

9. LITTLE RIVER VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

General Manager responsible:	General Manager Public Affairs, DDI 941-8637
Officer responsible:	Customer Services Manager
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PURPOSE OF REPORT

1. The purpose of this report is to present to the Community Board, for its consideration, options regarding the future delivery of Visitor Information Centre (VIC) services at Little River.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

2. In 2005 the Banks Peninsula District Council commissioned an external report assessing options for the future of Visitor Information Centres in Banks Peninsula. The report, by consultants Tourism and Leisure Group, recommended that the council discontinue its existing funding of the Centre (\$10,000 p.a.) after June 2006.
3. BPDC did not confirm the recommendations of the report but resolved to hold further discussion on the future direction of VIC's following the inclusion process with Christchurch City Council, including discussions with Community Board members to be invited.
4. In April 2006 Council advised the Little River Railway Trust (which operates the VIC) that the funding would not be continued beyond 30 June 2006.
5. After further discussions, a transitional payment of \$5000 was made in August to enable the VIC to continue operating for a further six months.
6. Representatives of Council and Christchurch and Canterbury Tourism (CCT) have held discussions with various parties as to options for the future delivery of VIC services on Banks Peninsula, including Little River.
7. An option to retain a static service at Little River is presented here for the board's consideration, as a basis for discussion and consultation with the local community.

FINANCIAL AND LEGAL CONSIDERATIONS

8. No specific funding is available from Council for further operation of the Little River VIC. Should the Community Board consider, after consultation with the local community, that the proposal presented here should be pursued, then further investigation will be carried out to identify possible funding sources from across both Council and CCT.

Council is the owner of the railway station building, and there is a current lease in place with the Little River Railway Trust which incorporates the operation of the VIC. Appropriate lease and contractual arrangements will be made to reflect the decisions made on the VIC.

STAFF RECOMMENDATIONS

It is recommended that the Community Board facilitate consultation with the Little River community and stakeholders to determine support for the Visitor Information Centre, and to discuss support for this proposal for the provision of Visitor Information Centre services.

BACKGROUND ON LITTLE RIVER VISITOR INFORMATION CENTRE

9. Little River is a community of 200-plus, and is a strategic “gateway” to Banks Peninsula in that the main highway (SH75) to Akaroa and Banks Peninsula passes through the community and all visitors will travel through Little River as part of their Banks Peninsula tourism experience (except for some 4WD vehicles or those just visiting Lyttelton Harbour).
10. At present a Visitor Information Centre service is provided from the former Railway Station premises, which is owned by the Council, and leased to the Little River Railway Trust. The Trust provides the VIC service, in liaison with the Little River Craft Co-operative which sub-leases retail space in the building. Funding of \$10,000 p.a. has been provided to the Trust in the past to support the operation of the service.
11. In 2005 the Banks Peninsula District Council commissioned an external report assessing options for the future of Visitor Information Centres in Banks Peninsula. The report, by consultants Tourism and Leisure Group, recommended that the council discontinue its existing funding of the Centre after June 2006.
12. BPDC did not confirm the recommendations of the report but resolved to hold further discussion on the future direction of VIC’s following the inclusion process with Christchurch City Council, including discussions with Community Board members to be invited.
13. Since that time the future of the Little River VIC has been uncertain. A transitional payment of \$5000 was made in August to enable the VIC to continue operating for a further six months.
14. Representatives of Council and Christchurch and Canterbury Tourism (CCT) have held discussions with various parties as to options for the future delivery of VIC services on Banks Peninsula, including Little River.
15. The Railway Station Trust has indicated it does not want to support the salaried employment of an information person beyond 28 November 2006. From enquiries made to date by CCT it appears no other organisation or business venture is willing to provide a “lead agency” to continue employment of information staff.
16. There is currently no capacity or resource for Christchurch and Canterbury Tourism (Banks Peninsula Tourism) to assume this responsibility.
17. There is a proposal and funding available from another allocated budget to provide static signage at Little River as part of an overall signage/information strategy for Banks Peninsula. This project will not be completed until approximately August 2007 but will be cognisant of the Little River situation, and may form part of a longer-term solution.
18. There is a reasonable case to be made that provision should be made for at least a basic level of information for visitors to Banks Peninsula at Little River – some of the information could be considered essential for safety reasons (especially road suitability for certain vehicle types). However, the information would mostly be about the resources available to provide an enjoyable experience for visitors (ie location of scenic spots, walking tracks, tourism products etc). In the height of the season, when Little River is proverbially “packed” such information is actively sought. Additionally, the Little River Rail Trail will increase this traffic as the cycleway becomes increasingly popular.
19. During the winter season (May to September), the need for visitor information is largely reduced to weekends and public holidays when the domestic market visits the region and Little River.

OPTIONS

20. **Option (a) Status Quo:** This option is not available as the Little River Railway Trust has indicated it does not wish to continue providing the VIC service.
21. **Option (b) CCC Service Centre:** Provide VIC services from the CCC Service Centre. This option is not considered viable as the CCC Service Centre is only open during weekday business hours. The cost of providing staff for weekends would be substantial. This location also has the disadvantage of being located opposite the current VIC, on the “wrong” side of the carriageway for traffic travelling towards Akaroa.
22. **Option (c) Static VIC in current location.** This option would involve the establishment of a “static”, un-staffed VIC service operating from the existing location. Further detail is set out below.

PREFERRED OPTION

23. **Option (c) Static VIC in current location**

Dependent on funding identified from CCC, CCT or other sources, it may be feasible to provide temporary information resources to visitors in the CCC owned Little River Railway Station in the following manner for the 2006-2007 summer season only: -

- An interactive electronic kiosk with screens loaded with appropriate generic visitor information (Banks Peninsula Tourism Manager);
 - A brochure rack with supplementary information for visitors, prompted by messages received from (1) above (ie campervan, Rail Trail, hiking routes, tourist drives type information);
 - Little River tourism product (accommodation providers, activity operators and attractions). Given that the brochure display will have only minimal servicing (by CCC staff) the display will be free and only available to Little River operators.
24. While this approach is focused on achieving a short-term solution for the coming summer season, it may also form part of a longer-term service provision. Resources such as dedicated static signage will be investigated with the “Signage Project” about to be embarked upon. This will identify the scale, content, delivery method and positioning of information for visitors arriving at the gateway of Banks Peninsula.
 25. Beyond 2007, the growing economic and community development impetus from tourism in Little River may well encourage the community to augment the static display with knowledgeable staff to grow the facility at Little River into a commercial operation that better recognises its strategic importance.

COMMUNITY VIEWS

26. The Little River Craft Station Co-operative has written to Council indicating its support for the retention of the VIC service. Additionally, a petition, containing 514 signatures but unverified, was forwarded to Council in June to indicate local and visitor support for the retention of the VIC service at Little River.
27. The Community Board is in a position to facilitate further discussion within the local community to ascertain current levels of support for the VIC, and for the proposed option for retaining the service as outlined above.