

Cultural and Economic Services Committee

Date: 24 February 2020

Title: General Service Updates

Purpose of the Report: To inform Committee of work activity

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Corporate Objective/s		
LLTC Three Year Plan – Aim: 2 – Action No. 26 – to consider ways to support the increase in leisure and personal development opportunities for youth, incorporating ongoing feedback from young people and considering suitability of delivery locations for youth work.		
Implications:		
Financial		
Human Resources		
Operational/Service delivery	√	General update information
Procedural/Legal		
Risk/Health and Safety		

1. RECOMMENDATION

Should members be minded:

1.1 To note the report.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 The activities and responsibilities of the Cultural and Economic Service (C&E) are broad and diverse. Below are brief updates on service activity to round-up the end of the financial year and inform Committee of projects completed and ongoing.

3 INFORMATION

3.1 Buzzard Trails

3.1.1 Living History Trail was successfully launched in October 2019 using the digital platform of a mobile phone app. Subsequently, The Children's Trail has also been added to the app. with the launch anticipated for spring 2020.

3.1.2 By February 2020, Buzzard Trails app. had been downloaded **414** times (as also reported to Policy & Finance Committee on 24/02/20), an estimated average over a 4-month period of 100+ times a month/ 25+times a week.

3.1.3 Future development of the app. will focus on interpreting “The Sands of Time Trail” in a further user-friendly format. It is hoped that working with the Greensand Trust and local business, maximum exposure can be afforded to the importance of sand to local biodiversity and business prosperity.

3.2 Town Centre Wi-Fi

3.2.1. At the time of drafting this report, Wi-Fi registrations totalled **352** from 2 January to 23 February. This averages out at 50 registrations a week or, 6 per day.

3.2.2 Of 352, 143 have given marketing consent. Direct marketing is an additional method for reaching our town visitors and at present will focus on community messages from the Council. Officers have received training on using the promotional tools yet first needed to wait for the contractor to set up the anonymous list of contacts - the Council does not hold people’s personal details. Over the next months, messages will begin to be sent.

3.2.3 During the set-up period, officers were contacted by the Friendly Wi-Fi consortium inviting the Council to register directly to be an approved Friendly Wi-Fi provider. This involves an annual licence fee. Friendly Wi-Fi status means that we actively block web sites considered inappropriate for child protection, gambling, etc. reasons. Whilst our chosen contractor facilitates this ‘gate-keeping’ approach, as the commissioning organisation, the Council is required to be the ‘approved’ organisation.

3.2.4 There are currently 4 Wi-Fi points active in the town to facilitate connections - Lake, Bridge, High Streets and Market House. The 5th will be installed in North Street once a lamp column has been replaced. Officers understand that the principal authority’s contractor is currently working in the town addressing street lighting issues and the work is due to be completed by the end of March 2020.

3.3 Town Centre Geo-Sense – footfall monitoring

3.3.1 There are 4 active Geo-Sensors coexisting with the Wi-Fi equipment. As per para. 3.2.4, the 5th sensor will be installed in due course. The count of visitors is secured by the sensors tracking WiFi enabled devices thus also being able to recognise a single device. This allows recognition for visits (repeats or otherwise), how long the device is present within the town - dwell time, when entry to the town is made and where. No personal details are collected or held.

3.3.2 Between the period of activation, 2 January to 23 February 2020 (nearing 7 weeks) ,**212,716** visitors had visited the town (the count area). Of that figure, 116,456 are repeat visitors (54.7%) with the remaining, 96,260 (43.3%), being new visitors.

3.3.3 This will be the baseline year using this system. Officers have inputted specific dates of interest into the Geo-Sense calendar to allow comparisons, e.g. market days and event days. Over the next few months officers will be able to observe regular activity, trends and peaks, to aid the Council, its

partners, e.g. Central Bedfordshire Council as the principal authority, and local businesses' understanding of the town centre usage.

3.4 Town Centre Shopping and Service Directory

3.4.1 In February 2020, officers gratefully received a volunteer's assistance to review the data used to publish the Town Centre Shopping and Service Guide, and Map. Committee had previously endorsed the use of earmarked reserves to fund the publication which is refreshed bi-annually (Ref. 38/CE). At the time of drafting this report, officers were pursuing quotes for the printing of the document.

3.5 Architectural Lighting

3.5.1 Officers have been securing landlord confirmations and more pertinently, the principal authority's confirmation of planning processes required. The latter was nearing resolution at the time of writing this report. In addition, officers have been finalising final cost estimates to share with the principal authority to draw down the final elements of their grant funds.

3.5.2 All Saints Church are currently securing diocese consent for works. Progress with the old gas showroom has been difficult and there is a possibility that this element of the project will not be achieved. As previously discussed with Committee, alternative places are being explored to light up and ensure utilisation of the grant is achieved.

3.6 Electronic signage

3.6.1. The day to day use of the signage is now coordinated through the Corporate Governance and Central Services administration team with all staff completing social media plans to advise the team when information is to be circulated.

3.6.2 The maintenance of the equipment remains the responsibility of C&E services. Regretfully, two signs have incurred faults over recent months. The Town Council has been reliant upon the principal authority to assist access and management of electricity connections. This has caused frustration in securing prompt diagnosis and correction of the faults. Officers have now received positive contact from the principal authority in terms of addressing this matter.

3.7 Pigeon Management

3.7.1 Much work needs to be undertaken. Officers have been contacting individual premises to gain interest in working collaboratively with the council. It is not unexpected that retailers do not necessarily wish to allow access to rooftops or want pigeons to gather on their premises. Officers will bring a report to the next committee with an alternative delivery project should meaningful progress have not been achieved.

3.8 Section 106 approved projects

3.8.1 Wi-Fi - as per para. 3.2 above.

3.8.2 Christmas Tree – transfer completed. The surface of the new ground fixing hole for the tree still needs to be finished and guaranteed dry weather is needed before this can be completed. Officers are exploring alternative uses for the ground fixing when not being used for the tree. One idea is to erect a pole and have guy-ropes leading off it like a tee-pee for flags to be hung from, see example image. Additional work will need to come from the Town Council's budgets.



3.8.3 Bell Alley - quotes are being invited for refreshed surfacing of the alley way. Once secured, officers will need to liaise with the principal authority to confirm release of funding prior to the Town Council agreeing with the contractor to commence work. As the area has several retailers, careful planning of work and delivery dates will be needed to minimise interruption to businesses.

3.8.4 Road barriers – officers are liaising with the principal authority on this matter.

3.9 Promotion Activity

3.9.1 Committee will be aware that the service promotes all the Council's events and activities within the town. As previously discussed with committee, event sponsorship is invited linked to promotion opportunities. The 2020 invite leaflet to sponsor events has been produced and is being circulated. In 2019, the service realised approximately £1,775 of sponsorship:

- ✓ Business Network; 5 x £150 = £750
- ✓ Canal Festival; 1 x £500 = £500
- ✓ Christmas; 1 x £375 & 1 x £150 = £525

3.9.2 The service also leads on the editing and publication of the Council's About Town newsletter. Over recent editions, the feature, 'Focus On' has promoted the town centre shopping offer. This feature is written by a local retailer who voluntarily drafts each copy. Interestingly, in writing about different areas of the town, the retailer has commented on how much is here that he did not know about. It's a very telling comment. The articles aim to inform all.

3.9.3 In addition and on an annual basis, the service also ensures that the town is promoted nationally in the CDC Tourism Yearbook known as the "definitive planning directory for the coach tourism industry." Coach businesses do not tell the Council if they arrange visits however through opportune moments, we learn about a coach trip having taken place. It is important therefore that the town is kept 'on the map'.

3.10 Liaison with Town Centre retailers

3.10.1 Over this financial year, the Federation of Small Businesses held their first Special Interest Group. The aim being to galvanise local businesses to work collaboratively between themselves and the local authorities to secure investment for the town centre as well as ongoing support to maintain its vitality and viability. The group has engaged in recent benchmarking and public feedback forums and the aim will be for an improved ongoing liaison between the group and the Town Council.

3.11 Community Defibrillators

3.11.1 The Council is fortunate in having a reliable volunteer who is a Community First Responder who regularly checks the defibrillators (defibs). He has also agreed to undertake checks of the newest defib. located at Connells House Hockliffe Street, which was a collaboration between Connells, The Hockliffe Street Baptist Church, Ark House Vets and the Town Council.

3.12 Public Convenience (Multi-Storey Car Park)

3.12.1 Following its meeting on 09/12/19 (Ref. 37/CE) and having secured endorsement from Policy and Finance Committee (Ref. 82/PF), officers now await a revised lease for consideration to include the new Changing Places facility in the foyer area.

3.13 Greensand Ridge Gateway Feature, High Street

3.13.1 The Greensand Trust (GST) lead this project and received a financial contribution of £3,000 from the Town Council. It is planned to place an art feature in the entertainment circle at the bottom end of the High Street. Progress was slowed down due to funding issues and more recently, the commissioned artist has left the project. GST is recruiting a new artist, who was one of the original shortlisted artists, to take up the work. The project is expected to be completed in the first part of the financial year.

4 STAFFING

4.1 In late April, the Service Support Officer will take up her position of 15hrs per week. Initially, there will be three main areas for work focus:

- a) To assist with Committee's Task and Finish group's work researching and scoping leisure activities for Older People with a view to identify potential activities for Committee's consideration in September 2020.
- b) To continue to develop the Buzzard Trail App. expanding the content and promotion of the trail as per para. 3.1.
- c) To assist the Community Forum, associated with the Partnership Committee, in undertaking the planning and delivery of the young people's survey, also with additional input from the TACTIC service. The timescale is yet unknown.

4.2 Committee is aware of the recent TACTIC services staff changes and staff look forward to having a full team in place by April 2020.

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