

Full Council

Date:	25 February 2014
Title:	SODC Market Towns Fund
Purpose of the Report:	a) To agree £1,000 funding for leaflets b) To agree £3,000 funding for the visitor information project
Contact Officer:	Helen Stewart, Town Clerk

Background

South Oxfordshire District Council supported by the Town Council commissioned a piece of work with the following objectives:

- To make recommendations as to how tourist information could be made much easier to find and ensure that staff are fully 'up to speed' in terms of knowledge about the tourist offer.
- To make recommendations about how visitor information could be presented to improve the visitor experience.
- To make recommendations on any gaps in the literature and how these might be filled.

The work was carried out by Tourism Angles and Sarah Osborne a consultant for the company, gave a presentation on her findings to the Culture Recreation Committee on 3 February. As part of the project council staff have been consulted and have visited the Tourism Information Office based in Marlow. A copy of the full report is found as Appendix 1 to this report.

A general conclusion from the report is that Thame is in a prime location to benefit from an increase in visitor numbers with dedicated accommodation packages in and around the town for those interested in Midsomer Murders. The television series had been aired in over 100 countries around the world with each episode attracting over 6 million people. South Oxfordshire was home to 50 Midsomer film locations with locations in Thame being filmed more than anywhere else. Several coach groups of overseas visitors and from around the UK visit the Midsomer locations each year with visitor numbers increasing year on year.

There is no reason to doubt that this trend will not continue and numbers are expected to treble in 2014. The use of Thame specific press releases, social media to advertise related events, walking trails and increased visible Midsummer product in the town will assist in developing Thame as a destination town to promote 'the place' – to businesses, investors, visitors and residents. This presents an opportunity for the Information Centre to be developed to play a bigger role in the local economy.

Recommendations

The recommendations in the report can be found on page 16 but are copied here for ease of reference.

A. To develop the information centre service to improve its footfall and profile

- (i) Make some immediate physical changes to the interior and exterior of the information centre. The visibility and presentation will be improved and result in increased footfall.

(ii) Increase the amount of information content, making it more visible with clear labelling, a series of changing information boards and giving priority to information about Thame and its immediate surroundings. This will improve the information centre service for visitors and local residents as well as giving support to businesses in the local economy. The more lively space and interesting content will also increase repeat customers and 'word-of-mouth' recommendation

(iii) Raise the information centre team's levels of knowledge about what Thame has to offer so they can offer confident answers and suggestions. This will delight visitors, encourage more spending into the local economy and assist local residents who may not be aware of all the things to see and do in their local area. Improving the enquiry response time, offering a consistent level of service and providing a warm and friendly welcome at all times will develop a cycle of repeat visits and word of mouth recommendation to bring in new customers.

B. To focus on growing more Midsomer Murders visitors to Thame

(iv) Work with the industry to create more Midsomer product in the town e.g. build on the new Midsomer walking trail of Thame; explore other options like Midsomer hotel packages and visible references to Midsomer around the town.

(v) Carry out Thame-specific Midsomer promotion, to raise general awareness of Thame's prominence as #2 'most filmed' location for the series and focus on attracting higher spending visitor through coach groups and independent staying visitors.

Resource Appraisal

The district council's Market Towns Fund will contribute 62.5% of the cost for the following projects providing added benefit to Town Council's investment and the economic development of the town.

	TTC	SODC
i) With modest spending on new fixtures, signage, labelling, display boards and some product training but not major items such as a new counter.	£3000	£3000
ii) A new information board to be located externally in the aperture of the window to the toilet at the front of the Town Hall. (Drawing listed as 16. Information Board).	£1000.	£1000
iii) Reprint of Walking Guides	£1000	£4000
Total	£5000	£8000

Risk Assessment

Listed building planning consent may not be granted for the Information Boards.

Recommendation that:

- i) £5000 for the projects detailed in the Resource Appraisal be funded from the Capital Rolling Fund.*