



EXEMPT PART B: RECOMMENDATIONS TO COUNCIL

REPORT TO: POLICY AND RESOURCES COMMITTEE

DATE: 5 FEBRUARY 2015

**REPORT OF THE: HEAD OF CORPORATE SERVICES
CLARE SLATER**

**TITLE OF REPORT: FUTURE OF PICKERING TOURIST INFORMATION
CENTRE**

WARDS AFFECTED: ALL

EXEMPT INFORMATION

Exemption Category: Certain information in this report is considered to be exempt as defined in Paragraph 3 of Part 1 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972 (as amended).

- 1) Reason for Exemption: The information relates to the financial or business affairs of any particular person (including the authority holding that information)

The public interest test has been considered and, in all the circumstances of the case, the public interest in maintaining the exemption is considered to outweigh the public interest in disclosing the information.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

1.0 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 Following the implementation of the decisions resulting from the review of visitor information services it is now proposed to close Pickering TIC at the end of the summer season 2015 and support the development of a visitor information point in Pickering.

2.0 RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 2.1 That Council is recommended to approve:
- (i) That Pickering TIC be closed from 6 September 2015, with no Sunday opening.
 - (ii) That a visitor information point be established in Pickering.

3.0 REASON FOR RECOMMENDATION(S)

- 3.1 The TIC continues to experience a reduction in levels of accommodation bookings, enquiries and footfall. This rate of reduction has been steady over the last 5 years

and has not been impacted by the focus of TIC services at Pickering. Whilst delivering visitor information services and supporting the development of the visitor economy continues to be a priority for the Council, the TIC is no longer considered to be the most effective means of meeting the needs of visitors or business partners. Supporting the operation of the TIC is therefore no longer considered to be a priority for the use of Council resources. It is anticipated that other organisations providing information services such as Pickering Library may be able to benefit from the provision of some of the services currently provided by the TIC.

- 3.2 Closure of Pickering TIC will enable consideration of the future management of Ropery House as part of the Councils property portfolio. Additional income could be achieved for the Council from the rental of the unit currently occupied by the TIC. The TIC occupies approximately a third of Ropery House Alternatively the Council could at some point in the future consider the sale of the asset for a capital receipt. Neither option is possible with the TIC in situ.
- 3.3 Continuing to operate the TIC service results in an implication for the revenue budget in the region of £17,670, if the projected sales target was met for 2015/16. The implication of retaining the service until September 2015 would be £8,835.
- 3.4 Ceasing delivery of TIC services directly by the Council results in a small saving in non-salary running costs of £15,000 with existing staff retained in the Access to Services team of the Business Support Hub.
- 3.5 It is proposed to cease the operation of the TIC at the end of the summer season for 2015. This will enable the transfer to the new arrangements for promoting Ryedale and inclusion of new contact details on literature for 2016/17.

4.0 SIGNIFICANT RISKS

- 4.1 Possible negative impact on economy or tourism industry will be mitigated through the development of a VIP in Pickering. Liaison with Businesses will continue through the tourism service, along with further development of the online offer to visitors.
- 4.2 Risk to budget due to failure to meet income targets. Closure therefore removes the risk to balancing the budget.

5.0 POLICY CONTEXT AND CONSULTATION

- 5.1 Tourism is a non-statutory function for a local authority.
- 5.2 The Council has agreed an economic action plan for Ryedale. In relation to the visitor economy it identifies hospitality (tourism) as one of Ryedale's key economic sectors.

Within a list of growth sectors to consider is included 'visitor and creative economy – links to the high landscape value of the Moors, Wolds and howardian Hills'

The Economic Action Plan includes the following action points:

- a) B5 Sector Specific Support: Visitor and Creative Economy – supporting business led initiatives, product development and community owned facilities. Creative Economy Commissioning project.
- b) B6 Market Towns – promotion of vital and viable town centres through engaging with local businesses and supporting private sector initiatives. Working with

businesses and residents on their local initiatives, particularly those aspirations identified in the LDF such as promotion of local heritage, retailing or social enterprise facilities

- 5.3 The Council has undertaken consultation with representatives of the tourism industry linked to the development of the Tourism Commissioned services and also the development of the Ryedale Economic Action Plan.

In 2013 the Council undertook a detailed budget consultation with members of the public and an area for savings identified was the direct provision of Tourist Information services by the Council.

Consultation has also been undertaken with tourism operators regarding the design and delivery of visitor information services in Ryedale.

REPORT

6.0 REPORT DETAILS

- 6.1 In September 2013, the Commissioning Board concluded a review of visitor information services ([link to CB papers](#)). The resolution of Council was as follows:
- (i) That the Visitor Information Services review at Annex B be endorsed; and
 - (ii) That the Council's primary visitor information services be supported, utilising existing budgets, through the following commissioned tourism services:
 - establishment of Visitor Information Points in Malton and Helmsley;
 - electronic marketing initiatives be undertaken including the development and enhancements to on-line visitor information and website (utilising funding currently used to support the 'Visit North Yorkshire' paper guide);
 - (iii) Support marketing and information services for the Wolds and Malton and Norton, and local activities in partnership with Scarborough Borough Council and the North York Moors National Park Authority.
- 6.2 Following implementation in April 2014 of the resolutions made by Council, an evaluation of the operation of Pickering TIC has been undertaken. A summary of this evaluation is as follows with further information attached at annex A:
- a) Pickering TIC has not received an increase in calls or other business following the changes to the provision of visitor information services in Malton and Helmsley.
 - b) The majority of transactions through Pickering TIC are in relation to RDC services such as parking permits. These represent the highest value of transactions as well as greatest volume. In other market towns parking permits are available through a range of outlets including shops and the post office. This can be arranged for Pickering.
 - c) The other top selling items can all be purchased from other retailers in the town.
 - d) The decline in footfall, sales and contacts made through Pickering TIC can be seen over a number of years.
 - e) Bookings for accommodation made through the TIC have declined.

These findings are supported by other research into the future design of visitor

information services which suggest that the direct provision of visitor information centres may not be the best means for developing the visitor economy available to a local authority.

6.3 An evaluation of the operation of the two visitor information points has also been undertaken. The information point in Helmsley is located in the Cut-price Bookstore in Helmsely market place. This is working successfully in terms of meeting customer requests and has had a positive impact on the host business. Following discussion with a number of retailers in Malton town centre the visitor information point in Malton is now located in Ryedale House, the take up of information by visitors is low. The location of the Malton information point is being kept under review. Analysis of phone contacts made with the Council has shown that the anticipated increase in phone calls at Pickering TIC has not materialised. It is therefore proposed that a visitor information point be developed for Pickering using the same principles as those used to develop the one currently operating in Helmsley, with the possibility of locating this in a community setting such as Pickering Library to be explored.

6.4 Financial implications

The financial implications of closure of the TIC are minimal. If the closure takes place in September 2015 then half of the budget provision will be required in 2015/16.

Option	Non salary costs 15/16
1. Continue to operate Pickering TIC	17,670.00
2. Cease to operate Pickering TIC	2,690.00*

*ongoing requirement for RDC to pay business rates until unit is let or asset is sold

The TIC is currently staffed by members of the Access to Services Team of the Business Support Hub. No staff would be made redundant as a result of closure of the TIC.

6.5 The table included in Annex A illustrates the lower level of footfall and transactions on a Sunday through Pickering TIC. Operating the TIC on a Sunday places increased pressure on the resources available to support the TIC within the Access to Services Team. During a consultation with staff who work in the TIC undertaken in November 2013 the view of all staff was that the TIC should be closed on a Sunday throughout the year. The resources available to the TIC can be more efficiently utilised in supporting the transition to new arrangements if the TIC is closed on a Sunday.

6.6 A successful precedent has been established for the operation of Visitor Information Points in Ryedale by the North York Moors National Park in Thornton Dale and Hutton le Hole. The Council now operates a VIP in Helmsley and would like to extend the provision of VIP's to Kirkbymoorside.

6.7 The Council will continue to support the development of the visitor economy in partnership with other organisations and the private and community sectors, in line with the Ryedale Economic Action Plan.

7.0 IMPLICATIONS

7.1 The following implications have been identified:

a) Financial

The closure of Pickering TIC will enable the council to offer the vacated unit at the Ropery House, Pickering, for rental or potentially release the whole site for sale. The Council will continue to have a liability for business rates until the unit is let or the whole asset is sold.

- b) Legal
There are no legal implications
- c) Other (Equalities, Staffing, Planning, Health & Safety, Environmental, Crime & Disorder)
An impact assessment has been undertaken and no other impacts have been identified.

8.0 NEXT STEPS

- 8.1 It is proposed that Pickering TIC be closed in September 2015 to enable the promotion of new arrangements for visitor information to be promoted in the literature produced for the promotion of Ryedale as a visitor destination.

Clare Slater **Head of Corporate Services**

Author: Clare Slater Head of Corporate Services
Telephone No: 01653 600666 ext: 347
E-Mail Address: clare.slater@ryedale.gov.uk

Background Papers:

<http://democracy.ryedale.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=258&MID=1119#AI7830>

Commissioning Board Papers – 19 September 2013

Ryedale Economic Action Plan

Council Business Plan

Background Papers are available for inspection at:

www.ryedale.gov.uk

Annex A

Summary of data relating to operation of Pickering TIC

Fig 1 Value of transactions by type (April 2014 to date):

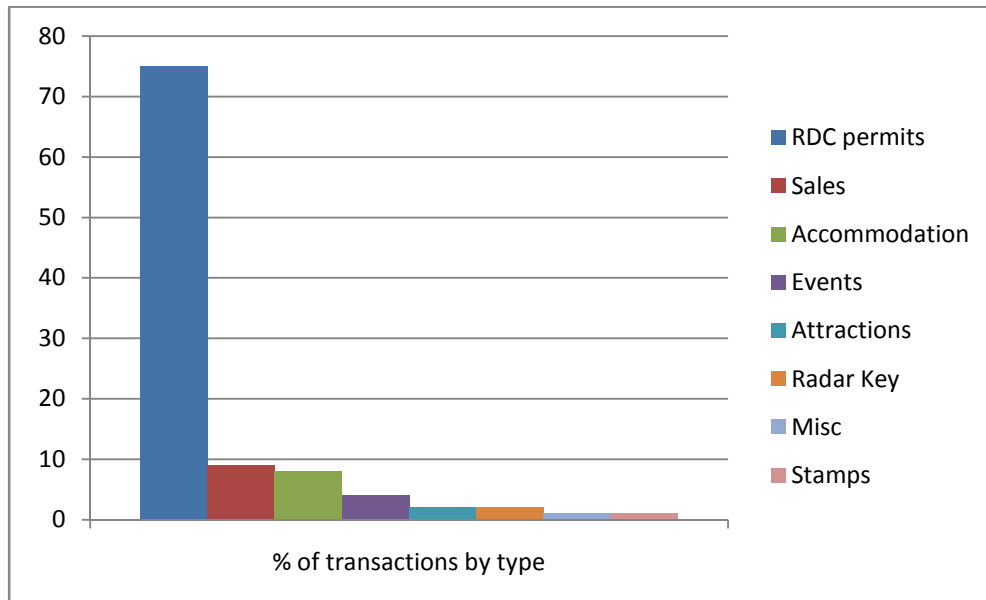


Fig 2 Value of sales by type of goods (April 2014 to date):

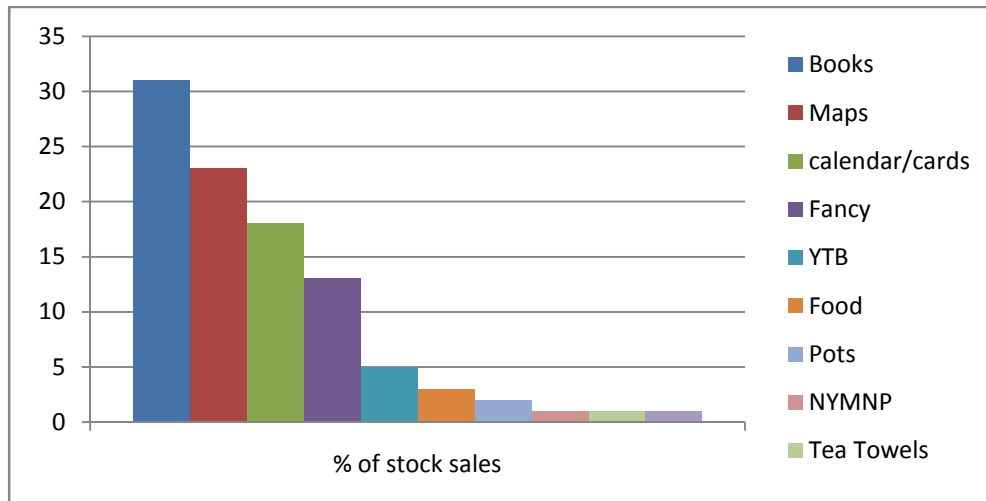
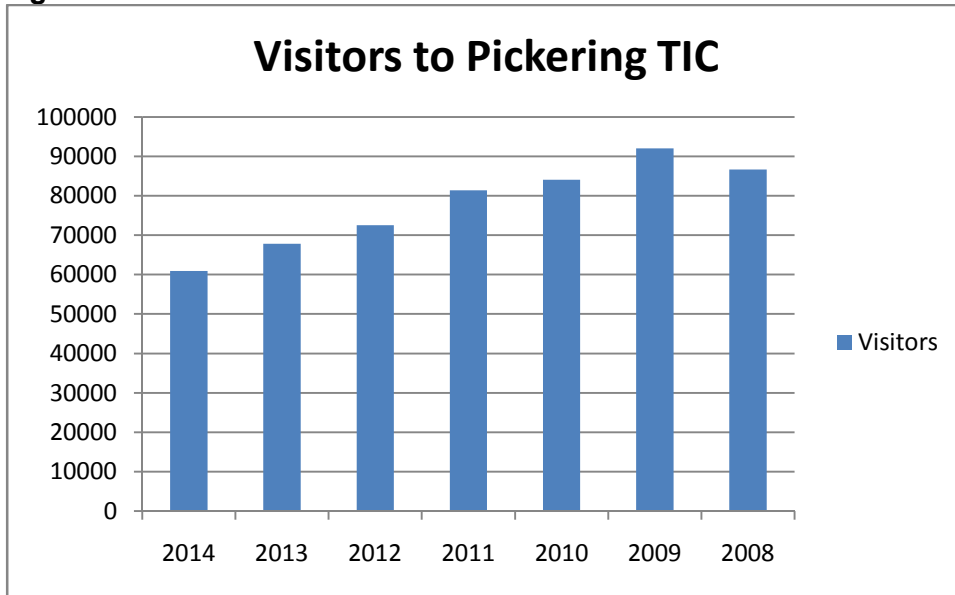


Fig. 3



All years refer to a calendar year from January to December

Fig. 4

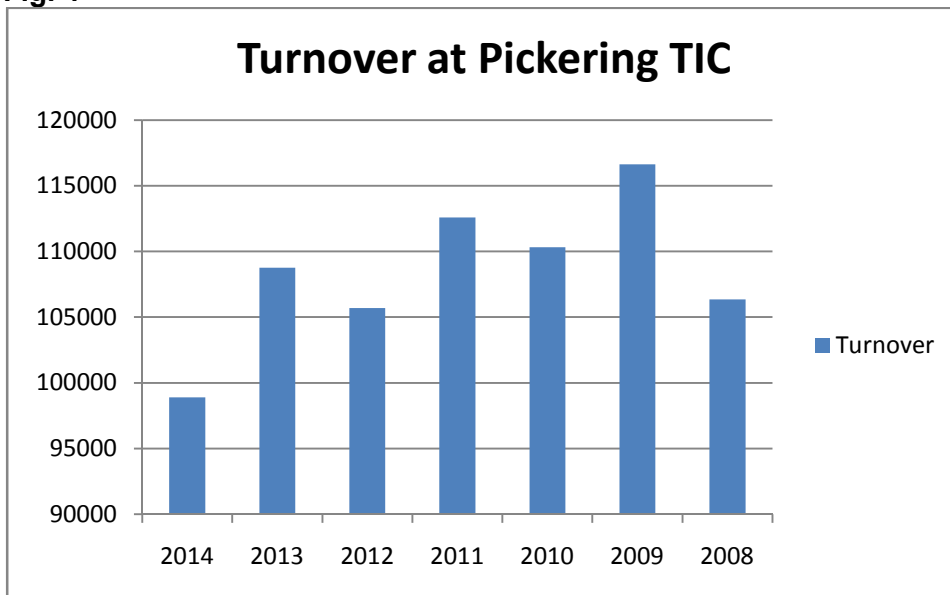
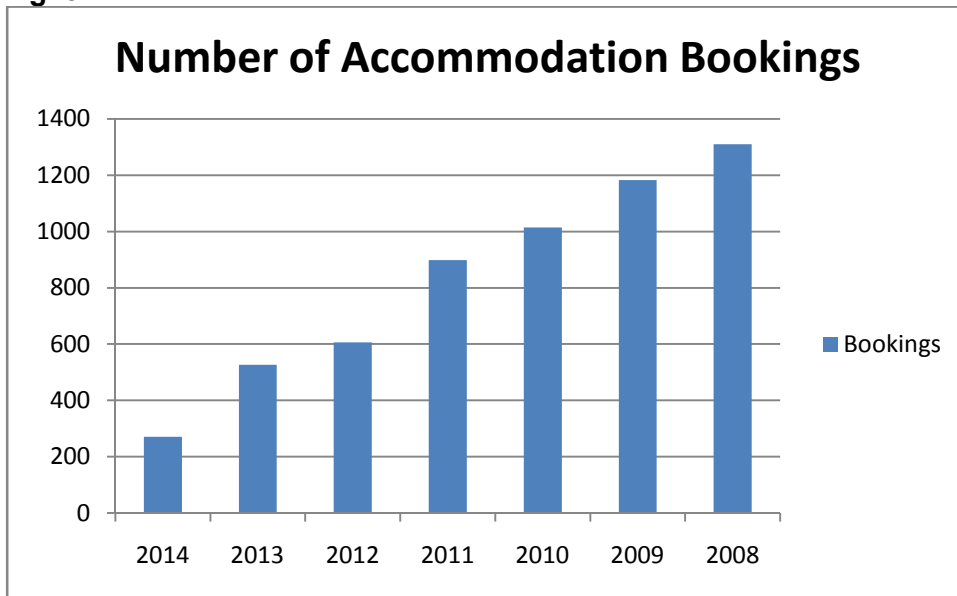


Fig. 5



Contacts made with Pickering TIC by type:

Fig.6

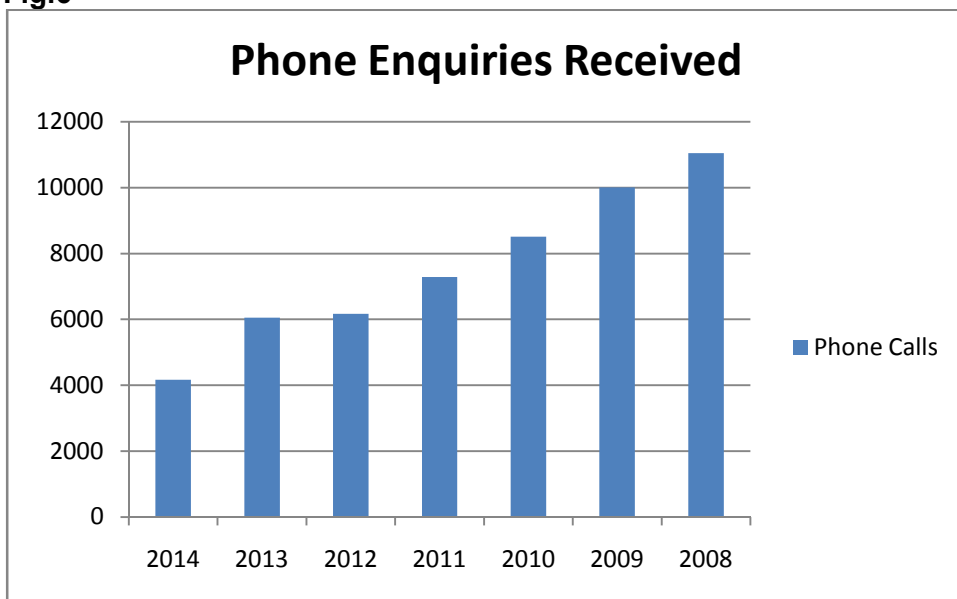


Fig.7

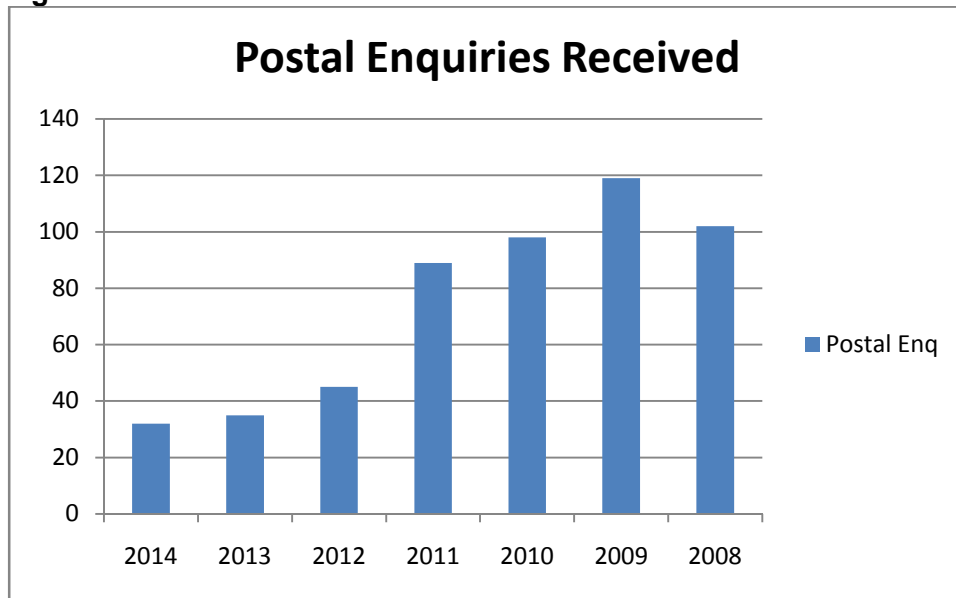
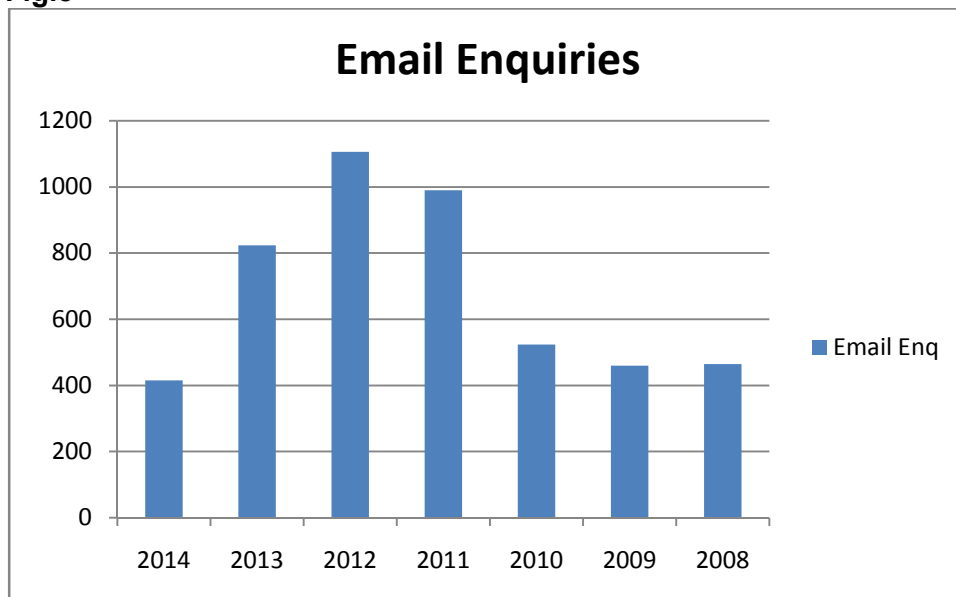


Fig.8



Weekly Data
Fig. 9

