

TONBRIDGE CASTLE – OUTCOME OF PUBLIC CONSULTATION AND OPTIONS FOR FUTURE COMMERCIAL ACTIVITIES

Item CE 22/10 referred from Communities and Environment Scrutiny Select Committee of 19 October 2022

The report of the Director of Central Services and Deputy Chief Executive provided an update on the outcome of the public consultation in respect of Tonbridge Castle. In addition, a number of high-level options were set out for consideration.

Members were reminded that the Gateway agreement with Kent County Council would expire on 6 July 2024. Given the expected loss of income from this date the current commercial operations at Tonbridge Castle and grounds were being evaluated to identify opportunities to generate sustained long term revenue savings and income.

Careful consideration was given to the options detailed in 1.4 of the report and a number of points were raised and discussed. Members noted the public interest in having toilet facilities at the Castle, expressed interest in providing a ‘changing place’ space, expressed interest in working collaboratively with local independent businesses, recognised the value of exploring in depth commercial opportunities to generate income and welcomed the Borough Councils intention to consult with organisations and local authorities with experience of managing historic attractions. There was interest expressed in exploring the opportunity of establishing a charitable trust to manage the Castle on behalf of the Borough Council.

Finally, Members were pleased that the public consultation had received such a positive response with many local residents expressing interest in participating in focus groups.

RECOMMENDED: That

- (1) the outcome of the public consultation exercise be noted and the positive response welcomed;
- (2) Options A to E (Café/Bistro restaurant; events and activities; educational tours; shop and other concepts) be commended to Cabinet for further investigation and evaluation.

***Referred to Cabinet**