

In preparing this report the relevance of the following factors has been considered: prevention of crime and disorder, equality of opportunity; and legal, financial, environmental, health, respect for human rights, personnel and property considerations.

DERBYSHIRE COUNTY COUNCIL

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES/CULTURAL AND COMMUNITY SERVICES IMPROVEMENT AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

10 May 2006

Report of the Chief Executive

Review of Buxton Museum and Art Gallery – Outcome Report

1. Purpose of the Report

To inform the Committee of the outcome of the review of Buxton Museum and Art Gallery.

2. Information and Analysis

Members will be aware, from the numerous progress reports submitted to this Committee, that various aspects of the facilities offered by Buxton Museum and the Derbyshire Museum Service. These can be grouped as follows;

Premises

Reference has been made to the condition of the Museum Building and the overall need for extensive improvements, not least to the areas used for storage of collections and art work. The tenancy of part of the buildings by the Courts was noted and that this posed a barrier at the present time, to expanding the Museum's facilities. It was understood that the Courts were due to vacate the building in approximately 6 years time, although this could happen earlier, should the Courts find alternative suitable accommodation.

The County Property Officer advised the working group that the Museum premises are not a listed building but are situated in a conservation area. As such, certain permitted development rights have been removed and things like changing windows or roofing materials, which wouldn't normally require planning permission now do. This doesn't affect internal alterations where it is only necessary to satisfy building regulations as normal. However, if any major works were proposed for the building it would be prudent to obtain a Certificate of Immunity from English Heritage. With this in place, English Heritage can't come along and "spot list" the premises for 5 years. This means that the building cannot be made "listed" for that period of time, therefore allowing the County Council time to draw up and implement any

proposals for improvements to the building without being impeded by listed building status being imposed upon the premises.

Members of the working group were very mindful of the resource implications of undertaking a large refurbishment and expansion programme for the Museum but were aware that potential funding may be available from the Lottery Heritage Fund. This matter had been discussed in an interview with Jim Grevatte, the Museum Development Officer at East Midlands Museums Libraries and Archives Council (now MLA East Midlands), when he had indicated there would be broad support for such a bid for Buxton Museum.

As well as the condition of the building in general, smaller improvements should be considered to make the building more accessible to older people and making the collections more accessible/appealing to children visiting, either in groups as with families.

These issues and the increasing need for maintenance on the building should be considered for inclusion in the Council's Capital Programme. The County Property Officer had made a presentation to a previous meeting of this Committee and he had spoken of the need for increasing maintenance of the building.

External Organisations

A meeting was held with the Friends of Buxton Museum when number of suggestions for improvements was identified. These are detailed as follows;

- Access to collections needs to be improved, possibly by having more catalogues on-line so that people could discover what the Museum has to offer
- More promotion and publicity was needed, again via the a website, but also through partnerships with other local organisations especially Destination Derbyshire which aims to promote tourism throughout the county
- More could be done to encourage children to visit the Museum. Although there were already projects at the Museum for children, these could be more widely promoted, not least through Derbyshire's Education Service, and facilities for children should be increased
- The profile of the Museum should be raised within the town by means such as better sign posting, and high impact publicity on the outside of the building itself. The Crescent, and the recently developed Devonshire project could be asked to assist in promoting the Museum and its various exhibitions. In addition, the street facing windows of the Museum, which were currently blocked in, should be re-opened as glass, where possible and the frontage of the Museum should be made more colourful and eye-catching to promote the Museum's existence and be better used to promote the various exhibitions.

- The Friends of the Museum group representatives were keen to assist in the scrutiny review's endeavours wherever possible, for example, help in developing the website and putting together a bid for Lottery funding.

The Derbyshire Museums Manager, Ros Westwood, allocates part of her time to supporting the local independent museum sector. Primarily, she leads the Derbyshire Museums' Forum which supports many small, independent museums throughout the county. The work she undertakes in this aspect involves the County Council in a Community Leadership role and she was very highly regarded in this respect. It was therefore considered that it is important that work in this area is allowed to continue and grow. To this end it may be advisable for the Department to look at the post's other commitments in respect of allowing more time to develop work in this area. At the same time, the Department should consider what succession planning is in place in respect of the post of Derbyshire Museums Manager and developing staff at the Museum.

Promotion of the Museum

The working group considers that there is scope for the Museum and its facilities to be more widely promoted, particularly through the following channels;

- The County Council's Children and Younger Adults Department – although the Museum has links with some local schools more could be done to encourage visits from schools from other parts of the county
- Libraries and other County Council "venues" should be used more for out-reach exhibitions and resources should be made available to develop more innovative exhibitions for display on a county-wide basis
- The Derbyshire Museums Forum should be used as another route for out-reach exhibits and temporary collection "exchanges".

Staffing

The working group members were all impressed by the enthusiasm and dedication of the Museum staff and can see how their commitment contributes to the good reputation of the County's Museum Service. The members would like to see the Museum benefit from resources to allow the Museum staff to make improvements highlighted in this report.

Acknowledgements

The working group would like to extend thanks to the following groups and individuals who helped in this review;

Staff of the Museum and the Cultural and Community Services Department
Cabinet Member for Cultural and Community Services – Cllr Bob Janes
Jim Grevatte – EMLAC Museums Development Officer
Friends of Buxton Museum and Art Gallery
County Property Officer

Other Considerations

The impact of the review on the Council's financial, property and personnel resources has been taken into account.

OFFICERS' RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Improvement and Scrutiny Committee support the following recommendations of the review working group;

1. That, once the Courts have vacated the Museum premises, the whole building should be made available for Museum use.
2. That, should the occasion arise when the Courts indicate their intention to vacate the building, a working group of appropriate officers be established to put together a bid to the Lottery Heritage Fund, working with advisers from EMMILAC and representatives of the Friends of Buxton Museum as appropriate. As part of this process, the County Property Officer should be requested to obtain a Certificate of Immunity from English Heritage to protect the current status of the building.
3. The role of the Derbyshire Museums Manager should be strengthened in respect of work with the wider Museum community, for example her leadership work with the independent sector, and she should be allowed time from other duties in order to develop this role, wherever possible.
4. The facilities offered by the Museum should be more widely promoted, particularly through the Council's Children and Younger Adults Division, outreach displays at libraries, other council venues and in co-operation with independent sector museums.
5. Smaller improvements be made as soon as possible to provide more seating in the gallery and other areas as appropriate, create more user-friendly displays (with emphasis on children and older people) and to highlight the Museum frontage with banners, window displays etc. to raise the Museum's profile in the town.

KATH LAURO
Chair of Review Working Group