	£2,500	In progress	Maintenance budget
10	Re-locate safes from upper floor to cash-up room behind new reception desk	£500	Could be done between 8am and public opening	Tullie
11	Removal and re-location of TIC display equipment and furniture from the Old Town Hall	£3,000		TIC
12	Alterations to existing projector room to accommodate TIC information	£1,500	Normal hours in screened off area	TIC
13	Removal of existing shop counter including disposal and making good floor	£2,500	Normal hours in screened off area	Tullie / TIC
14	Lighting alterations to shop area	£2,000	Normal hours in screened off area	Tullie / TIC
15	IT / data alterations for TIC re-location	£10,000	Normal hours in screened off area	TIC
16	New signage - Tullie and TIC	£5,000	Out of normal hours work	Tullie / TIC
17	Alterations to storage areas to accommodate TIC literature etc	£500		TIC
		£57,600		
	Add 15% oncost and contingency	£66,240		
	Maintenance Budget	£7,500		
	Tullie / TIC	£58,740		