



Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 19th November 2021

Report of: Museums Manager

Subject: MUSEUM ADMISSION CHARGES

1. Recommendation

That the Joint Committee:

- 1.1 approve Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust's proposed 2022 admission charges for Hartlebury Castle, and**
- 1.2 approve the piloting of an admission charge for special temporary exhibitions at Worcester Art Gallery and recommend this new charge to be added to Worcester City Council's 2022-23 fees and charges.**

2 Background

HARTLEBURY CASTLE ADMISSIONS

- 2.1 Under the terms of their agreement with Worcestershire County Council (WCC), Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust (HCPT) should propose any changes to the joint admissions charges before November each year.
- 2.2 Admission income for the whole site and castle are shared between the two partners, with the formula for the split for each type of ticket laid out in the agreement. Performance in 2021 so far has resulted in the actual split (including the sale of grounds-only tickets) as 44% of admissions income to WCC and 56% to HCPT.
- 2.3 HCPT have submitted a proposal for new admission charges to Hartlebury Castle in 2022 and these, along with their benchmarking review and information about their medium-term planning regarding admission charges, are attached as the appendix to the report 'Hartlebury Admissions'.

SPECIAL EXHIBITIONS AT WORCESTER ART GALLERY

- 2.4 Museums Worcestershire have focused on the temporary exhibition programme at Worcester Art Gallery for the last decade, with the programme growing in ambition, profile and audience appeal. The annual budget for temporary exhibitions has not increased since the joint service was formed in 2010, with the team now working hard each year to bring in grant funding to support the programme. As well as bringing important art and interesting history to Worcester, temporary exhibitions now routinely offer additional interpretation in different formats, family trails and formal exhibition resources, talks for different ages, and community outreach

partnerships, all tailored to ensure the exhibition has maximum impact for local residents.

- 2.5 If the Art Gallery is to continue to grow and raise the profile of Worcester as a cultural destination the service needs to investigate a resilient mixed-funding model for temporary exhibitions, as well as capital investment for its permanent facilities.
- 2.6 National museums pioneered the business model of free permanent collection displays alongside chargeable temporary exhibitions to ensure that the public always had access to the museums, but that resources could keep pace to mount exhibitions with profile and reach. In the past five years, many regional museums have followed this model, charging for some special (and expensive to mount) exhibitions across the year. This includes Cheltenham, Birmingham, Wolverhampton, Gloucester and, most recently Hereford, who have set an adult admission charge of £5 for their current Grayson Perry exhibition.
- 2.7 Museums Worcestershire have this year started using Art Tickets, an online booking system enabling visitors to easily pre-book and pay for events and talks which could be extended to exhibition ticketing. The system includes good data analytics, giving an overview of the audience breakdown.
- 2.8 New charges for the museum service must be approved by the relevant committee/cabinet of the appropriate authority – in this case Worcester City’s Policy and Resources Committee.

3 Preferred Option

- 3.1 The cost of leisure activities has changed significantly since the last benchmarking of Hartlebury Castle’s admission charges in 2019. Hartlebury Castle is currently one of the cheapest similar attractions in the area.
- 3.2 It is recommended that the committee approve HCPT’s proposal for 2022 admission charges to the whole site at Hartlebury Castle, in recognition of the ongoing improvements to the visitor offer:

Adult	£ 11.50
Child	£ 6.50
Concession	£ 10.00
Family	£ 32.00
- 3.3 It is proposed to use the autumn 2022 exhibition at Worcester Art Gallery, of a significant and well-known historical artist, to pilot an exhibition charge. The income would part-fund the exhibition costs. The pilot would be evaluated and the results included in the committee’s forward planning for the Art Gallery.
- 3.4 It is proposed to set a new charge of between £2 and £5 for entrance to occasional special temporary exhibitions at the Art Gallery. A discussion on dynamic pricing, incentives, discounts and free admission categories, as well as work to overcome non-financial barriers to entry, will be included on the agenda of the Joint Museums Committee January workshop.

If this committee approves the adoption of this new charge, it will be added into the City Council's Policy and Resources Fees and Charges report, scheduled for February 2022.

- 3.5 There is no intention to propose a new charge to view the permanent displays at the Art Gallery & Museum – which are now under development planning - or to charge for all temporary exhibitions.

4 Alternative Options Considered

- 4.1 HCPT were unwilling for admission charges to Hartlebury Castle to increase at the August inflation levels used for other museum fees & charges, both out of concern of presenting a low-quality message for the site and the need to meet income targets in their business plan following investment into facilities.
- 4.2 WCC and HCPT will be discussing improvements to the current income split and negotiation process as part of the future planning and options appraisal of the site.
- 4.3 Additional grant funding has already been sought for the autumn 2022 exhibition at Worcester Art Gallery. The exhibition will be funded from many components, of which income from admission charges would make up only a small part.
- 4.4 Reducing the ambition of the exhibition programme would have wider knock-on impacts, with the secondary spend in Worcester of each special exhibition calculated at half a million pounds.

5 Implications

5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

Earned income makes up about a third of Museums Worcestershire's operating budget. Increasing charges in line with increasing costs and market enables the service to maintain service levels rather than decline.

5.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Worcestershire County Council has started to review the current leases and agreements with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust, in advance of the current lease end in 2026.

5.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk inherent in a service model with a significant element of earned income. Spreading the risk by diversifying the sources of that income makes that business model more resilient.

5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

There are no policy implications in this report.

5.5 Equality Implications

It is important that the equality implications of any new charging model are properly investigated using robust data. Piloting a new charge at Worcester Art Gallery enables that to take place and feed into future planning. The proposed pilot would include discounts and free admission categories for Worcester residents, as well as community working to overcome non-financial barriers to entry to the Art Gallery.

5.6 Human Resources Implications

Museums Worcestershire's budget is 86% staff costs. If earned income does not keep up with the cost of employing staff, then budget planning will have to put staff at risk.

5.7 Health and Safety Implications

There are no H&S implications to this report.

5.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

Museums Worcestershire's ambitions are to make the museums impactful in residents' lives and to bring visitors and income into the county and city by raising the profile of its quality cultural destinations.

Ward(s):

All wards

Contact Officer:

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Background Papers:

none