

Agenda Item No:

Report No:

Report Title: Shared Services : 37 Church Street, Seaford

Report To: Cabinet

Date: 6 June 2007

Lead Councillor: Councillor David Gray

Ward(s) Affected: All Seaford Wards

Report By: Director of Finance and Community Services

Contact Officer(s): John Magness

Purpose of Report:

To update Cabinet on the progress of the project and to seek a further contribution of £40,000 towards the project cost.

Officers Recommendation(s):

- 1 That a further £40,000 be allocated towards the project cost subject to Seaford Town Council confirmation that it will agree to accept the devolution of the ground floor of the Crypt building for use as a community arts and events venue on the basis outlined in this report.
 - 2 That Cabinet asks the Devolution Committee to take forward the outline proposal for Devolution of The Crypt to Seaford Town Council as set out in paragraph 3.7. and to report back with a detailed analysis and proposal of how this can be achieved.
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Reasons for Recommendations

- 1 Cabinet has identified this innovative project with the Seaford Town Council, Sussex Police, Citizens Advice Bureau and the Tourist Information Centre as a priority for service improvement in Seaford.

1 Background

- 1.1 Existing data shows that of the 5,825 face to face enquiries handled by the Town Council during 2006/2007, 50% were referred on to East Sussex County Council and 30% on to Lewes District Council. Combining existing resources will mean that more enquiries can be dealt with at the point of contact, rather than being referred onwards, particularly if East Sussex County Council can be represented in the Centre.
- 1.2 In 2006/2007 the Seaford Tourist Information centre handled 3,000 telephone/email enquiries and 20,500 face to face enquiries. The aim

from a raised profile of the new centre is to attract an additional 10% of visitor enquiries.

- 1.3** By pooling resources the Centre will be open longer due to better reception cover within the building.
- 1.4** Having one centre with greater capacity will also enable consistent levels of service to be provided during holiday periods. The centre should also be able to cope with additional enquiries about the national bus pass scheme due to be implemented from April 2008. Seaford has one of the highest national ratios of retired citizens within its population and many pop into the TIC or Town Council to enquire about bus passes.
- 1.5** The District Council policy is to use Tourism as a catalyst to support the local economy. The opportunity to make greater use of the Crypt as a community and arts venue will help maintain and attract greater visitor numbers to support business in the town centre. The town centre faces strong competition from out of town retail sites and attracting additional footfall via attractions such as the Crypt is essential to maintain a vital and viable town centre. .

2 Information

- 2.1** This project will secure the provision of a multi agency information point and public meeting place for the citizens of Seaford through improved working arrangements between public sector bodies and the voluntary sector.
- 2.2** The Police Station is at 37 Church Street and will bring together the first multi agency service point in the UK that combines the local Policing team, three tiers of local authority, a Tourist Information Centre, the local Citizens Advice Bureau and the Towns Neighbourhood Watch coordinator.
- 2.3** It will enable the partners to relocate to the Seaford Police Station in order to share resources and achieve better value for money than can be currently secured from existing arrangements.
- 2.4** The project secures the Council's earlier commitment to retain the Tourist Information Service in Seaford and to address the accommodation needs of the CAB office in Seaford, which is located adjacent to the police station in the front part of a modern building that was built by the Council to incorporate and protect the historic Crypt Scheduled Ancient Monument. The building is owned by the District Council and the back part is a successful art gallery.
- 2.5** With the CAB moving from its office in the Crypt building this will provide an opportunity to the District and Town Council to discuss devolution of this local historic asset to the Town Council. This could add to the Town Council's portfolio of devolved assets following its achievement of quality council status. Local ownership and community management of assets is an innovation promoted by the Government. The discussion will

incorporate a review of the whole gallery and office space at the back including ways to improve access as required by the Disability Discrimination Act. This could then enable the ground floor space to provide a much improved venue in Seaford's town centre for community and cultural events and exhibitions.

- 2.6** The project feasibility study commenced in December 2005 when Chief Inspector Bob Gough approached the local authorities in the Lewes District area to explore his vision for a multi agency service provided from the Seaford Police Station. At that time police forces were being encouraged by Government to revitalise neighbourhood policing through the "Pathfinder" approach and this drove Inspector Gough's vision. A project team was initiated in March 2006 and has met 10 times. Subject to finance the project is ready to start with the building conversion works and then live running from December 2007.
- 2.7** All participating organisations have been involved with designing the internal layout and have signed off their requirements.
- 2.8** The project was discussed during consultation with the 2007/2008 Council Tax focus groups and was favourably received.
- 2.9** The Seaford Neighbourhood Watch has advised its 5,000 members about the project and supports it.
- 2.10** The Town Council, District Council and Police Authority have all formally considered reports on the project.
- 2.11** The local MP (Norman Baker) has met with the Chief Constable. The East Sussex County Council Chief Executive has met with Town Council representatives to discuss the merits of the project.
- 2.12** The Town Council has obtained competitive tenders using the East Sussex County Council tender procedures. The lowest tender is acceptable and the price remains valid for three months.
- 2.13** Subject to securing the remaining funding the project is ready to commence.
- 2.14** Any revenue savings generated from efficiencies will be reinvested in this project.
- 2.15** Seaford Tourist Information Centre's last day of opening to the public at the office that we lease at 25 Clinton Place will be Saturday 16th June 2007.
- 2.16** The TIC will transfer to a portable office at the rear of the Crypt gallery until 35 Church Street is converted. We will endeavor to minimise any gap between the two events.

3 Key Terms of the Agreement

- 3.1 The Town Council has initiated and taken the lead role in this project. It has undertaken extensive negotiations with the Sussex Police Authority and held regular meetings with the partners. The terms of the arrangement are set out below and were considered by Cabinet on 18 October 2006
- A 20-year lease with a break clause at 10 years for either party (Seaford Town Council and Sussex Police Authority).
 - £15,000 rental per annum for the first 5 years, the rental thereafter to be in line with RPI.
 - A normal landlord and tenant lease, non-repairing in favour of the Town Council.
 - The first 6 months rent free, valued at £7,500
 - After 10 years the Sussex Police Authority reserves the right to charge rent in accordance with the District Valuer's view at that time.
 - That the Town Council is responsible for payments of Non Domestic Rates, Gas, Electricity, Water, cleaning and any other services within their portion of the building, which includes accommodating the Tourist Information Centre. Lewes District Council will contribute £4,000 per year (inflation linked) towards these costs.
 - That the Town Council invests at least £60,000 towards the refurbishment of the reception and first floor areas being occupied.
 - That Lewes District Council invests at least £55,000 towards the refurbishment of the old cellblock area and toilets for the Citizens Advice Bureau and contributes £4,000 per annum towards the rent and fully serviced accommodation for the Tourist Information Centre.
 - The Citizens Advice Bureau will occupy their premises rent free for the duration of the 20 year lease.
- 3.2 The Town Council would be the lessee with Sussex Police Authority and there will be subleases for parts of the building to the Citizens Advice Bureau and Lewes District Council.
- 3.3 A sum of up to £10,000 will be required for the Tourist Information Service to cover moving costs and setting up costs in the Police Station.

4 Financial Appraisal

- 4.1 After evaluation and negotiated adjustments the lowest tender received by the Town Council for the building works amounted to £205,000. Professional Fees for the project at £18,000 bring the total capital cost to £223,000.
- 4.2 The committed funding amounts to £137,500, being £65,000 Lewes District Council and £72,500 Seaford Town Council.
- 4.3 The Funding shortfall is currently £85,500 and has mainly arisen from the complexity (mechanical and ventilation services) of converting the former cell blocks into office accommodation for the CAB.
- 4.4 A funding application was made to the Sussex Innovation Fund towards the balance, but was not successful.
- 4.5 The Seaford Town Council will meet in June 2007 to consider how much of the shortfall it can meet.
- 4.6 The Town Clerk has asked whether the District Council would reconsider its contribution now that the tenders have been received.
- 4.7 If Cabinet is minded to consider a further contribution it may wish to link this to a devolution opportunity for Seaford Town Council to assume ownership of The Crypt.
 - 4.7.1 The terms of the devolution opportunity could be designed to achieve a broadly cost neutral position for the next three years by cash limiting the District Council's contribution at current budgeted levels. The District Council would be willing to run the service on a day to day basis on behalf of the Town Council.
 - 4.7.2 The inflation increase needed for future years by the Town Council could be met by the Town Council from additional business generation opportunities once the CAB vacates its space at the rear of the Crypt.
 - 4.7.3 The financial arrangement from year 4 onwards would be designed to reflect Town Council ownership of the asset and service. This could be achieved by tapered financial support from the District over that period. The District would remain willing to run the service for the Town Council if it so wished.
- 4.8 The Local Authority Business Growth Incentive Fund currently has an uncommitted balance of £45,671 and could be used to provide the additional contribution if Cabinet was so minded.

5 Environmental Implications

- 5.1 I have completed the Environmental Implications Questionnaire and there are no significant effects as a result of these recommendations.

6 Risk Management Implications

6.1 Details of the risk analysis undertaken prior to the project's initiation, and measures in place to monitor and manage any risks are shown below:

Risk	Mitigation
Support for the project and services	Views of the public, local Chamber of Commerce and local organisations prior to committing to the project
Something is overlooked	Use Lewes District Council's checklist for decision makers to ensure that all basic aspects are covered
The tender exceeds the available funding	Engage an Architect early on to produce an indicative cost estimate and plan the funding on that basis
	Consider a phased approach to the capital works
	Identify additional funding sources
	Engage with the contractor to see what ideas he may have to reduce costs
	Abort the project
Unforeseen problems arise during the conversion works	Include a contingency in the project cost
	Assess the implications of encountering asbestos
	Locate the original building control plans to determine construction obstacles
VAT complications associated with exempt supplies	Seek VAT advice and obtain confirmation from the local VAT Inspector to the proposed accounting treatment
The target move date is delayed	Prepare interim plans
Uncertainty over pooled budgets	Put in place a legal agreement between the participating organisations
The objectives fail to be achieved	Determine the current baseline position so that performance can be measured following the projects implementation.

7 Background Papers

7.1 Cabinet report 18 October 2006.

8 Appendices

8.1 None.