

Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 15 June 2023

Report of: Museums Manager

Subject: WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM FUTURE OPTIONS

1. Recommendation

That the Joint Committee

- 1.1 note the information regarding options for the future of Worcestershire County Museum; and**
- 1.2 recommend to Worcestershire County Council their preferred option for consideration at a meeting of the Cabinet in September**

2. Background

- 2.1 The Worcestershire County Museum is a popular destination as part of the wider offer to local residents and tourists at Hartlebury Castle. It brings significant visitor spend into Worcestershire, with associated benefits for local businesses and local employment. For decades, a visit to the museum was an important trip for Worcestershire school children and this tradition continues with a lively formal and informal education programme that supports classroom learning, creativity and an understanding of Worcestershire's history.
- 2.2 As reported to this committee at its last meeting, the museum team have been reviewing the opportunities to further develop the County Museum offer, so that the benefits of a museum visit can be translated into an evidence-based programme that supports the health and wellbeing of local residents through commissioned support, social prescribing and other community programmes.
- 2.3 The Joint Museums Committee has delegated powers to manage the operation of an effective museum service. Significant decisions by either local authority regarding their museums should first be considered by this committee and then, in the case of the County Museum, be reported to Worcestershire County Cabinet including a recommendation from the joint committee.
- 2.4 Worcestershire County Council is also the sole trustee of the Tickenhill Collection, the founding collection of the County Museum now held in charitable trust. The two County Council members of this committee hold the responsibility to ensure that decisions that impact the Tickenhill Collection are considered appropriately as the charity trustee. The charitable objective is: *The maintenance and administration of the Tickenhill Collection which shall be placed or kept in such one or more public rooms, halls, museums or other places for exhibition in Worcestershire or elsewhere and that it shall be kept open for inspection by the public. Also, to lend the said collection or any part thereof for public exhibition or for educational purposes.*

- 2.5 As noted by this committee at their meeting in September 2022, Worcestershire County Council holds two leases for the area making up the County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, both of which end in early 2026. The landlord is Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust with whom we collaborate to open the site to the public as a visitor destination. These are full repairing leases, and the costs of any outstanding obligations will need to be negotiated at lease end. A condition survey has recently been carried out and Worcestershire County Council's property team are working on a programme of works leading up to the lease end, keeping the landlord informed. This is included in the County Council's capital programme.
- 2.6 The County Museum's Transport Gallery, which includes a display of the county's internationally significant Vardo collection has been closed to staff and the public for several months for essential maintenance, including the assessment and management of the low-risk asbestos present in its building fabric.
- 2.7 The Cider Mill at the County Museum has also been fenced off to prevent close public access in recent years. This property was relocated from another site during the early years of the Council lease. It would require major structural works to make it safely accessible. Alongside a review of its condition, a significance review is underway to assess if the County Museum is the best long-term home for this building. This assessment will be brought back to this committee at a later stage.
- 2.8 The property and museum teams have undertaken a review of options for the County Museum. Two phases of review, both at high level, have been carried out, considering the service in relation to various property options. In addition to the options set out below, the first phase review considered other locations in the county that were in areas of redevelopment or close to other potential heritage partners. Those not included below did not meet the necessary space opportunity criteria or had unrealistic cost levels. These reviews were supported by property consultants.

3. Options for Consideration

- 3.1 The table below sets out the options reviewed. Property costs are based on metre squared estimates and development costs are estimated for the building size.

Option A	Remain at Hartlebury Castle, North wing, admin block and new build Transport Gallery	<p>A redeveloped Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, continuing as a visitor destination but also developing learning and health programmes meeting needs of Worcestershire residents.</p> <p>This option meets the funding priorities of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, plus other smaller funders.</p>	<p>CAPITAL Property costs £2.3million Museum and energy sustainability development costs £1million</p> <p>REVENUE Long-term reduction in energy costs and increased income</p>
Option B	Relocate to County Hall - within existing building (ground floor pavilion) and part new build	A new County Museum within County Hall, improving the public access to County Hall and the Council's assets. Focused on learning and groups and access to the County's collections.	<p>CAPITAL Property costs £7million Museum development costs £0.7million</p> <p>REVENUE</p>

		This option does not meet the funding priorities of the National Lottery Heritage Fund but will meet other smaller funder priorities.	Annual lost revenue (pavilion potential tenant) £95k
Option C	New build alongside the Countryside Centre at Worcester Woods	A smaller Worcestershire County Museum at Worcester Woods, together developing as a visitor destination with shared facilities. This option does not meet the funding priorities of the National Lottery Heritage Fund but will meet other smaller funder priorities.	CAPITAL Property costs £5.4mill Museum development costs £0.5million REVENUE Potential long-term efficiencies of services working closer together
Option D	See exempt appendix (not for publication as it contains commercially sensitive information)		

- 3.2 'Do Nothing' or 'status quo' at the current site is not an option. For the County Museum to remain at Hartlebury Castle, in the long term, works are required over and above lease obligations. If the Museum is to remain on site the minimum property work required is a replacement roof for the Transport Gallery, however the building itself remains unfit for purpose for display of the significant collection of Gypsy Vardos. It is proposed therefore under option A that the existing gallery is demolished and a new, fit for purpose, gallery constructed.
- 3.3 Option A will retain a lease position and will require Worcestershire County Council to engage with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust for a new leasehold interest on the basis of demolition and rebuild of the existing Transport Gallery. It will seek terms which mitigate the risks (exempt appendix refers - not for publication as it contains commercially sensitive information) associated with remaining at the site as part of consideration of the detailed terms for both the property lease and service management agreements.
- 3.4 For options A-C, the next steps will be for the Council's project team to progress the property proposals to concept design stage. The costs noted in table 3.1 are indicative, additional detailed investigation with quantity surveyor input will be available for the County Cabinet decision.
- 3.5 For all options, the museum team will progress work on a service business plan which would include outcomes, potential long-term income streams, and energy solutions to reduce revenue costs. A proposed portfolio of potential external funding will also be prepared for the recommended option. For option A, an Expression of Interest will be submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund this summer.
- 3.6 For options A-C, feasibility will be progressed to consider the options available to the Council make it possible to bring the Gypsy Vardos back into public display in the short term.

4. Implications

4.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications

All options have both a capital and revenue impact. This report aims to set these out at high-level to enable options to be comparable to support the decision making. Further detail on costings will be assessed on the recommended option with support from external consultants to inform the County Cabinet review.

4.2 Legal and Governance Implications

The County Council's legal team have supported the high-level review and will continue to feed into the project working group.

4.3 Risk Implications

A risk analysis of the options has been undertaken at high level. The report appendix includes additional information about the main risks identified, which includes some sensitive commercial information.

4.4 Corporate/Policy Implications

Should the Council choose to progress with an option which would make significant changes to its museum offer, this will be subject to public consultation.

4.5 Equality Implications

Equality implications of the different options have been considered as part of the review. There are both benefits and restrictions to wider access to the museum of all the options, with none believed to outweigh other factors. More detailed equality impact assessments will be undertaken at the next stage of work.

4.6 Human Resources Implications

HR will support the next stage of work as required.

4.7 Health and Safety Implications

The property review includes consideration across the option sites for any H&S implications.

4.8 Social, Environmental and Economic Implications

The County Museum contributes to the social and economic health of the county and options A-C would enable those to develop and grow. Option A would also enable investment to reduce the County Museum's environmental impact and ongoing energy costs.

Ward(s):

All wards

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Background papers:

**Appendix (Exempt): Worcestershire County Museum
Future Options**