

Putting Hardelot on the map



BUSINESS PLAN 2014-19

Introduction

The Hardelot Centre, near Boulogne in Pas de Calais, France, is owned and managed by Kent County Council for the benefit of its schools, youth organisations and the broader community. It also provides a resource for others outside the county to take advantage of teaching and learning facilities, while at the same time enjoying French immersion to improve language skills and cultural experience.

While the Hardelot Centre could be viewed as a KCC resource, it must also be autonomously sustainable and cannot burden the county's finances.

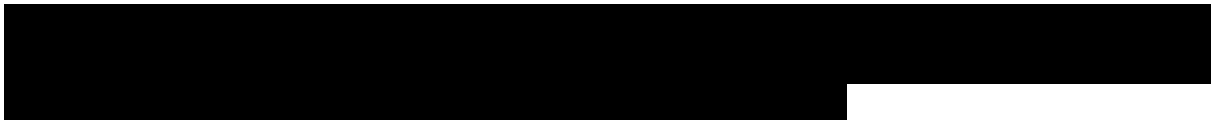
This business plan projects, over a five year period, the management, marketing and financial outcomes for the Centre, together with recommendations based on the facts presented by the Centre's past trading records and the understanding of the market for school activity journeys.

Overview

The premise for rendering successful any failing enterprise is simple: costs must be reduced; revenues increased; or a combination of both.



The costs associated with managing and running the Hardelot Centre appear to have been addressed in part and while the Centre might benefit from some restructuring of staffing, it is unlikely that any significant further cost reductions are possible.



If one views the Hardelot Centre as being equivalent in some respects to an hotel, occupancy should be at 50% to ensure long term sustainability and 60% to ensure a small but healthy profit from the enterprise.



Objectives

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The Hardelet Centre has been the responsibility of KCC's International Affairs Group (BSS-BS) since April 2011. At that time the priority was to increase income and reduce expenditure, in order to make the Centre financially self-sufficient as soon as possible.

In doing so, however, the International Affairs Group was tasked with delivering the following main outcomes:

- To be a centre for English students to gain a short experience of France
- To create opportunity for English and French students to meet and learn about each other's cultures
- To forge a general partnership with Nord Pas de Calais that links the teaching of French in the UK and the teaching of English in France
- To develop a progressively broader use of the Hardelet Centre for small conferences and seminars - for example a seminar with KCC representation in France (like the Brussels office)
- To create a sustainable joint venture with Pas de Calais, linking the Centre to Hardelet Castle
- To use the Centre as a place of education but not only to broaden opportunities
- Most of these outcomes have been satisfied. However, the use of the Centre must be increased and expanded to meet long term financial sustainability



Current situation

First and most tangible observation is that the current situation at the Hardelet Centre is one of obvious transition. The restructuring of the staffing arrangements and a lack of marketing create an impression of status quo without overt evidence of momentum for improvement at the Centre.

In the business plan created in 2012, there was a list of initiatives for change suggested. These were:

- *Review of all expenditures*
- *Review of all Hardelet providers*
- *Negotiation of all utility contracts, catering and cleaning providers*
- *Tighter financial management*
- *Reduced food waste*
- *Review of staff tasks and planning resulting in less duplication of work and no need to pay overtime in busy periods*
- *Continuous presence of management on site – ready for clients opportunities, better staff management, special relationship established with customers*
- *New tariffs*
- *Increase of picnic prices*
- *More customer care*
- *A range of new products and services*
- *20% Increase of bed nights*
- *More flexibility with packages – bespoke service delivery*
- *Promotion of the centre at various specialised exhibitions*
- *Use of manager's transfrontier network*
- *Centre more visible amongst the local community and officials*
- *Assistance of local volunteers*
- *Free work placement in summer*
- *Partnerships with local attractions ,clubs ,twinning association*
- *Partnerships with local schools*

A very noticeable omission from the list above is a need for marketing and greatly improved communications between the Centre and its potential clients. Without a strategic communications initiative in place it will not be possible to impart news of changes to the Centre's publics.

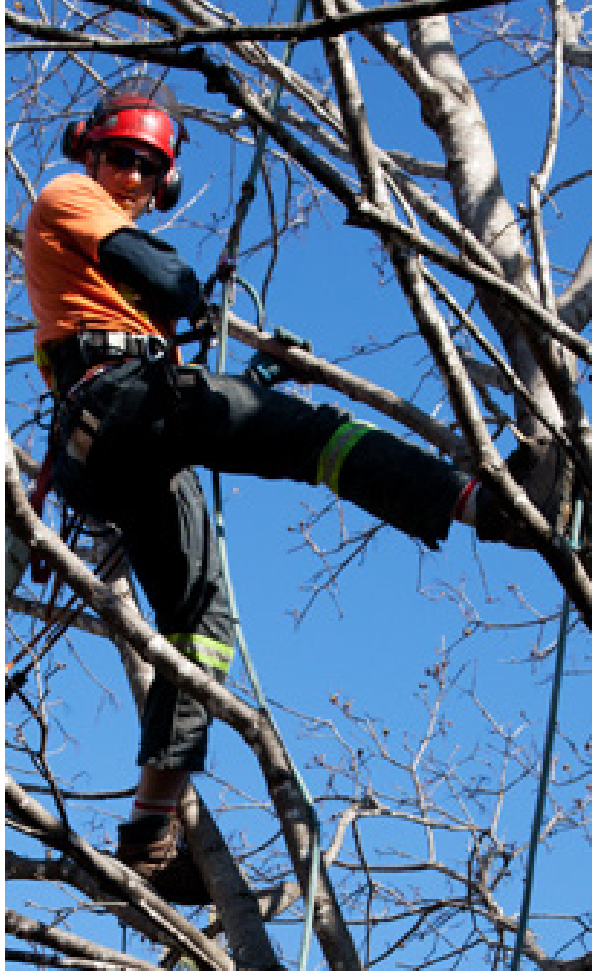
Financially, the Centre is currently just about viable if previous historical losses are unaccounted for. In fact, there has been a marked improvement during the past two years, but this must be countered by the fact that a full time Centre Manager's post has not been filled after the previous incumbent left in 2012.

Bookings have increased each year since 2011 and there are confirmed bookings until 2016. There remains much scope for further increasing bookings.

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Current situation - Staffing

Outsourcing





Investing in the Centre

Accommodation

In the short term, showers and WCs need maintenance or replacement. In the longer term installing en suite washing and toilet facilities should be considered.

While bunk beds are adequate for school and youth group parties, they limit the appeal to other groups that could provide important weekend business.

To maximise the return on investment in staffing, while also increasing turnover, an extension to the accommodation capacity should be considered. Doubling the capacity to 60 beds would enable multiple schools to attend each week and also allow for larger single school groups.

Teacher accommodation

To improve the teacher resources and accommodation would measurably boost repeat sales. It is teachers not children that determine where the school will go for its trips. Teachers, like the rest of us, have raised levels of expectation thanks to improvements in the holiday market over the past decade. It is important to win their loyalty. Better bedrooms and improved lounge facilities for teachers to relax in are important.

Teaching resources

It would be worthwhile investing in materials for, say, arts and crafts. Extended classroom facilities would enable the Centre to be used fully even in poor weather. There is scope to bring in third party teaching professionals for arts, French, geography and so forth. Materials and tutors' fees could be passed on to schools/groups as part of a teaching and learning package.



Grounds



The four hectare site could be developed further for Learning Outside the Classroom and also for other outdoor activities. There is scope for sports surfaces and further adventure play equipment. Two further classrooms would also be a benefit by enabling the Centre to retain its appeal even in inclement weather – thereby extending the booking season.

Marketing



It would be a useful revenue source if the Centre offered a range of merchandise that visitors could purchase. These items could include postcards, mugs, caps, tee-shirts and small gifts. Tee-shirts and caps could be offered to schools at the time of booking and prior to their visit.

Putting Hadelot on the map

One of the key areas to Hadelot's short term success is to increase bookings. The best way to achieve this is to tell more people about the Centre and what it has to offer.

- The obvious and immediate target audience is Kent's educational arena. There are 479 Primaries; 137 Secondaries; 3 Nurseries; 45 Special schools; 8 FE Colleges; and 2 Universities. If 25% of Kent primaries sent one class for four nights to the Hadelot, it would equate to 5,280 bed nights, which alone would represent an occupancy rate of 57%.
- The second target group is schools immediately surrounding Kent – including Essex, Hertfordshire, Sussex, Surrey and Greater London.
- Thirdly are *all* schools in England and Wales.
- Next are youth groups including Scouts, Guides, Beavers, Cubs, Brownies, youth clubs, church groups and all the other youth organisations.
- Lastly are all the special interest groups including cyclists, hikers, historical societies and so forth.
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Tactics and strategy

Kent schools are not taking advantage of the benefits of the Hadelot Centre. Few schools outside the county know about the Hadelot Centre. Unless one already knows of the Centre, it is impossible to find on the Internet (searching terms such as "school trips", "adventure trips", "school holiday trips", "School foreign learning" and so on returns nothing from search engines).

Website

The first requirement is to design, construct and optimise a discrete website for the Hadelot Centre. This can link directly with the KCC website (and also with the Chateau d'Hadelot website etc.), but must be individually searchable by the main search engines (Google etc.). It must also be able to be maintained regularly by Hadelot Centre staff and should be updated with information on a regular basis (at least once a month).

The content of the website should include teaching and learning features, suggested itineraries, information about the surrounding area, cultural information, data for teachers and more.

The group remarked how welcome they were made to feel, so a great big thanks to all your staff. The centre itself also drew some praise and has been mentioned as a possible for a training weekend in the future

Brochure

It remains important to have a brochure for the Centre. While the Internet provides the most heavily used and direct contact, it is useful to have a document that can be retained by the enquirer – a brochure should be sent immediately upon receiving online enquiries.

The brochure should be as timeless as possible and could be in a format of a folder with individually printed inserts for different phases, topics or groups. This would also enable quick and inexpensive updates or extensions to be added to the pack.

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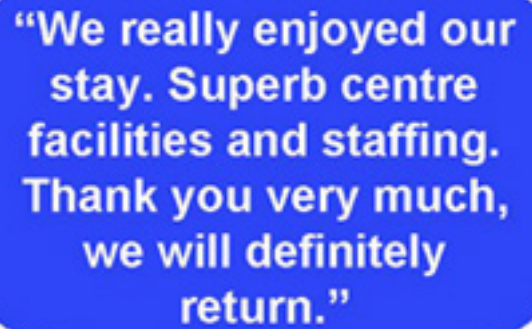
E-mailings

While schools receive thousands of emails each year, this remains the most cost effective way to reach a target audience. It is presumed that an e-mail list for schools exists within KCC. Other addresses can be purchased reasonably inexpensively to target schools outside Kent and also other groups.

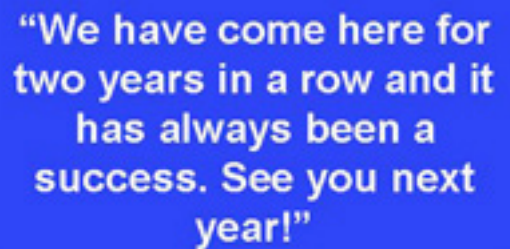
Newsletter

A newsletter can impart changing information and news from the Centre. It also does so in a credible way. It can be sent by e-mail, hosted on both the Hardelot and KCC websites and can be printed inexpensively if required. One newsletter should be published each term.

A budget should be allocated for the above because such outlay will produce a tangible return on investment in the form of increased lettings.



"We really enjoyed our stay. Superb centre facilities and staffing. Thank you very much, we will definitely return."



"We have come here for two years in a row and it has always been a success. See you next year!"

Conclusions

If nothing more is done at the Hardelot Centre except restructuring staffing and implementing a sales/publicity/marketing campaign, it will be possible to achieve a small profit.

By offering value-added services, such as art tutors, language tutors, cookery and other learning opportunities, there is scope to increase profits. For example, an art tutor for a weekend would cost about £600, but it would be competitive to charge, say £350.00 per person for two days board and tuition. If just 10 students attended, this would generate a gross profit of £2700.00 for a weekend.

Staff restructuring is vital to create the flexibility of personnel to deal with the inevitable peaks and troughs of the Centre's occupancy. Outsourcing, where applicable, delivers a greater degree of control over costs, according to demand.

Certain maintenance/repairs and modifications may be a statutory obligation, such as access lighting.

The ability to handle bookings and payments for excursions and field trips would be a distinct advantage, both as a potential additional profit centre and also as a convenience for the Centre's clients.

The likelihood is that the Hardelot Centre will for a year or two make relatively little money. However, with the measures mentioned in place, the Hardelot Centre could become profitable while still providing a rich and valuable resource to schools and other groups in Kent and beyond.

In the longer term, investment in the facilities would enable greater charges to be levied. If additional sleeping accommodation can be considered, this would enable greater income with only marginal increases in staffing costs. Hence greater profits could be generated for reinvestment in the Centre or for other resources.
