

**Report to: Joint Museums Committee, 7<sup>th</sup> March 2024**

**Report of: Museums Manager**

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**Subject: ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM DEVELOPMENT**

## **1. Recommendation**

**That the Joint Committee**

- 1.1 note the progress on planned developments at Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum, including with the Worcestershire Soldier display; and**
- 1.2 approve the use of the museum general reserves already designated for Worcester City Art Gallery and Museum development to add capacity to the museum team to support the development plans.**

## **2. Background**

- 2.1 Museums Worcestershire's Strategic Plan 2019-24 recognises the need to plan for significant improvement and development to the museums.
- 2.2 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 £1.5 million pounds of secondary spend to local businesses in 2022-23. However, the building infrastructure and the rest of the museum offer has not kept pace with the development of the exhibition programme and limits its success. Sustained work has been undertaken to plan wider development for the museum.
- 2.3 In June 2022, this committee noted investment from the Townsfund to support the development of a new Worcestershire Soldier display at The Commandery. The Mercian Regiment Museum (Worcestershire) Trust and the Worcestershire Yeomanry Museum Trust in partnership, supported by Museums Worcestershire, have recently been successful in achieving a £243,200 grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop this project. This is an ambitious project to create a new exhibition with an emphasis on enhanced storytelling, more opportunities for volunteering, lifelong learning and community engagement, alongside a focus on more inclusion and greater wellbeing for local people. The ambition of the project means that the new display at The Commandery will launch in 2026-27, with the current Worcestershire Soldier display remaining at the Art Gallery & Museum until 2025-26. A new display aimed at families and spotlighting Worcester's Victorian history will run at The Commandery from early 2025 until the new Worcestershire Soldier is ready to be installed.

- 2.4 Following the dismantling of the Worcestershire Soldier display at the Art Gallery & Museum, a new permanent art gallery will be created to display the City's art collection, currently usually held in store. Gaps in the collection are being developed with the support of a gift from Professor Olsen, this work being overseen by the Worcestershire Heritage, Art & Museums charity.
- 2.5 The charity has recently confirmed a second significant donation and is working with Museums Worcestershire and the donor to outline a strategy to invest in the development of the wider suite of galleries that will be vacated by the Worcestershire Soldier. This funding will enable a focus on Worcester's history as a centre of design and technology training and will include new displays about the city's glove-making industry (the City's important collection of gloves and glove-making being in store) and a programme focused on engaging and supporting young people.
- 2.6 The committee noted in November 2022 investment from the UK Shared Prosperity Fund to improve visitor facilities at the Art Gallery & Museum. This work will be undertaken, commissioned by the council's property team, in 24-25.
- 2.7 The committee also noted in June 2023 success in funding from Arts Council England to improve the activity space and museum history displays in consultation with community groups. This work is underway and will be completed by March 2025.
- 2.8 Using funding from West Midlands Museums Development, Museums Worcestershire recently commissioned a feasibility study into commercial opportunities for the Art Gallery & Museum building. This will feed into Museums Worcestershire's strategic planning and inform the detailed implementation of the above developments at the Art Gallery & Museum.
- 2.9 In June 2023, this committee designated £63,500 from the museums' general reserve to be used for Worcester Art Gallery & Museum development, but the specific use of these funds is not yet agreed.

### **3. Preferred Option**

- 3.1 Although the Townsfunding includes some project support, this level of additional capital development at the Art Gallery & Museum requires more capacity within the museum team for a longer period.
- 3.2 In January 2019, this committee approved a secondment arrangement backfilling the Social History Curator and Commandery Manager. This arrangement created capacity to co-ordinate of the Glove Affair project (working with the glove collections) and now the Museums Voices project (redisplaying the history gallery) and has worked very successfully.
- 3.3 It is proposed to extend this arrangement, using the designated reserve noted in 2.9 above, until March 2027 to enable the co-ordination of the proposed new displays of the glove collection.

### **4. Alternative Options Considered**

- 4.1 Capacity could be redirected from the temporary exhibition programme towards these capital developments. This would mean a reduction in programming and a knock-on impact on income.

4.2 This level of success in funding could be paused or halted altogether, and funding returned. This would have an impact on visitor enjoyment of the building and repeat visiting. There is no guarantee that funding would be available at a later date.

## **5. Implications**

### **5.1 Financial and Budgetary Implications**

The funding outlined in this report is all now secured. Development and implementation needs to be co-ordinated.

### **5.2 Legal and Governance Implications**

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

### **5.3 Risk Implications**

There is a risk that the ambitions of development impact on other priorities at the city, particularly when partnerships are key to success. 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.

### **5.4 Corporate/Policy Implications**

It is not believed that there is a corporate or policy implication of these developments.

### **5.5 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.

### **5.6 Human Resources Implications**

Extending the existing successful arrangement will minimise the additional HR work required.

### **5.7 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.

### **5.8 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**