

## **WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL**

### **Report by the Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Housing, Environment and Economic Development Committee:  
2 November 2011**

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**Subject: Review of Milton Visitor Information Services**

#### **1. Purpose**

- 1.1** The purpose of this report is to provide the Committee with an update on the review of the Milton Visitor Information Centre as well as examining available options identified for providing an alternative delivery for visitor services. The report seeks approval by the Committee in relation to the recommended options to be taken forward in 2012/13.

#### **2. Background**

- 2.1** West Dunbartonshire Council provides VisitScotland with annual funding of £47,180 as a contribution towards the delivery of tourism services in and for the benefit of the local area. This includes the delivery of visitor information services at both Milton and Balloch.
- 2.2** A previous report was presented to the Committee in June 2011 highlighting a steady decline in visitor numbers experienced by Milton Visitor Information Centre over the last five years. The Committee agreed:
- 1) that additional road signage, including better sight lines etc, be investigated with AMEY Highways with regard to Milton Visitor Information Centre;
  - 2) that officers work in partnership with VisitScotland to investigate alternative delivery mechanisms to provide a cost effective visitor information service; and
  - 3) that a further report on the proposal and recommendations of the feasibility review be brought to a future meeting of the Committee for approval.

#### **3. Main Issues**

- 3.1** Milton Visitor Centre operates an annual service between April to October and employs temporary staff at the start of each season. Recent information presented by VisitScotland suggests there has been a further deterioration in visitor numbers for Milton Visitor Centre compared with previous figures presented at the June 2011 Committee.

- 3.2** April 2011 to August 2011 witnessed a further decrease of 28% in visitor numbers and 46% in accommodation bookings compared with the same period for 2010.
- 3.4** Balloch Visitor Information centre is performing well in these difficult economic times and the increase in their visitor numbers is absorbing part of the declining number of Milton’s visitors. The figures highlight that Milton’s performance has deteriorated well below the regional and national average for visitor numbers and accommodation bookings. Any decision on its future resides wholly with VisitScotland. The table below summarises the period April 2011 to August 2011.

**Table 1: Visitor numbers from April 2011 to August 2011:**

	Milton VIC	Balloch VIC	Regional	National
Visitors	3,695	38,989	n/a	n/a
% Change	-28%	+4%	-6%	-13%
Accommodation Bookings	-46%	-1%	-12%	-19%

- 3.5** Alternative locations for additional signage were explored with the Council’s Roads department and AMEY. It was concluded that all key locations along the westbound A82 approach to the Milton centre are adequately signed. VisitScotland recently advised that improvements had been made to directional signage located near the visitor centre within the site boundaries.
- 3.6** In August 2011, Grounds Maintenance attended to the hedges and vegetation in front of the visitor centre and along the A82 footway in order to improve visibility. VisitScotland has since reported that this improvement had generated a slight increase in visitor numbers, further perimeter hedge trimmings may make only marginal improvements.
- 3.7** A feasibility review was undertaken by VisitScotland to identify alternative locations in order to deliver visitor services in partnership with other organisations. The report was however inconclusive in evaluating an alternative to closing Milton Visitor Information Centre.

**3.8** Eight sites were identified by both West Dunbartonshire Council and VisitScotland with each site assessed in line with VisitScotland's criteria in relation to business type; staffing levels; location / accessibility; and return of investment. The table below summarises the pros and cons for each option extracted from VisitScotland's options paper:

**Table 2: Pros and Cons from VisitScotland's site assessment**

<b>Option</b>	<b>Pros</b>	<b>Cons</b>
Scottish Maritime Museum / Denny Tank	Well signposted and close to retail development.	Low visitor numbers Current visitors are mainly local school groups
Dumbarton Library	Central location with good accessibility Free internet services	Used mainly by local community, footfall potential low
Auchentoshan Distillery	5 star visitor centre High visitor numbers, mainly international. Staff are trained in customer care. Entry point in Council area.	Close proximity to City and focus on Distillery and primarily adult market.
Titan Crane	Friendly and enthusiastic staff. New visitor centre recently opened.	Not on main tourist route Low visitor numbers with main market being school groups Yearly change of staff would require retraining
Lomondgate	Accessible from A82 with over 40,000 cars passing daily. Flexible options in terms of provision	Site still under construction Close proximity to Balloch VIC
Dumbarton Castle	Graded a 4 star attraction Well signposted Good visitor numbers	Limited accessibility no disabled access No dedicated reception area
World of Golf	Good location on A82	Aimed exclusively at golfers and not wider tourist market. Wrong side of the road.
Clydebank Town Hall / Museum	Currently being refurbished to house small café and gallery	Not on main tourist route Limited parking

- 3.9** VisitScotland's options paper highlights that although some locations assessed have the potential to become a partnership, most were not suitable due a variety of factors, including issues such as poor location, lack of accessibility or potential low footfall numbers. As the review was inconclusive WDC will continue to support VisitScotland and the Milton Visitor Information Centre and review annually the resources allocated.
- 3.10** An additional option that Council Officers would like to explore for 2012/13 following examination of the possible partnership options report is to investigate the establishment of a visitor information point at Auchentoshan Distillery.
- 3.11** Resources from the VisitScotland allocation could be utilised to enter into discussions with Auchentoshan Distillery to investigate and establish a potential visitor information point at a cost of approximately £10,000 in setting up costs. Revenue cost of approximately £1,500 per annum would be necessary to maintain the visitor information point.

#### **4. People Implications**

- 4.1** There are no people implications.

#### **5. Financial Implications**

- 5.1** West Dunbartonshire Council provides VisitScotland with annual funding of £47,180 as a contribution towards the delivery of national tourism services, which includes the operation of Milton Visitor Centre.
- 5.2** Re-prioritisation of funding to VisitScotland may be necessary in 2012/13 based upon the establishment of a new partnership visitor information point.

#### **6. Risk Analysis**

- 6.1** There is a risk that VisitScotland may decide in future years to close Milton Visitor centre if the tourism numbers continue to decline.

#### **7. Equalities, Health & Human Rights Impact Assessment (EIA)**

- 7.1** No significant issues were identified in screening for potential equality impact in this report. An Equalities Impact Assessment will be undertaken as necessary for any proposed changes to existing service delivery going forward.

## **8. Strategic Assessment**

### Social & Economic Regeneration

- 8.1** The proposal contributes to social and economic regeneration by aiming to increase visitor numbers to West Dunbartonshire through the further enhancement of local visitor services. This is consistent with the aims growing our tourism economy, as identified within the West Dunbartonshire Economic Development Strategy (2011 - 2016) and West Dunbartonshire Tourism Strategy and Action Plan (2009 - 2012).

## **9. Conclusions and Recommendations**

- 9.1** The feasibility review undertaken by VisitScotland was inconclusive and did not identify a definitive alternative location to establishing a Visitor Information Centre in place of the centre at Milton. The Auchentoshan Distillery may prove a useful location for attracting additional tourists and further discussion will take place with the distillery with a view of establishing a potential visitor information point there.
- 9.2** The Committee is therefore asked to agree to:
- (i) continue to support VisitScotland in delivery of tourism information services; and
  - (ii) investigate the potential of establishing a visitor information point at Auchentoshan distillery for 2012/13.

**Elaine Melrose**

**Executive Director of Housing, Environmental and Economic Development**

**Date: 3 October 2011**

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**Appendix:** None

**Background Papers:** None

**Wards Affected:** All