

THE COTSWOLDS DISCOVERY CENTRE, NORTHLEACH

Summary: To provide an update on the Cotswolds Discovery Centre.

Recommendation: That the latest progress report be noted.

Office Ref: Martin Lane, Director

General Update

1. The Partnership Board met on the 12th January and 8th February and is due to meet again on the 8th March.
2. The Board's representatives on the Partnership Board met on 12th January and 2nd February to review progress and options going forward.
3. From the end of October the Café and Discovery Centre have operated reduced winter hours and are closed on Tuesdays and Wednesdays. From the beginning of January the Board has trialled a reduced staffing level and range of food offered in the café, focusing on simply drinks and cakes.
4. The Friends are planning to submit a Growth Bid at the end of February to Gloucestershire LEP and the Rural Payments Agency, RPA to advance various building, glazing, kitchen facility and café investments on site. The bid is still in preparation and is due to be considered by the Partnership Board via email in advance of submission. The Friends intend to bid for £105,000 and have to raise £185,000 as match funding. The outcome of the bid should be known at the end of May / early June.
5. The Friends have submitted a planning / listed building consent application to Cotswold District Council to replace the current single plate glass walls and roof in the café and north gallery with double glazed units.
6. The reduced staffing levels and food offering since January will extend through to the end of March and is having a beneficial impact on the Board's finances, a model which will be reviewed for application in the longer term.
7. The Friends commissioned a café report to support their Growth Bid. In general terms it reviewed current and future trading and staffing levels and potential areas for investment. It led to an initial discussion amongst the Partnership Board about the appropriateness of the current Agency Operational Agreement, whether a review or new agreement was appropriate and whether the café should be part of the Agency area. These discussions will be pursued at the 8 March meeting
8. The estimates process for the year ahead is in part dependent upon the outcome of the Growth Bid, not least the impact of any building works on the potential for a temporary closure of the cafe and its replacement with an outdoor catering facility eg shepherd's hut.

Supporting papers: None