



Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 7th June 2022

Report of: Museums Manager

Subject: CITY MUSEUMS DEVELOPMENT

1. Recommendation

1.1 That the Committee note the progress on planned developments at the City Museums.

2. Background

- 2.1 Museums Worcestershire's Strategic Plan 2019-24 recognises the need to plan for significant improvement and development to the museums. Three agreements/leases come to an end in 2025-26, giving an opportunity to plan to redevelop spaces to best align the museum infrastructure to long-term priorities.
- 2.2 Worcester City Council confirmed proposals for the allocation of its £19.6million Townsfunding in September 2021. This includes investment for the City's museums:
- Moving the Worcestershire Soldier gallery from the Art Gallery & Museum to the heart of the heritage venues at The Commandery. This will give the opportunity to modernise and renew the display and further develop its education potential.
 - Developing the current Worcestershire Soldier space at the Art Gallery & Museum to focus on the City's important and attractive collection of British Impressionism and the stories it tells of the British landscape. This will form the first phase of redevelopment at the Art Gallery & Museum.

3. Information

3.1 The detailed Town Investment Plan that includes these developments "Heritage and Riverside" was approved for submission to the Department for Levelling Up, Homes and Communities at the Policy & Resources Committee on 22 March 2022.

New Worcestershire Soldier Gallery at The Commandery

- 3.2 The Town Investment Plan sets out £185k towards the new Worcestershire Soldier gallery at The Commandery, to which the Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire) Trust and the Worcestershire Yeomanry Museum Trust will additionally contribute £105k of matched funding.
- 3.3 The Working Group, drawn from all three members of the partnership, are working on the project planning together and are currently setting out a memorandum of understanding on partner responsibilities and a structure of partner sign-off at milestones.

The partners have committed to work towards a vision for the new display for a *newly-curated people-centred display in the right heritage location; increased education impact and community pride; and an enhanced offer for visitors to access many more resources that personalise the museum experience.*

- 3.4 The new display will take over much of the ground floor in the Commandery's Canal Wing, and will offer visitors an object-rich display that will complement the rest of the Commandery's offer and that of the nearby other heritage attractions.
- 3.5 The City has a hosting agreement with each trust that ends in 2026. There are no benefits to any partner to create a display that could then cease in 2026, so discussions are underway to draft new agreements that set out the next phase of these relationships.
- 3.6 The Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire) Trust intends to lead an application for the new display to the National Lottery Heritage Fund and to launch a local fundraising campaign, concurrently to the Townsfunded project. This will enable the new display to maximise the potential of the two military collections, with new interpretation and increased access via new technology to their now extensive digitised resources which are of interest to family and communities historians.

New Collection Art Gallery at the Art Gallery & Museum

- 3.7 Worcester Art Gallery & Museum brings visitors to Worcester from across the country to visit its temporary exhibition programme. In recent years this has developed as a significant strength of the museum service and brought just over a million pounds of secondary spend to the local area in 2021-22.
- 3.8 The building infrastructure and the rest of the offer has not kept pace with the exhibition programme. Visitors and local residents particularly ask to see Worcester's excellent fine art collection for which currently there is no permanent display space.
- 3.9 The fundraising charity Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums has been established and has received the first two instalments of Professor Olsen's donation which in total, with Gift Aid, will give £400k restricted to further develop the art collection for display in a new gallery. This will be used to buy artworks that complement the City's collection by adding high profile names and rounding out the story this collection tells.
- 3.10 The new permanent art gallery will focus on the jewels of the City's collection and the new purchases, which are all from a period of change in art from the late Victorian period to the mid twentieth century, known as British Impressionism. The gallery will show how famous French Impressionists influenced a new way of looking at art, and art was changed forever by the development of new paint chemicals, by a revolutionary new freedom of expression, and by the horrific experiences of the First World War. It will include how important this period of art was in influencing high profile artists today. It will also show that Worcestershire was central to this period of art and the well-known artists that used the county as their inspiration. The aim is that Worcester Art Gallery becomes as well-known for its collection of British Impressionism as Penlee Gallery in Penzance is for the Newlyn School, or Birmingham Art Gallery is for the Pre-Raphaelites, and that visitors are attracted to Worcester to seek out these special collection displays.

- 3.11 The first purchase funded by the Shirley & Rolf Olsen Art Fund is hoped to be two paintings by Dame Laura Knight, one a landscape and one a Gypsy portrait, offered by a private vendor. The charity will shortly launch its first fundraising campaign for these works, matching Professor Olsen's support for their acquisition.
- 3.12 £20k is set aside in the Townsfund to prepare the infrastructure following the move of the Worcestershire Soldier display. The new Collection Art Gallery has been planned as the first phase of development for the Art Gallery & Museum, with additional phases needed to improve facilities such as the lift, toilets, café, other commercial and learning spaces and upgrade the collections displays throughout. The City Council is currently investigating whether other Government funding could support these phases and development and business model options will be brought back to this Committee at a future meeting.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

Commitment to develop the City museums is initially funded by the Townsfund, but further phases to maintain development momentum at the Art Gallery & Museum building still need to secure funding.

4.2 Legal and Governance Implications

Worcester City Council's legal team are supporting legal frameworks required by the capital projects and the new hosting agreements with the military museum trusts.

4.3 Risk Implications

There is a risk that the ambitions of development are set back or halted by other priorities at the City or with their partners. This should be set against the risk that as facilities continue to age and deteriorate, current strong performance cannot be maintained. Regular reporting to the Joint Museums Committee will be continued, so that they can keep a close oversight of this risk.

4.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

A review of the Joint Museums Agreement (not updated since 2010) has been recommended to reflect these and other developments.

4.5 Equality Implications

There are no identified equality implications to the information in this report. Equalities impact assessments will be undertaken as part of each detailed planning stage.

4.6 Human Resources Implications

These are significant projects requiring staff capacity and they will be integrated into annual service plans for existing staff to oversee the work. Additional staff capacity will also be needed and budgeted as part of the project.

4.7 Health and Safety Implications

As with all capital projects, Worcester City Council will ensure that H&S is considered as part of the project planning and tendering of contracts.

4.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The work outlined in this report will improve both City museums. This will enhance the tourism offer, promoting the economic status of the City, and will improve social outcomes for residents.

Ward(s): All wards
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Background Papers: none