

**Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 26<sup>th</sup> October 2023**

**Report of: Museums Manager**

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**Subject: HERITAGE MARKETING REPORT**

## **1. Recommendation**

**1.1 That the Joint Museums Committee note the progress made in delivering museums and heritage marketing projects.**

## **2. Background**

2.1 Museums Worcestershire has carried out audience research across the museums in 2021-23 with Culture Recovery Funding to gauge any difference in audience's post-pandemic and to inform future service planning.

2.2 The Place and Economic Development Committee committed City Plan funds to Museums Worcestershire across 2021-24 financial years to invest in commercial facilities and support promotional campaigns to increase the growth of national and regional visitors to Worcester.

2.3 Museums Worcestershire promotes its museums as destinations in their own right and as a significant part of the Worcester and Worcestershire heritage visitor economy. This report sets out core service successes in these areas.

## **3. Information**

### **3.1 Audience Research**

3.2 A three-year audience research project has shed new light on audiences across the museums and will feed into future service planning. Key findings:

3.3 Just over half of visitors to the museums are visiting for the first time.

3.4 Visitor dwell time has increased with almost half of Commandery visitors staying between 1.5 hours to 3 hours; Hartlebury can now be considered a full-day destination with a third of its visitors staying 4 hours or more; and a quarter of the Art Gallery & Museum visitors stay for 1.5 hours or longer.

3.5 73% of all our museum visitors think the whole experience is very good, and 87% think the staff welcome is very good.

3.6 The research provides evidence that museums support the visitor economy by attracting visitors into the city and county. 39% of visitors planned their trip to Worcestershire particularly to visit the museums. One in five are staying in Worcestershire overnight and of those 71% are staying in paid accommodation (e.g.

a hotel) and are visiting restaurants, shopping and visiting other heritage attractions during their stay.

### **3.7 Investment of City Plan Funds**

- 3.8 The Place and Economic Development Committee committed City Plan funds to Museums Worcestershire across 2021-24 financial years to invest in commercial facilities.
- 3.9 Investment to upgrade the two city museum cafes to increase income has focused on the improvement to infrastructure including installation of toilet facilities specifically for Commandery café users and staff, enabling the Café to develop their business by opening outside of core museum opening times. Income in 22/23 exceeded the income received from growth of rent by 34% and visitor satisfaction has increased by 15% at the Commandery Café. Initial advice received for the Art Gallery & Museum café showed limited opportunities for increasing business in its current location. Funds therefore have been committed to a feasibility study for a larger café.
- 3.10 Commercial feasibility and investment at The Commandery. Funds were committed to increase income streams from weddings and hires. Market research showed limited take up for corporate hire due to both the saturation and competitive nature of the market. Funds were used to invest in equipment for weddings which has resulted in a 75% increase in bookings in 2023 up from 2022. The planning and piloting of an Escape Room at The Commandery proved successful and has provided a new income stream. Since opening in November 2022 Commandery Quest has had 149 bookings and brought in £9k, with participants praising the unique nature of the escape room venue.
- 3.11 National marketing campaign for The Commandery based on its national heritage significance. A national marketing campaign placed The Commandery at the heart of the city and county's tourism offer with the aim of strengthening Worcester's image as a historic city and contributing to the visitor economy. Working in partnership with Visit Worcestershire and Worcester BID, the campaign included TV advertising, an 'A-Z of Worcester's heritage' in the Metro newspaper and a travel trade campaign plus out of home advertising. A dedicated Facebook ad targeted at one hour-plus drivetime enjoyed a reach of over 86,000. 28% of all Museums Worcestershire website visits over the period of the campaign were to The Commandery's homepage. Visits to The Commandery over June – August increased by 22% compared to the previous year.
- 3.12 Investment has enabled a broadened reach out to audiences beyond our core catchment through targeted distribution of the Art Gallery & Museum's annual brochure, focusing on the area to the north and east of the city, following analysis of the Arts Council's Taking Part data. The recent audience research has indicated a greater penetration in this geographic area.

### **3.13 Core Service Successes**

- 3.14 Service marketing has focused on individual venues' events and exhibitions programme marketing, successfully drawing visitors to the Canaletto and 1980s exhibitions with record attendances and supporting events such as Oak Apple Day at The Commandery and the launch of new exhibition Captivating Costume at Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle.

- 3.15 Marketing has supported the recruitment of volunteers to support the museums and an engaging video was created specifically to promote volunteering opportunities at The Commandery. The video was featured on a Facebook advertisement which reached more than 11,000 viewers.
- 3.16 We continue to build our digital presence. The city museums participated in Worcester BID's Instagram reels campaign "summer in the city". A reel about activities at The Commandery and another about summer at the Art Gallery and Museum were posted collaboratively, appearing simultaneously on Worcester BID's feed and Museums Worcestershire's feed, expanding the museums reach to new audiences with the reels receiving 1,698 views (Commandery) and 1,249 views (Art Gallery & Museum). The 1980s exhibition proved a hit on social media with the exhibition period seeing a 9% increase in Facebook followers.
- 3.17 Development of the Museums Worcestershire website has introduced much improved home pages for each of the museums. New web pages which bring together the seasonal events across the sites are proving very popular with the summer page receiving almost 7,000 page views.
- 3.18 The pandemic forced us to rethink procedures and we now benefit from the adoption of an online ticketing system provided by Art Fund. Initially adopted to control numbers it now enables us to facilitate booking for paid events and exhibitions, as well as bookings for the Escape Room and most recently Commandery online admissions and generates around £2k of income per month.
- 3.19 Enhanced benefits of the Commandery resident ticket ensure that Worcester residents still enjoy value for money with their annual entry ticket thanks to partnering with a number of city centre businesses who have offered discount to pass holders. A refreshed Membership Scheme has also seen numbers grow and high retention rates achieved.
- 3.20 The weekly Worcester News feature 'Museum object of the Week' continues to share our collections with 21,000 readers and is one of the longest-running weekly features.
- 3.21 We continue to work with Visit Worcester and Visit Worcestershire to build the profile of the heritage and cultural offer of the city and county. The Commandery was pleased to host a successful Accommodation Forum run by the Tourist Information Centre team. The Commandery also featured in the 'Big 3' heritage itinerary created by Visit Worcestershire for the Group Travel market.
- 3.22 There will be a presentation to accompany this report at the meeting.

**Ward(s):** All wards  
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**Background Papers:** None