

‘Better Welcome’ proposal agreed at the Bishops Castle Tourism Group AGM

10th March 2008.

Purpose of this report

1. The AGM considered the proposed improvements to the Auction Yard Car Park and walk through to the High Street
2. The AGM supported this proposal therefore an application for a £25,000 grant for capital expenditure will be submitted to Advantage West Midlands as part of its Better Welcome Programme.
3. A project steering group has been set up to liaise with key stakeholders, complete the application and submit it to AWM by 30th May.

Background

4. The three year £1million Better Welcome programme was introduced by AWM in October 2006.
5. AWM recognised that market towns represent a great tourist resource. Towns like Bishops Castle provide a strong focus for rural tourism and this is revitalising market towns.
6. Last year Action for Market Towns initiative (AMT-i) surveyed visitors then analysed the results to see how West Midlands’ towns fare compared to other English towns.
7. This resulted in Action Plans and there is now an opportunity to obtain £25,000 from AWM to develop and improve Bishops Castle as a tourist destination. It must be a capital project with 5,000 match funding secured; the application must be submitted by the end of May.
8. Car parking ranked 3rd in the 6 project ideas on the Better Welcome Scoring Matrix. The first priority was cohesive and interpretive signage which the Auction Yard Car Park project would also address
9. The other 3 capital projects concerned the Town Hall which will be the subject of its own funding application. The Better Welcome Grant cannot be used to contribute towards the cost of a large capital project like the Town Hall.

Outline proposal

10. To carry out the improvements outlined below to the Auction Yard Car Park and King’s Head thoroughfare which is the obvious visitor route to the town’s main attractions.

11. This work is necessary because visitors to Bishops Castle using the main car park receive a poor impression of the town due to the neglected appearance of the area from the car park to the high street (The rear of the Kings Head Pub). Moreover there is nothing indicating the town's main attractions and how to reach them from the car park. The obvious route is through the back yard of the Kings Head., which is owned by the Punch Taverns.
12. The car park is owned by SSDC and managed by Property Services. It is hoped £5000 match funding could be provided by SSDC Property Services if the application is successful. Any proposals must be mindful that the car park is also a working auction yard so the introduction of soft landscaping would not be practical.
13. The Auction Yard Car Park is where the most accessible public toilets are sited; the car park is a free facility. That, and the ease of parking was highlighted as one of the towns strengths as a visitor centre
14. As well as being let down by the poor appearance of the main thoroughfare into the town, the car park gives no information about how to reach the high street.
15. Punch Taverns controls this route and is responsible for the upkeep of the thoroughfare surface. Usage has established the alley as a right of way but the surface is in poor condition and not ideal for a wheel chair user.
16. The thoroughfare is not currently registered with the County Council as a definitive right of way; the Town Council has recently applied to have it designated as a bridleway.
17. Clare and Jonathan Greig of Bumbles Cottage, Church Street own the plot at the rear of the Kings Head yard, adjacent to the car park. They are in the process of transferring this plot to The Community Land Trust; they would continue to own the land immediately attached to the through route and auction yard and will grant The Community Land Trust a right of way over it.
18. Clare and Jonathan Greig will shortly be to applying for planning permission to build two new 1 bed houses on the plot. If successful The Community Land Trust will develop it.
19. Pugh's Butchers own the site opposite the Greig's plot. They have outline planning permission to develop this plot for two houses.
20. Both the Pughs and the Greigs have a vehicular right of way over the thoroughfare leading from the High Street to the Auction Car Park via the King's Head Yard.

Proposed improvements

21. These fall under three headings:
 - transforming the Kings Head thoroughfare to the High Street (project one)
 - improving the appearance of the existing car park, (project two)
 - the introduction of interpretive information (project three)
22. The car park surface is in good condition but the car park although spotlessly clean does have some ugly features such as the railing, obsolete gate and the breeze block wall, the SSDC sign and two disused iron girders (it has been suggested these may be there to prevent lorries reversing into the wall). It is therefore proposed the car park is given a ‘facelift’
23. Improving the surface of the Kings Head thoroughfare requires hard landscaping which would require the cooperation of the owners. It would need to be done to a wheelchair friendly standard therefore the required work would need to be specified by a Quantity Surveyor and contracted out.
24. The introduction of interpretive information would involve identifying the top attractions that tell the story of Bishops Castle. Using a professional interpretive organisation is recommended.
25. For the car park/ thoroughfare soft landscaping and presentation of the interpretive information it is proposed there should be a collaborative approach with local groups and that local craftspeople should be used where practical to carry out the work.
26. It is important that we establish what vehicular access and use any of the owners (Punch Taverns, The Community Land Trust, and Pughs) require as this will determine what can be done in respect of the pedestrian route. E.G it would be pointless putting down a surface that is primarily intended for pedestrian use if brewery delivery lorries would be driving over it.
27. The extent of the work otherwise possible would depend on the cooperation of Punch Taverns and the owners of the remaining parts of the site. All three have already been contacted and we believe they are supportive. Close liaison with The Community Land Trust will also be necessary;
28. SSDC Property Services say they would project manage the work which means that, doing the quantity surveying, obtaining quotes and putting the hard landscaping work out to tender etc would be taken care of.

Proposed work to car park	Owner and project number	Outline cost
Paint or replace existing railings To enhance good border planted by landmark trust	SSDC two	To be determined
Establish if tied back gate is necessary or obsolete	SSDC two	

Improve appearance of breeze block wall adjacent to the toilets and review information board on loos		
Remove iron girders or incorporate them into signage/interpretive information	SSDC two	
Remove existing car parking information sign and replace with one with reflects a sense of place as well as giving information	SSDC two	
Introduce interpretive information	Three	
Proposed work to thoroughfare to High Street (subject to cooperation of the owners)		
Re designate usage of the vehicular and pedestrian access route so there is a clear distinction or pedestrian use takes priority	Punch Taverns/Griegs/Pugh's One	
Sort out car parking rights and delivery practice along the route of the thoroughfare.	Punch Taverns One	
Remove existing redundant pathway	Punch Taverns One	
Resurface the vehicular and pedestrian access route from the car park to the High Street	Punch Taverns One	
Make route wheelchair friendly	Punch Taverns One	
Re landscape the poor border in front of the fencing opposite the Kings Head Yard	Pugh's? One	
'rescue' the planted border in front of the fencing opposite the Kings Head Yard	Pugh's? One	
Improve the appearance of the Kings Head Yard	Punch Taverns One	
Clear and replant the 'garden' at the rear of the Kings Head Yard	Punch Taverns One	
Introduce solar lighting?	Punch Taverns One	
Make temporary cosmetic improvements to the proposed building site opposite the Community Land Trust site.	Pugh's One	

Proposed interpretive and signage information (all Project Three)	Detail	Outline cost
Locate local expert on interpretation		
Agree on main features to be interpreted (it is		

recommended the railway station is included)		
Ask Town Council for permission to use the Town Crest		
Locate local graphic designers, board makers and carpenters		
Agree where interpretive information should be duplicate		
Improve sign age at Station Rd entrance to car park		

Timeline

18th March first Project Steering Group meeting

18th March to 11th April;

Obtain quotes including for work by local craftspeople where practical and desirable.

Agree on main items for improving visitor information

Finalise project plan including costing and application form

19th May application approved by the Bishop's Castle Partnership

30th May application submitted to AWM

Autumn 2008; work commences in collaboration with the Tourism Group which will project manage the improvements and take responsibility for liaising with local people and statutory agencies.

Work must be completed by 2010.