

# **CORPORATE AND COMMUNITIES OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY PANEL 26 MARCH 2024**

## **UPDATE ON WORCESTERSHIRE COUNTY MUSEUM**

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### **Summary**

1. The Corporate and Communities Overview and Scrutiny Panel will be updated on Worcestershire County Museum, including progress to plan for its future at Hartlebury Castle.
2. The Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities and the Assistant Director for Communities have been invited to the meeting in order to respond to any questions the Panel may have.

### **Background**

3. The Worcestershire County Museum is a popular destination bringing local residents and tourists to Hartlebury Castle. It brings significant visitor spend into Worcestershire, as well as supporting learning, creativity, volunteering and health benefits for local residents.
4. The vision for the County Museum's future is to include space and programmes of work that attract earned income, grant funding and commissioning from primary care networks and partners that will support the Council to improve health outcomes for Worcestershire residents, as demonstrated in the paper to Cabinet on 26 October 2023 (see background papers).
5. Worcestershire County Museum displays the County's Museum collection, which records the rich history of Worcestershire and the stories of its residents, alongside a lively and popular programme of events and education. The service aims to use these resources to develop the potential of the County Museum, both commercially and to support the needs of Worcestershire residents. A highlight of the collection is the largest selection of historic Gypsy caravans (Vardos) in the world, a collection which is considered nationally significant and therefore can attract supporting external funding as well as be a draw for engagement programmes. The Council is also the sole trustee of the Tickenhill Collection, the founding Worcestershire collection which continues to be held in a charitable trust. The charitable objective of the trust is to maintain the collection for display and educational purposes.
6. The museum's current 60-year leases for the museum at Hartlebury Castle end in February 2026. The two leases have Security of Tenure under Part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. The landlord is Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust with whom the Council collaborates to open the site to the public as a major visitor destination for Worcestershire.

7. Under the Joint Museums Service terms of reference, the Joint Museums Committee (which is made up of councillors from Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council) considers the operation of an effective museum service and recommends a preferred option on any significant business model changes, to Cabinet. They reviewed several options at their meeting on 15 June 2023 and recommended Option A to Cabinet. which was then approved by Cabinet on 26 October 2023-

Option A	Remain at Hartlebury Castle, North wing, admin block and new build Transport Gallery  Estimated cost to the Council £800k-£1 million	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.  This option meets the funding priorities of the National Lottery Heritage Fund, plus other smaller funders.
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## **Actions Taken to Date**

### Governance

8. A project team and governance process have been established with representatives from the relevant service teams and support by internal technical experts covering all aspects of the redeveloped Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, including Property, Museum, Legal, Commercial and Finance. Strategic Board meetings with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust are undertaken bi-monthly, and project group meetings weekly. Individual workstreams meet as necessary between meetings.
9. Alongside the internal governance, workstreams and governance forums have been established to facilitate engagement and decision making between the partners. A Strategic Board and four workstreams have been established to coordinate the redeveloped Worcestershire County Museum at Hartlebury Castle.

### Key Progress since Cabinet Decision

10. Project leads met with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust (HCPT) to discuss a funding application on 29 January 2024 and they agreed the bid should be led by the Council, in close partnership with HCPT.
11. Guidance from National Lottery Heritage Fund indicated that the Expression of Interest (the first stage of the funding application process) matches closely against the four investment principles (Saving Heritage, Protecting the Environment, Inclusion Access and Participation, Organisational Strategy).
12. The Expression of Interest has been drafted, reviewed by Assistant Director of Communities and project team including technical experts and was submitted to National Heritage Lottery Fund on 3 March 2024.

13. Feedback and decision on the Expression of Interest is expected by 29 March 2024. Subject to this first stage approval, the project group will be working towards a more detailed application for the development phase ready for submission in August 2024, with guidance from National Lottery Fund.
14. In preparation for the development application, the museum service, along with the project team, have been gathering information to assist with the planning including the detailed project plan, high-level timeline with key milestones and decision points, and further detail to create building specifications for each of the areas within scope.
15. Condition surveys for museum areas within the current lease to the Council have been carried out by the Council as well as Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust. Both surveys have been reviewed and details have been collated alongside museum service specifications to inform the specification for the development application and subsequent tenders for the refurbishment and new build work.
16. Priority repair works are continuing outside of the funding application bid to ensure urgent works are completed as part of the Capital Maintenance Programme. Consideration is being given to works which can be delayed for inclusion within the wider scope of works to ensure maximisation of match funding for external funders as well as to ensure that all works are completed in the most efficient and cost-effective way. For the best chance of success at leveraging in external funding, the Council's matched funding should be around a third of total project cost.
17. Initial planning and options appraisal is underway for the proposed construction of a temporary Transport Gallery to house the Vardo collection, to make this collection accessible to the public ahead of the works required on the existing Transport Gallery. This, and other aspects of the plan, will be carefully reviewed alongside the funding application progress, budget forecasting and site survey information at key decision points within the timeline as more information becomes available. As such, the indicative timeline below contains a number of proposed dates which are subject to change pending key decision points.

## Key Dates

Deliverable	Timeframe
Expression of Interest submitted to National Lottery Heritage Fund	31/03/2024
North Wing Roof Repairs	11/03/2024
Decision of Expression of Interest to be received back from National Lottery Heritage Fund	29/03/2024
Admin Block and North Wing window maintenance repairs	08/07/2024
Development phase application submitted to National Lottery Heritage Fund	15/08/2024

Development phase application decision received back from National Lottery Heritage Fund	December 2024
Temporary Gallery erected	January 2025*
Permission to Start from National Lottery Heritage Fund	March 2025*
Interim Management Agreement between WCC and Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust to come into operation	April 2025*
New or temporary shop and reception installed	April 2025*
Advice on opportunities for energy efficiency for the site integrated into the planning	July 2025*
Design of North Wing and Transport Gallery new build	August 2025*
Museum current lease ends	February 2026
Heads of Terms for a new lease agreed	August 2026*
Delivery Phase application submitted to National Lottery Heritage Fund	September 2026*
Delivery Phase application decision received from National Lottery Heritage Fund	March 2027*
Build of new Transport Gallery	August 2028*
Refurb of North Wing	June 2029*
Sign off of new lease between WCC and HCPT	September 2029*

18. Some of the key dates listed above (\*) are estimated timescales pending determination of the funding available for both development and delivery phases.

### **Risk Implications to Worcestershire County Council**

19. There is a risk that should the Council fail to achieve any external funding to support the preferred option, work would still need to be carried out to comply with lease end obligations. Entering into a new lease would require, as a minimum, replacement of the existing Transport Gallery asbestos roof along with all other identified lease compliance work. In the event of a rejection by National Lottery Heritage Fund, the project would be reviewed, and a revised version brought back to Capital Board for a funding decision.
20. As previously mentioned in paragraph 6, the Council's current interests at Hartlebury Museum are protected under Part II of the Landlord and Tenant Act 1954. Throughout the negotiations for future leases and management agreement, consideration will need to be given to continue to protect the Council's interests if there is a change of landlord within the lifetime of the new lease.

## **Key Elements to be Considered**

21. The project aims to protect and promote the museum collections of Worcestershire County Council, and the memories of local people and celebrate the stories of the County's history. The work to interpret and include these will be through engagement with residents.
22. The rejuvenated County Museum will complement the activities of Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust, ensuring the site continues to be a significant attractor of tourist spend into Worcestershire, while operating more efficiently alongside each other.
23. Worcestershire County Museum has a track record for supporting health outcomes for residents, from groundbreaking programmes using collections and reminiscence to support those living with dementia and their carers, to evidence of positive mental wellbeing improvements in social visits and volunteering. The rejuvenated museum will have space and resources to extend these programmes and embed new activities that support the Council's prevention public health objectives, enabling local people to live healthier lives for longer. Planning and piloting of programmes is underway, supported by partnerships with other local providers and the local district collaborative network and primary care networks.
24. The museum aims to enable a step-change in the number of visits from school children as part of this work. The site is already popular with schools, but there are barriers to numbers, with spaces having developed organically. Schools are currently unable to bring more than two classes at a time, meaning larger urban schools are less likely to visit. The changes will open Worcestershire County Museum to the urban conurbation of the West Midlands, as well as developing programmes for local looked after children and home educated groups.
25. National Lottery Heritage Fund is the largest potential funder for the project, but a wider funding plan aims to apply for funding from Arts Council England and the National Lottery Community Fund. Approaches to larger and local charitable foundations are also being planned, each to support specific areas of the wider project.

## **Purpose of the Meeting**

26. The Panel is asked to:
  - consider and comment on the information provided on the County Museum
  - agree any comments to highlight to the Cabinet Member with Responsibility for Communities;
  - determine whether any further information or scrutiny on a particular topic is required.

## **Contact Points for this report:**

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## **Background Papers**

In the opinion of the proper officer (in this case the Assistant Director for Legal and Governance) the following are background papers relating to the subject matter of this report:

- [Agenda and Minutes of Cabinet on 26 October 2023](#)

[All agendas and minutes are available on the Council's website here.](#)