

Joint Museums Committee**Thursday, 19 March 2015, The Randall Room, The Guildhall,
Worcester - 10.00 am**

		Minutes
Present:		Mr A N Blagg, Mrs L C Hodgson (Chairman), Mr A C Roberts and Mr D Wilkinson
Also attended:		Officers Iain Rutherford, Museums General Manager (Museums Worcestershire) Helen Large, Marketing and Events Manager (Museums Worcestershire) Neil Anderson, Held of Community and Environment (Worcestershire County Council) Anne Worboys, Principal accountant (Worcestershire County Council) Ruth Mullen, Corporate Director – Services Delivery (Worcester City Council) Simon Lewis, Committee Officer (Worcestershire County Council)
		Other attendees Lucy McCall and Julia Thompson – DCA Consultants (for item 4)
Available papers		The members had before them: A. The agenda papers (previously circulated) B. The Minutes of the meeting held on 27 February (previously circulated) A copy of document A will be attached to the signed minutes.
215	Named Substitutes (Agenda item 1)	None.
216	Apologies/ Declarations of Interest (Agenda item 2)	None.

217 Confirmation of Minutes (Agenda item 3)

RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting held on 27 February 2015 be confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

218 Commandery Development Proposals (Agenda item 4)

The Joint Committee received an update on the Commandery Development proposals.

The report indicated that in June 2014 the Joint Committee received a report on a four phase programme of development at the Commandery, following discussions with funding bodies including the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). An application to the HLF Our Heritage Fund was required for the first phase of this work which would see the reintroduction of the English Civil War as a theme in a significant section of the building.

Before this bid could be developed and submitted, the City Council requested a further study be completed, in the light of additional capital funds available internally. Such investment would clearly have a bearing on the scope and scale of the development programme.

On behalf of the City Council, Museums Worcestershire appointed the DCA team to work on proposals for the Commandery in the light of this new funding, supported by architects, exhibition designers and other specialists. The study would address display and interpretation, the visitor experience, building environment and services and links with other cultural developments in the immediate vicinity.

Lucy McCall and Julia Thompson from DCA Consultants presented the draft proposals and made the following points:

The Brief

- Specialist advice had been sought for this brief in relation to conservation architecture, interpretation and design, catering and retail provision
- The ambition was to increase and diversify visitor numbers and spend at the Commandery through a phased approach to transform the visitor offer and experience. The positioning of the Commandery's proposed development in Worcester's wider heritage offer had been examined. It was aimed to develop clear messaging for marketing/branding. The remaining issues associated with the fabric of the building

would be assessed with the immediate essential work being addressed

The baseline – where we are now

- The baseline for the project was that the Commandery was a magnificent Grade 1 building in a city centre location with masses of history and space and lovely gardens with views up to Fort Royal Hill. The building had a small 'shop front' that could be regarded both as a strength and a weakness
- The building had been largely restored however there remained challenges that detracted from the visitor experience and restricted display options e.g. temperature of the rooms
- There was interpretation, mainly through an audio guide that told six layers of history in every room, although many of the rooms were empty. There was little internal way-finding and the visitor route felt very long and undifferentiated. The visitor offer was therefore confusing and difficult to sell to the customer
- There were around 20,000 visitors a year to the Commandery at present which was split 50/50 between tours and school visits. There was a very strong educational programme that needed to be preserved and grown
- The income from school visits admissions was £12,000 which was modest given the number of visits. The total income generated from all sources totalled £50,000

Unrealised potential

- The current interpretation in the Commandery did not appeal to many visitors – often leaving them confused
- Loyal visitors to the Commandery missed the pre-2007 focus on the Battle of Worcester. The English Civil War had strong resonance amongst the visiting public
- The heritage city offer was well understood and loved by potential visitors. Worcester had all the heritage (combined with riverside walks/good shopping/cafes/restaurants) but did not get the message across to the public. The Commandery was core to Worcester's heritage city offer and needed to develop an offer that positioned it successfully in the wider offer
- The Commandery offer needed to be successfully marketed alongside the wider Worcester offer. The site needed to generate more income

Assessing the potential

- The Commandery had the potential to vividly tell the story of the Battle of Worcester and ways of communicating it needed to be explored
- There were other stories to tell in the building. The amount of space in the building was challenging but meant that these stories could be told in different parts of the building
- The Great Hall was ideal to introduce the whole building and to position the Commandery in the wider Worcester offer including the civil war trail. It had potential to tell more stories for example the Presidents story in 1786 which would be a strong selling point for visitors from the USA
- The Cathedral was a natural partner for the Commandery, a partnership arrangement that had flourished in the magna carta year
- The Commandery offered potential to separate off parts of the building from visitors to dedicate to income generation – weddings, meetings and small events, holiday lets
- In order to tell the story of the Battle of Worcester, visitors would be encouraged to enter the building by a separate entrance. Rooms could be dedicated to the royalist story, the parliamentary story, escape and capture stories
- The Great Hall could be a multi-purpose room therefore any displays would need to be moveable

Realising the potential - Admissions

- There were currently around 10,000 admissions to the Commandery per annum. 2 out of 5 visitors did not pay because they were Worcester City Council residents. Admissions currently generated around £17,500 per annum
- Research undertaken last year concluded that with an improved offer, higher admission prices combined with a 'kids go free' initiative, income from admissions would improve to around £55,000 in year 1 and £65,000 in year 2 following the completion of the redevelopment. These projections would be reviewed in the next phase of the study

Realising the potential - Café

- A café at the Commandery had been piloted last year. The site was in a good location alongside the canal towpath which was accessible to the general public as well as visitors to the

Commandery

- The café operation had been tendered and negotiations were underway with a local business
- Based on a 10% share of sales, the Commandery's share of income this year (April to September) was £1,500. Longer term income potential based on extending the operation of the café to 9 months of the year was £3,500 - £4,000

Realising the potential - Retail

- The current fixtures and fittings could be refreshed and made more sympathetic to their surroundings at a low cost. A rethink of the stock was needed and linked more strongly to the offer at The Commandery, including the gardens. Visual merchandising needed to be overhauled. An investment of £7,500 could transform the proposition. Spend per visitor could be doubled and visitor numbers increased. The shop front needed to work as an advertisement for all that lay within the building

Realising the potential - Events

- There was space in the Commandery well suited to wedding ceremonies (room with direct access to the garden) and receptions, meetings and private dinners/parties (The Great Hall). Income could exceed £15,000 per annum. The employment of a part-time events person on a basic salary plus commission could cost in the region of £10,000 per annum, There would be set up costs for marketing, furniture and equipment in the region of £20,000

Realising the potential – Holiday lets

- There was an area of the Commandery that could readily convert to a holiday let. Comparator offers let at around £1,000 to £1,750 a week depending on the season. There were existing external management possibilities like the Vivat Trust whereby the company would take over the marketing of the lets at a fee. There was potential to link the letting arrangements to the weddings offer. English Heritage would need to be consulted should any conversion work be necessary for the building

Assessing the remaining issues with the building and addressing any immediate essentials

- Architects had looked at the humidity and temperature levels of the building as they were

limiting what could be displayed in the building as well as affecting the comfort of visitors. In the long term, it might be worth considering adoption of the National Trust approach to conservation heating whereby temperatures were kept between 12-14 degrees to keep relative humidity under control.

In the ensuing debate, the following principal points were raised:

- Greater visitor numbers would be welcomed but was there a maximum number that the building could take? Lucy McCall suggested that the strength of the floor boarding would be an important factor in determining the maximum capacity of the building
- Was it possible to include reference to Simon De Montfort and the birth of democracy in the displays in the building? Lucy McCall agreed to look into the possibility including such a reference
- There had been a café at the Commandery in the 1990s in the proposed room. However despite the quality of the offer, it had not succeeded to a large extent because people did not know it was there. The Museums General Manager added that that café had been successful in the summer but could not sustain its customer base in the winter. Lucy McCall stated that the provision of a café was a basic expectation for visitors to such a facility and evidence suggested that it increased the amount of “dwell time”
- The Head of Community and Environment suggested that as part of the marketing of the wedding offer, a wedding fair could be arranged at the Commandery. In addition, the offer could be included as part of a wider wedding service offer including County Hall and Hartlebury Museum
- The Museums General Manager confirmed that any catering and associated specialist equipment would need to be brought in for special events
- What was the reason for the high humidity levels in the building? The Museums General Manager stated that the high humidity levels were partly as a result of damp and low temperatures in the building. The colder it was, the greater the humidity level. It was not possible to fully control the temperature in the building which fluctuated greatly and thereby increased the humidity and in turn affected the displays. Lucy McCall added that this therefore meant that hardly any exhibits could be shown outside cases. Work needed to be

undertaken to find the best way to improve the issue possibly with the help of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund

- What would be the total cost should all the proposed plans be brought together? The Museums General Manager added that the proposals had been brought to this meeting to ascertain whether members were content with the approach being suggested before consideration by the City Council. DCA Consultants would then develop a business plan which would include a cost/benefit analysis and an analysis of the eventual value of the investment
- Had the proposals underplayed the environmental issues associated with the building? Would there be an impact on the willingness of people to lend collections to the service? Lucy McCall commented that there were certain absolute limitations on what could be displayed for example it would not be possible to display oil paintings in a traditional manner. However for the Battle of Worcester, this did not necessarily present a barrier. Visitors understood the story through interpretation without the need to use collections
- Had the consultants considered the interaction with Fort Royal Park and the pedestrian routes around the City? Lucy McCall commented that these aspects were being considered
- Lucy McCall undertook to look into the possibility of reference to the 'Faithful City' in potential displays at the Commandery
- Had any consideration been given to the improvement of the offer and increase in income through the use of the building by film companies as film sets? Lucy McCall commented that this income stream was difficult to predict but should not be discounted over the longer term
- The proposals put forward by the consultants should be supported however had any consideration been given to creating a separate building eg a visitor centre which would enable humidity to be controlled and provide capacity for school visits or would that detract from the building and take space away from the gardens? Lucy McCall welcomed the suggestion but indicated that more work would need to be undertaken to understand the purpose of such a building
- Subject to approval by this Joint Committee, what were the next stages in the process? The Museums General Manager explained that a

219 Shared Services Review (Agenda item 5)

presentation would be made to Worcester City Council. The City Council would need to make the decision to release the funds for the project. DCA Consultants would then be instructed to complete the business plans

- Was there a timeline for the process? The Corporate Director – Service Delivery commented that the proposals were at an early stage and conversations would need to be had with the relevant City Council portfolio holder before consideration by the City Council. The issue was complicated further by the impending elections. However the intention was to proceed sooner rather than later.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the draft proposals for investment at the Commandery be supported: and**
- b) the City Council be recommended to proceed to the next stage of realisation.**

The Joint Committee considered undertaking a shared service review.

The report indicated that over the course of five years, the service had had to respond to financial and other pressures which had had an impact on the terms of the original partnership agreement. These factors included:

- a) The reduction in funding from both Councils, in particular the pace and timing of changes;
- b) Pressures on support services at the host authority;
- c) The impact of new management arrangements at Hartlebury;
- d) Shared premises with Worcester City Council at the Museum and Art Gallery; and
- e) Collections management and storage pressures.

The partnership agreement stated that "The Joint Committee shall from time to time review the operation of this Agreement and the means by which the functions (or any of them) delegated to the Joint Committee are performed ...". It was proposed therefore that the Joint Committee approve in principle a process of review to address the issues set out above.

In the ensuing debate, the following principal points were raised:

- The Head of Community and Environment explained that it was not proposed to rip up the shared service but rather to modify it and bring proposals back to the Joint Committee for consideration. The shared service had been a key factor in securing funding and it was important that both councils continued to work together
- Was the remit of the review too narrow? Should the review consider the way the service operates as a whole and opportunities for the future? The Museums General Manager commented that part of the review would look at ways of using the dormant trust so that its benefits could be determined without breaking up the shared service. The question was whether members wanted a more fundamental review
- Had the relevant Cabinet members at the County Council been consulted? The Head of Community and Environment commented that the matter would be brought to the attention of Cabinet Members in due course
- Some of the smaller independent museums in the county had contacted the shared service for help but the service did not necessarily have the resources to provide any support. It was important therefore to establish whether the shared service provided a programme that was relevant to other museum bodies. The Head of Community and Environment added that the shared service had received requests for support from various organisations and it should not be necessary to have to refer to the relevant Cabinet Member on each occasion.

RESOLVED that:

- a) **the principle of a shared service review be approved; and**
- b) **authority be delegated to the Head of Community and Environment (Worcestershire County Council and the Corporate Director – Service Delivery (Worcester City Council) to explore the issues set out in paragraph 6 a) - e) of the report and to develop detailed proposals for further consideration by the Joint Committee.**

Grant Award (Agenda item 6)

The report indicated that earlier this month, the Arts Council announced that Museums Worcestershire was one of 19 museums in the Midlands to receive funding, a grant award of £129,100 in total. The funds were to be spent over two financial years. A condition of the grant award was that £20k needed to be found in partnership funding, spread over two financial years. In addition the service in its role as lead applicant needed to enter into partnership agreements with the Elgar Birthplace and Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust. Guidelines on the form of agreement required were provided by the Arts Council.

The shared service had a reserve of £17K currently and it was proposed that £10K was committed to be able to take up the grant offer in April. Making this budget decision relating to the use of end of year surplus funds was one of the joint committee's delegated functions. Funds from the revenue budget in 2016-17, or from reserve funds, would need to be set aside to meet the balance of partnership funding required in the following financial year.

In the ensuing debate, the following principal points were raised:

- What was the status of the Elgar Birthplace Museum? The Museums General Manager stated that the Museum was a separate Trust from the shared service although the cottage itself was owned by the City Council. The shared service maintained strong links with the Museum
- Was it intended to advertise the fund-raising post as a full-time position as this would take up a considerable amount of the Grant funds? The Museums General Manager commented that it was anticipated that should the post be created, it would be free-lance with funding linked to outputs and fund-raising targets.

RESOLVED that:

- a) the allocation of partnership funding as set out in the report be approved; and**
- b) he be authorised on behalf of Museums Worcestershire to develop agreements with its partners in accordance with Arts Council guidelines.**

221 Heritage Marketing Report (Agenda item 7)

The Joint Committee considered the progress made in delivering museums and heritage marketing projects.

In the ensuing debate, the following principal points were raised:

- It was queried why the Hive had not been included as one of the participating buildings in the 'Love Worcester' passport. The Marketing and Events Manager explained that the Hive had declined a request to be listed in the passport however copies of the passport were available in the Hive for visitors
- Had consideration been given to creating a presence for the shared service on Youtube? The Marketing and Events Manager stated that further work was needed to be undertaken to review how the service related to young people in general as well as through social media for example through the youth parliament in connection with liberty and democracy
- How did visitors to Worcester access the Love Worcester passport? The Marketing and Events Manager advised that the passport was available at the Tourist Information Centre as well as all the buildings listed in the passport and partner organisations
- Would a visitor to a participating building be automatically provided with a passport with that building stamped in it? The Marketing and Events Manager stated that that was the intention however due the costs, there had been a limited print run of 1,500 copies. The Head of Community and Environment suggested contacting the communications unit to discuss potential funding streams
- Would international visitors be able to get a copy of the passport in advance of arriving in Worcester? The Marketing and Events Manager advised that the marketing budget was limited and she would need to liaise with Destination Worcestershire to see if there was any way that this could be arranged
- Had the Local Enterprise Partnership been made aware of the passport initiative? The Marketing and Events Manager commented that she was due to meet representatives of the LEP in the next few weeks
- Had Worcestershire Ambassadors been contacted about the passport initiative? The Marketing and Events Manager advised that she would need to

**222 Service Plan
2015-16
(Agenda item 8)**

- speak to Destination Worcestershire about this
- It was agreed that Destination Worcestershire be invited to a future meeting of the Joint Committee.

RESOLVED that the progress made in delivering museums and heritage marketing projects be noted.

The Committee considered approving the Service Plan for 2015-16.

The report indicated that the plan provides a detailed work programme for the forthcoming financial year based on the overall direction and strategic objectives within the strategic plan agreed in November 2014. These are set out below:

- To create compelling, high quality destinations, exhibitions and events
- To develop heritage marketing and related tourism opportunities in the City and County
- To improve health, volunteering and learning opportunities in local communities
- To maintain responsible guardianship for our collections
- To secure a viable future for our museum sites through new ways of working.

In the ensuing debate, the following principal points were raised:

- In response to a query about the implications for the shared service of the changes to the curriculum of schools, the Museums General Manager commented that there had been an impact on the present offer at the Commandery however a new programme of activities for schools was being developed at the Commandery which would broaden the historical and curriculum focus. The issue was that young children were being taught earlier periods of history that did not necessarily relate to the stories at the Commandery
- How would performance targets be reported back to the City and County Councils and was the information provided relevant to performance targets? The Museums General Manager stated that he would need to review how the information was reported so that it measured impact rather than just statistics. He would bring a report to the next meeting of the Joint Committee with

proposals for the future.

RESOLVED that the Service Plan for 201-16 be approved.

**223 Finance Report
(Agenda item 9)**

The Joint Committee considered the financial position of the joint museums service.

RESOLVED that the financial position of the joint museums service as detailed in the report be noted.

**224 Performance
Report 3rd
Quarter
(Agenda item
10)**

The Joint Committee considered the performance of the joint museums service for the 3rd quarter 2014-15.

The report indicated that the key points to note were:

- Visitor numbers at the Museum and Art Gallery matched those of the previous year in spite of the extensive building works taking place to refit the ground floor. Visitor numbers at Hartlebury were also comparable with the previous year
- Numbers at the Commandery showed a decline represented in part by lower school numbers, a consequence of the recent changes in the school curriculum. Work was in progress to review this and to remodel the learning offer. The excellent response to the Love Worcester weekend in February would help to offset these figures
- The reduction in visits to Museum on the Move was a natural decline as this facility was currently under review, pending the reduction in funding from the Arts Council and the need to find a new business model
- Visits to the museum website continued to grow, a reflection of the importance on online activity for the service. The number of enquiries fielded by the collections team demonstrates an increasing awareness of the scope of the collections held and the expertise available in house.

In the ensuing debate, the following principal points were raised:

- Given the reduction in visits to Museums on the Move, would a decision be made on its future? It might be that funds would be better spent elsewhere. The Museums General Manager

225 Work programme (Agenda item 11)

commented that it might be necessary in the near future to make an immediate decision on the future of this service due to a change in funding from the Arts Council. If he decided to wind up the service, he would then seek endorsement from the Joint Committee at the earliest available opportunity

- Had there been any implications for the shared service associated with the recent changes to the County Council's web site? The Museums General Manager reported that there had not been any specific issues but in general, the web site did prove restrictive to the service and discussions were being held with the relevant officers at the County Council to improve the facility.

RESOLVED that the performance information provided for the 3rd quarter of 2014-15 be noted.

The Joint Committee considered its work programme.

The representative of the Head of Legal and Democratic Services reminded members that an additional item on Destination Worcestershire would be included in the work programme where appropriate.

RESOLVED that the work programme be noted.

The meeting ended at 12.05 pm

Chairman