

**JOINT MUSEUMS COMMITTEE  
14 SEPTEMBER 2016**

**COMMANDERY REFURBISHMENT PROGRESS REPORT**

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**Recommendation**

- 1. The Museums General Manager recommends that the progress made in developing the Commandery refurbishment project be noted.**

**Background**

2. At their meeting on 7 June and following a presentation on the Commandery master plan, the Joint Committee requested that a progress report on the Commandery project be submitted to each meeting (Minute no. 280 refers).
3. In July 2015 the City Council's Cabinet had agreed investment of up to £260,000 in improvements to the Commandery Museum. This was based on a development and outline business plan, produced by DCA Associates, which had been commissioned by Museums Worcestershire and referred back to the Cabinet for an investment decision by the Joint Museums Committee.
4. The strategic case for the investment was based on the studies into the value of heritage tourism, commissioned by Museums Worcestershire in 2013. Funded by an Arts Council grant, these included a detailed assessment of the current and potential value of Civil War heritage as part of Worcester's Tourism Strategy.
5. Museums Worcestershire has since appointed award winning exhibition designers GuM who have developed a new master plan for the building, with new Civil War displays at the heart of phase 1 as originally agreed. The outline designs for the sequence of works were presented to the last meeting and the phasing of the project has since been refined as follows:

**Phase 1: Worcester – the Civil War City**

- A series of linked garden wing displays will tell the story of Worcester's part in the English Civil Wars, the key historical figures and the significance of the conflict in helping to shape our Parliamentary democracy
- The façade of the building will be enhanced by the display of pikes above the gates which will be opened to provide a new entrance into the courtyard
- To the rear of the building a new Commandery Civil War study centre will be established including a library, research and volunteer facilities. The shop displays and stock will be refreshed to reflect the change of theme and reception for group visits will be enhanced in the canal wing.

## **Phase 2 - "It happened here"**

- A new light and projection display in the Great Hall to introduce the significance of the Commandery to visitors, plus the story of the visit of US Presidents John Adams and Thomas Jefferson in rooms overlooking Fort Royal Park.

## **Phase 3 - Commercial and visitor services**

- The creation of a new café in the front of the building facing the street the courtyard and canal, with the relocation of retail and admission point nearer the Great Hall entrance
- The establishment of a high quality wedding and corporate hire suite of rooms on the ground floor with an independent entrance
- The creation of temporary exhibition space.

## **Phase 4 - Future Interpretation**

- Completion of the interpretation plan, concentrating on Medieval and Tudor Worcester.

6. Museums Worcestershire has also appointed professional fundraisers to raise the additional financial backing necessary to complete the project to a more ambitious scale than was previously the case, particularly in the area of Civil War interpretation and enhanced visitor services and signing. Further meetings have been held with the Heritage Lottery Fund and a grant bid was submitted on 27 July 2016. Worcestershire County Council as a formal partner in the shared service has also agreed an investment contribution of £50,000. An additional grant of £28,500 has also been secured through the West Midlands Museum Development Scheme to help with heating; discussions with other potential funders are in progress.

7. Museums Worcestershire has engaged in extensive consultation to help define the form of the final proposals and ensure public and community engagement with the plans is high before and during the relaunch. A part time Marketing Officer has been appointed in accordance with the original recommendation to help boost the profile of the Commandery. New branding for the Commandery has also been commissioned.

8. The detailed proposals are being developed for phases 1 and 2 and aligned with the maintenance priorities for the building. The final decision on implementing the project rests with the City Council and a further report to the Cabinet will be necessary to proceed with the project.

## **Contact Points**

Worcestershire Hub: 01905 765765

Email: [worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:worcestershirehub@worcestershire.gov.uk)

### Specific Contact Points for this report

Iain Rutherford

Tel: 01905 361821

Email: [irutherford@worcestershire.gov.uk](mailto:irutherford@worcestershire.gov.uk)

## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Museums General Manager) the following are the background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

Strengthening Museums and the Visitor Economy (TSE Research)

Heritage Product Development (TSE Research)

English Civil War in Worcestershire (TSE Research)

"This really happened here" Audience Research and Evaluation of Interpretation at the Commandery (MHM)