

Media Release

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Changing the Face of Visitor Servicing: Embracing the Digital Age

At a recent meeting, the Mt Barker Council approved the closure of the Adelaide Hills Visitor Information Centre (AHVIC) from the end of January next year.

Consistent with many within the industry, Mt Barker Council has reviewed its visitor servicing model, which has triggered the decision to close the existing service and consider alternative methods, including industry-led servicing models, that ensure maximum return on investment.

The Adelaide Hills Visitor Information Centre is majority funded by Mt Barker Council, with regional partners Adelaide Hills Council opting to invest in on-line visitor servicing, since 2017.

Mt Barker Council's General Manager Planning and Infrastructure, Marc Voortman said, "Advances in technology have led to a significant change in visitor behaviour, with the overwhelming majority of tourists relying on online platforms for accommodation and tour bookings, as well as itinerary planning. This shift has placed traditional Visitor Information Centre models under scrutiny, with many councils re-evaluating their services in favour of online offerings."

"In recent times, the Visitor Information Centre has faced a number of specific challenges including ongoing volunteer shortages, lack of industry support, and the increasing need for facility renewal. These challenges have led Council to review the service and where it best apportions its investment in the area of visitor servicing" Mr Voortman said.

Leading up to the decision to close the centre, the council engaged with stakeholders from the Hahndorf Business and Traders Association, Adelaide Hills Tourism (AHT), the South Australian Tourism Commission (SATC), the Tourism Industry Council of South Australia (TICSA), and AHVIC Volunteers.

Representatives from SATC and TICSA have supported the council's exploration of alternative approaches, emphasising the need to embrace digital servicing while assessing the effectiveness of face-to-face services.

“While the rationale for closure of the current AHVIC is acknowledged by key industry representatives, we appreciate that some volunteers have apprehensions,” Mr Voortman said.

“Support will be provided to ensure volunteers have opportunities to transition to alternative Council programs or new volunteer-driven initiatives in the visitor servicing space. Council’s primary objective is to deliver the best possible product for consumers and a better return on investment for the community.”

An increased funding contribution from the council to Adelaide Hills Tourism will ensure a consistent regional approach to visitor servicing, increase support and liaison for local operators, and increased online engagement and exposure to visitors.

Council staff are preparing a business case for alternative visitor servicing models to be considered by the council in May 2024 and are looking to Adelaide Hills Tourism to help with stakeholder management during the transition to closure of the visitor information centre and provide support to potential alternative service offerings. This business case will also consider alternative uses for the existing AHVIC tenancy.

Pop-up visitor information services will be explored to satisfy needs identified through peak periods and major events until such time as decision is made on alternative models.

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