

Committee: FINANCE AND RESOURCES

Date: 26 SEPTEMBER 2023

Report: NEW LICENCE AGREEMENT WITH HUDSON HOUSE, REETH

Purpose of the report

1. To seek approval to enter into a new Licence agreement in relation to the Authority's presence at Hudson House.

RECOMMENDATION

2. That the Authority enters into a new Licence agreement with Hudson House which will involve:
 - (a) An annual Licence fee of £5k to provide office space for the Area Ranger.
 - (b) A grant of £5k, for 2024/25, towards the provision of visitor information. Any commitment beyond 2025 will be subject to the outcome of the current Visitor Services Review.

Strategic Planning Framework

3. The information and recommendations contained in this report are consistent with the Authority's statutory purposes and its approved strategic planning framework:
 - **Corporate Plan objective No. 30**
Plan and manage the Authority's work so as to make the most effective use of its resources, including generating sufficient income to maintain expenditure at the same level as 2014/15 in real terms across the extended National Park area.

Background

4. A report was considered by the F&R Committee in February, and subsequently by the full Authority in March, which set out the Authority's medium term financial plan and budget for the next three years. One of the proposals in the paper was to end the Authority's presence at Hudson House from 2024/25. This would allow for 12 months' notice of the intention to withdraw to be served.
5. Whilst recognising the difficulties of the Authority's financial situation, Members were concerned about the impact of the proposal on the Authority's service provision and the effect on the viability of the Hudson House partnership. The proposals were

accepted, but Officers were asked to commence discussions with representatives from Hudson House on options for future arrangements. This approach was approved by the F&R Committee. Consequently, notice of the Authority's intention to withdraw services was issued to Hudson House.

6. Discussions have taken place over the summer. These have been extremely constructive, open and helpful in finding a way forward that could meet the objectives of both parties.
7. Members will recall that the Authority has four 'flagship' National Park Visitor Centres at Aysgarth, Hawes, Malham and Grassington. We are also involved in three partnership arrangements with community-run tourist information centres at Kirkby Lonsdale, Kirkby Stephen and Sedbergh. These are described as National Park Partnership Centres and provide a range of information and displays about the National Park as well as access to a meeting room/office space where appropriate. The Authority pays a fixed all-inclusive annual sum as part of these partnership arrangements. Presently, the arrangements at Hudson House are a hybrid of these two models in that we provide some Authority front of house staffing in addition to an annual fee. This arrangement costs the Authority approximately £31k per year.

New arrangements

8. Following the discussions with Hudson House representatives it is proposed to put the arrangements in Reeth on the same footing as the Authority's other partnership centres. The Authority will retain a Ranger base in Swaledale for the foreseeable future. The current office space at Hudson House, shared with the Police, works well and this will continue. It is proposed the Authority pays a fixed all-inclusive fee of £5k per annum for this shared office facility.
9. In addition, it is also proposed that the Authority pays an annual grant of £5k towards visitor information provision at the site, as with other partnership centres. At the moment this proposal relates to 2024/25 only as the Audit & Review Committee are currently carrying out a member-led review of Visitor Services. This includes National Park Visitor Centres and Partnership Centres within its Terms of Reference. The results of this Review will determine the Authority's whole approach to visitor services, including future arrangements for a grant towards visitor information provision at Hudson House, beyond 2025.

Conclusion

10. The information contained within this paper represents a way forward for the Authority to maintain its presence at Hudson House and support the provision of visitor information. These arrangements have been discussed with, and are supported by, Hudson House representatives.

Kathryn Beardmore
Director of Park Services

6 September 2023