

Partnership Committee

Date: 23 October 2014

Title: TEMPORARY BEACH EVALUTION

Purpose of the Report: To provide the Committee with an evaluation in respects of the perceived added value that the temporary beach afforded the town centre.

Contact Officer: Jo Martindale, Partnership Officer

1. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1.1 That within its budget for the Financial Year 2015/2016, a total of £35,000 be identified for the purposes of supporting permanent attractions within Parsons Close Recreation Ground.

Should the Partnership Committee be minded to support recommendation 1.1:-

- 1.2 That attraction options (to include a business case and other likely funding streams) be brought to Partnership Committee for consideration as soon as practicable.

2. BACKGROUND

- 2.1 As part of the 2014 Summer Programme, a temporary beach was introduced to compliment the Splash and Play, Skate Park and recreational activities in Parsons Close.
- 2.2 It was considered that the proposal would offer “added value” by way of being sustained and accessible throughout the summer when compared to a single one-off event which has been offered in previous years.
- 2.3 Given the position of Parson’s Close to the High Street, it was also considered that the beach would provide a tourist attraction for both parishioners and visitors and help contribute to the town centre offer.
- 2.4 The beach was erected on 5th June and gave a 17m x 20m sand area with an additional 3m in length for a decking.
- 2.5 The beach was open to the public from 7th June to 7th September; opening times 10am-5pm 7 days a week.

2. DELIVERY AND SET UP

2.1 Building and Dismantling

Initial concerns over the potential for cross-contamination of sand with the Splash and Play and damage being caused were managed by opting for a heavy-weight sand which is proven to stick less to the skin thus reducing cross contamination. This also meant that weather conditions would cause less of an impact on the Beach experience. On-going monitoring was required with the potential to install a sediment trap if needed.

Placement of the beach and its proximity to the Splash & Play was therefore an important consideration. The entrance was directed away from the Splash & Play to maximise the distance between the two sites and prevent sand transfer. In addition, the placement took into account the need to prevent tree sap falling into the sand. This meant that the beach was placed slightly further towards the back of the park than originally planned and the benefit of shade being provided by the trees was lost. The provision of shade was raised in user feedback forms.

The Environment Agency was contacted to ensure there were no potential issues to consider regarding the water table and ground levels. The Agency confirmed their support with this year's beach projects and asked to be made aware of future projects.

Three contractor vans were onsite during set up and access was via Grove Road. Feedback was that this caused distress for some Grove Road residents. Having learnt from this, prior notification of the dismantle date was posted to all residential properties in Grove Road.

Project management of the Beach included the input of several council officers throughout its operation. To coordinate activity and responsibilities, a management information document was created which also gave detailed duties and instructions should cover be required. Unlike one-off events therefore, a sustained impact on the wider council services was experienced.

3. BEACH MANAGEMENT

3.1 STAFFING

The volume of applicants for the Beach Attendant posts was low which was of initial concern yet three Beach Attendants were recruited. Attendants worked a shift pattern sharing 63 operational hours (inclusive of preparation and cleaning). Their remit was to assist with splash & play and general park

duties. Hourly inspections and headcounts were carried out 4 times a day, and they were expected to record these attendance figures and distribute evaluation forms.

Attendants were also responsible for delivering beach activities, e.g. sand castle competitions every Sunday afternoon, mini beach-football games and volley ball equipment was in place though was not fully used due to staffing issues.

Beach Attendants received training on Manual Handling, Safety Awareness and Conflict Management as well as Splash & Play and parks duties. Uniforms were provided as well as sun protection lotion.

A number of staffing issues resulted in a call for wider Council staff team involvement to provide cover on an ad hoc basis thus putting a strain on the Council's resources during a traditionally low staffing period of annual leave. It also reduced our ability to regularly collect user data, e.g. visitor numbers. To manage this, facility protocols for cleaning were amended without causing a threat to users.

Managing staffing attendance therefore incurred additional cost to the Parks and Market staffing budgets whilst much of the substantive staff member's time given to the Beach remains a hidden cost. An estimate for the latter is added to the budget totals. This was an important learning point and it would be essential to research alternative options for managing any future temporary facility before committing to a project similar in nature.

3.2 SIGNAGE AND PUBLICITY

Signage included rules of the beach, emergency contact information, event publicity, health and safety and social media information. Plus signage boards with the beach logo and town council logo was also designed for the exterior walls. Both these signs cost in the region of £1,200.

A number of new temporary 'brown' directional signs were placed at sites in and around the town and accompanied the new Splash & Play signage as supported by the signage strategy. Feedback suggested that the signage type needed to be altered to differentiate between directional walking/cycling routes and vehicle routes to avoid vehicles being miss directed to short-term or limited parking bays. Web page information included the post code for Duncombe Drive car park to counteract this issue. Long-term signage for the Splash & Play will be altered and future temporary signage will use learning from this project. Future projects will also make use of the multi-story car park option in order to encourage visitors to visit the town centre too.

Publicising the Beach and the two party events (opening beach party and a themed pirate's party) incorporated the production of banners, a two sided leaflet that also advertised the early Big Lunch event, posters, press releases, information to schools, Council web pages and Facebook and relevant publications.

The cost of publicity came to approximately £1000. On evaluation from the feedback forms we asked users where they heard about the beach, the most effective was through word of mouth with 29% followed by online promotions at 26%. Nearly 30% was divided between posters, banners and press advertising. Others included school leaflets, visiting splash and play and through the brown tourism 'Beach' signs.

The two events served the purpose of launching and publicising the Beach and reminding residents and visitors of its presence in the park midway through the summer season. The cost of running these two events and providing free activities to the public was approximately £5,000.

A further £800 was put towards the hire of Deckchairs which contributed to the two non-Council events which utilised Parsons Close Recreation Grounds whilst it was on site, i.e. Carnival on July 12th and SAAFA Armed forces day on June 22nd.

3.3 OPENING TIMES AND USES

The beach was open to the public from 10am-5pm this allowed for set up duties at the start of the day and similar to that of the evening. It was initially thought that a beach attendant would be required throughout the day and onsite at all times as this was a new venture and to monitor and supervise and also be on hand to the public needs. It is now thought that a beach of this size may not necessarily justify round the clock monitoring and should the project be repeated would be something we would need to consider. It was vital however that the beach was raked and prepared at the beginning and end of each day.

Local schools and community groups expressed an interest in hiring the Beach as did residents. A private hire time was set up from Monday to Friday 10am to midday. Ensuring its availability in the afternoon would reduce disappointment if only one day was available for people to visit the Beach. By limiting the time and promoting the calendar online users were able to check and ensure the beach was available when planning their visit. The private hire was enjoyed by local schools in the term time, PTA Groups, Special need children's groups and the elderly care home.

Interest was also received from local community groups for evening hire, however without the manpower available (budget limitations) in the evenings and toilet facilities being locked at these times, we were unable to accommodate the requests. This also applied to private birthday parties however we did offer the private hire time to those who were able to have their functions during the same morning period, 10am-12pm.

3.4 LITTERING AND FOULING

In general, the level of litter was minimal within the boundary of the Beach. The occasional tin can and take-away food wrapper was found and easily removed. One report of dog fouling was recorded however nothing major was

reported by the public or from the hourly inspections taken by the Beach Attendants. The affected area was treated with disinfectant and sand removed. The sand was raked morning and evening as part of the Attendant's duties and all items found were recorded in the 'day-book'.

The instigation of regular monitoring and recording was beneficial to the Council as unfounded community based Facebook chatter was quashed by providing information to the public about the cleaning and inspection regime.

Additional bins were placed around the Beach and user feedback suggests that the noticeable presence of the Attendants was appreciated partly for maintaining the site.

3.5 VANDALISM

Initially the Beach received some negative attention, i.e. graffiti and unauthorised out-of-hours use. Proactive use of CCTV and the call-in of PCSO's to provide additional patrols had a significant impact and seemed to dramatically deter any major vandalism to the beach. The local Police had been informed of the project earlier in the year to allocate time to patrol the Beach utilising the local Dodford agreement, funded by the Town Council.

Lockable gates were installed which saw continuous damage with locks being broken. A drop lock (into the decking floor) was put in by the contractor on 12th June which didn't deter people from getting in but locks were not broken on a daily basis. The beach hut perspex window was also damaged and replaced at this time. The beach hut was moved away from the side walls to prevent further damage and nothing was stored in the hut over night.

Within the first week of opening, graffiti was on the exterior walls. A talented local graffiti artist was commissioned paint themed artwork on the outside of the beach which incurred additional expenditure. Local schools were also invited to add additional artwork to the inner walls of the beach. This stopped the graffiti.

4. COST

Set up costs to deliver the Temporary Beach = £29,460 Economic Development Budget (4570/504)

Additional Staffing costs to include parks maintenance functions and beach supervision = £5,600 (met through Grounds Budget)

Total Cost = £35,060

5. EVALUATION

The original rationale for delivering the Beach was to add value to the Town's offer by way of providing a sustained and accessible leisure facility throughout the summer. Given the proximity of Parson's Close to the High Street, it was

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considered close enough to the town centre to encourage local and visitor spending in the town.

The additional aim was to test the value of undertaking such a project against delivering one-off community events as previously done in the heart of the Town to encourage the same interest in visiting and spending money.

The evaluation for this project incorporates:

- i. Attendant's recorded data using 'clicker-counters', day-book logs, etc.
- ii. Simple feedback forms asking about user's age, post code detail, etc.
- iii. Feedback from users via facebook, Twitter feeds and letters/articles published in the local press.
- iv. Anecdotal feedback from Officers, Beach users, local group representatives and town centre businesses.
- v. Officer delivery-group assessments relating to delivering and management of the project.

Information suggests that the primary beneficiaries were local parishioners with the majority of users from LU7 & LU5 postcodes with an increasing number from surrounding villages and neighbouring towns such as Milton Keynes. Over half of the visitors were from Leighton and Linslade and surrounding areas with the second highest volume of visitors from Luton and Dunstable closely followed by Milton Keynes and Bletchley. In addition, visitors from further afield included Buckinghamshire, Hertfordshire and the furthest being Bournemouth

Anecdotal information suggests that it provided family group attendance, e.g. wider family members and friends opted to visit relations in Leighton Buzzard because the Beach provided a place to visit and a leisurely occupation for all members with a picnic and children's facilities.

When we introduced the additional question into the feedback form in August we asked users if they had visited the town and if they had brought anything. From the 50 people surveyed 68% of people had indeed visited to the town with 82% of them purchasing something from a local retailer. Where this is only a small sample from the results it does clearly indicate that three quarters of users during this time did take time to visit the town.

Further questions were also asked:

Would you return to the beach?

Would you recommend the beach and

Were you satisfied with your visit to the beach.

We were pleased to receive 100% positive feedback on all three questions.

A scoring system was also in place (Poor, Good and very good) to rate the following:

	VERY GOOD	GOOD	POOR
Sand cleanliness	86%	14%	
Friendly staff	77%	22%	1%
Staff appearance	69%	30%	1%
Information available	53%	40%	7%
Activities	64%	30%	6%

On using this data officers are mindful that some of the above monitoring was not sustained because of staffing difficulties, feedback form quantities offer a 'sample' of views and amendments were made to the feedback forms halfway through the season to include questions about visits to the town centre. The bulk of the amended feedback forms were received on one day, the Pirate's Party event, offering a snap-shot of views. That said, information gleaned is valuable in that it offers a statistical picture of how the Beach was received and used.

Comments on the feedback forms include:

“ Very good we need one in Milton Keynes”

“Great for all ages” “Love this town, we are lucky to have super facilities for children”

“Beach is wonderful that you have funded this year. My family love it. The council deserves positive recognition, thank you for all the events throughout the year it makes our town a bright place to live”

“Kids loved the beach, clean sand. Needs painted walls. Needs a coffee shop in park and sale of buckets and spades. Will be back”

“The beach is a great idea, clean and well maintained. Shame there's nothing similar in Aylesbury”

“Elderly holiday went down well. Need beach bowls, deckchairs and ice cream for the elderly”

“Best thing this town has spent money on, hope it comes back”

“Good amenities - need food and drink available. S&P and beach together great idea - same again next year”

“Seating for parents needed, Can't see children with the high walls”

Additional information may also be forthcoming through the Residents Survey which took place in the town towards the end of the season and officers are waiting to receive this.

6. CONCLUSION

Given that the two main aims were to:

- a) “..offer “added value” by way of being sustained and accessible throughout the summer when compared to a single one-off event and which has been offered in previous years.” and
- b) use Parsons Close Recreation Ground as a delivery venue due to its proximity to the town centre so “the beach would provide a tourist attraction for both parishioners and visitors and help contribute to the town centre offer” ,

The assessment is that that the Beach achieved the sustained added value of a service beyond one day event delivery. The quantity of figures attending this seasonal attraction is estimated to be well beyond the attendance of a one off event, e.g. repeat visits were recorded.

Similarly, feedback would suggest that the Beach did prove a tourist attraction. It provided a message that Leighton Buzzard is a place to visit where things happen; a destination. Visitors came from surrounding villages and towns including, Bletchley, Milton Keynes and the Luton/Dunstable areas. Verbal and anecdotal feedback provide that family days out took place with visiting siblings using the Beach as a destination and when a picnic was incorporated, the visits were sustained.

There appears to be little doubt that the Town’s parishioners enjoyed and used the Beach. The existing facilities in Parsons Recreation Ground were ideally complemented by the Beach. There were evident social benefits, e.g. free access to services, family life and broadening of children’s’ play experiences.

There may not be a sufficient body of evidence to confidently gauge the level of financial income value the Beach offered the town and in truth the level of research required is beyond town council resources. The suggestion is that there will have been additional awareness raising of the town offer towards securing additional expenditure.

The beach proved to be more labour intensive then originally anticipated therefore it cost more to deliver and placed a strain on the Council’s staffing capacity.

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