

COMMITTEE:	CABINET
DATE:	5th September 2002
SUBJECT:	Beachy Head Countryside Centre
REPORT OF:	Director of Tourism & Leisure
Ward(s):	All
Purpose:	To put forward proposals for the opening of Beachy Head Countryside Centre from October 1 st 2002.
Contact:	Keith Morrison Head of Tourism Development Telephone 01323 415430 or internally on extension 5430
Recommendations:	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. That the Council opens the Countryside Centre from 1st October 2002 to 30th March 2003 at weekends only 2. That the Council re-opens the Countryside Centre fully from 31st March 2003 to 30th September 2003. 3. That additional running costs not exceeding £3,750 be approved for the 2 months from 1st October 2002. 4. That the longer-term funding opportunities be approved for further investigation. 5. That the Countryside Centre be renamed 'The Beachy Head Countryside and Tourist Information Centre'.
1.0	<u>Introduction</u>

1.1	This report has been written further to a Cabinet Report from the Director of Tourism and Leisure dated 1 st July 2002.
1.2	The Beachy Head Countryside Centre is currently operated under lease to Whitbread Plc from the period 1 st June 2002 to 30 th September 2002.
1.3	The arrangement is an interim agreement until members have the opportunity to consider the operational arrangements for the Countryside Centre beyond the end of September 2002.
1.4	The Countryside Centre has a significant impact upon the operational viability of the Whitbread Brewers Fayre establishment at Beachy Head. The Countryside Centre opened during the winter for the first time in 2001, however it is considered desirable, from the perspective of tourism management, sustained partnerships and as a learning resource that the Countryside Centre should remain open, in some form, during the winter months for 2002 and beyond. It is therefore proposed for the 2002/2003 season that from October 1 st to March 30 th 2003 the centre opens at weekends only and re-opens fully on March 31 st 2003. The Councils Tourist Information Centre will oversee the Centre.
2.0	<u>The Countryside Centre's Potential</u>
2.1	The Countryside Centre is a unique resource as a visitor attraction offering many different tourist audiences a location from which to learn about and explore Beachy Head. The displays currently available are in need of both maintenance and a programme of replacement or renewal.
2.2	Whilst new exhibitions can be undertaken with local or regional partners, in order to maximise the visitor potential and visitor experience to the Countryside Centre, avenues for funding such a revamp should be explored.
3.0	Financial Implications 2002/2003 Opening

3.1	Estimates of operating costs for opening the Countryside Centre for 12 months from 1 st October 2002 are as follows :
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EXPENDITURE		INCOME	
£10,000	Staffing	£1,300	Donations
£1,750	Electricity	£1,300	Commission
£1,500	Repair & Maintenance	£29,000	Stock Sales
£ 200	Telephone		
£ 300	Volunteers		
£ 2,500	Advertising		
£1,750	Winter Weekend Opening		
£15,000	Stock		
£2,350	Rates		
Total: £35,350		Total: £31,600	
		Deficit: £3,750	

3.2

The above figures include the additional costs of winter weekend opening between 1st October 2002 and 30th March 2003.

3.3

The estimates are based on previous performance figures for income, but are viewed by officers as being realistic and a firm foundation upon which to base the running costs of the Countryside Centre.

3.4

Members should be aware that no budget exists for the running of the Countryside Centre. Approval to the recommendations will incur additional costs in the current year and in the next financial year.

3.5

It is possible that additional income at a minimal level can be generated through TIC booking services for accommodation and theatre sales and it is

3.6

In addition negotiations with Whitbread will take place during the last two weeks of August 2002 to investigate the potential for a financial contribution, as clearly the opening of the facility has an impact upon the neighbouring restaurant.

3.7

It is the intention to investigate other likely income sources for the Countryside Centre and Tourist Information Centre including the potential for selling local farm produce.

4.0

A Future Strategy

- 4.1 The Countryside & Tourist Information Centre has considerable future potential as a visitor and information resource. Research into sourcing funding and other partnerships to alleviate the annual funding issues over the centre and resolving the need to revitalise some of the exhibitions has lead to sustained dialogue with various outside bodies.
- 4.2 Initial investigations into other available funding sources have been encouraging, although it should be stressed that external funding may take some time.
- 4.3 Officers are now looking at potential bids using existing running cost with both the appropriate Lottery funds and the potential for projects within Interreg II or Interreg III and a further report will be presented when more information is known. Liaison with the County Council has been most productive with regards to developing bid information with the County Council having received similar funding for the Seven Sisters Centre.
- 4.4 In addition there have been external bodies expressing interest in leasing the Centre from the Council. Existing covenants within the lease from Whitbreads when coupled with the likely future implications of the National Park, concerns over maximising the future potential of the Centre as a visitor attraction, and the resulting limited return to Eastbourne Borough Council from such a partnership has resulted in plans for the Council to continue to operate the facility.

5.0 Human Resource Implications

- 5.1 There is some expenditure within the proposed budget to pay existing TIC staff to undertake a 'round robin' rota at the Countryside Centre and Tourist Information Centre.
- 5.2 It is important from the basis of requiring a knowledgeable & skilled staff that they are part of the broader TIC structure, capable of handling detailed local based enquiries. It is because of the wish to ensure consistent customer care that our skilled TIC staff provide the staffing resource.

5.3 The Centre has enjoyed a close relationship with various volunteers whose specialist knowledge of wildlife, flower and fauna is usually exceptional. It is envisaged that this relationship will remain and be built upon in tandem with the professional staff employed at the Centre.

6.0 Conclusion

6.1 The budget proposals and outside financial support have allowed a solution to be proposed which ensure that the Beachy Head Countryside Centre can remain open 12 months of the year, all be it at weekends only in the shoulder and winter months.

6.2 Officers are continuing to investigate other funding potential beyond 2003 utilising any suitable external funding with a view to writing a business plan and development strategy that maximises the Centre's potential for residents and visitors.

6.3 It is thought that the funding model for 2002/03 season, if successful can be used annually until further funding opportunities are clarified.

R. G. CUSSONS

DIRECTOR OF TOURISM & LEISURE

Background Papers

Cabinet Report from the Director of Tourism & Leisure, dated

1st July 2002.

Temporary Licence Whitbread Breweries Plc 2002

Original Lease Whitbread Breweries Plc 1993

To inspect or obtain copies of background papers, please contact

Keith Morrison on 01323 415430.