



Committee and Date

Cabinet

26 September 2018

## SHROPSHIRE MUSEUMS STRATEGY

**Responsible Officer** Tim Jenkins, Culture & Heritage Services Manager  
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### 1.0 Summary

- 1.1 Shropshire Museums Service manages the following sites and venues:
- Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery
  - Shrewsbury Castle (with the Shropshire Regimental Museum Trust)
  - Coleham Pumping Station
  - Acton Scott Historic Working Farm
  - Much Wenlock Museum
  - Ludlow Museum Resource Centre
- 1.2 In 2016 Shropshire Museums Services secured Arts Council England funding to produce a five-year strategy for the service. The need for a longer-term strategy arose from a period of considerable change for the service since the opening of the redeveloped Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery in 2014.
- 1.3 The draft strategy has been developed following extensive consultation with museums staff, volunteers, Friends groups, and stakeholders. It covers the period 2018-2023, and highlights the following mission, values and objectives for Shropshire Museums Service:
- 1.4 **Mission**  
We will work as a team to ensure that all of our customers have an enjoyable experience of our museums and collections. We will focus on attracting families, embracing their diverse make-up and needs. Our services will benefit the health and wellbeing of our local communities and we will strengthen our resilience by planning for the future.
- 1.5 **Values**
- Customer Experience
  - Family Focus
  - Health and Wellbeing
  - Resilience
  - Teamwork

## 1.6 Objectives

- Provide a high quality, well organised and accessible collection that supports the values of the Museums Service and helps us to tell Shropshire's stories.
- Provide a place where all customers feel welcome, comfortable, educated and excited to return.
- Proactively engage with partners to welcome a diverse audience into our museums and to strengthen the cultural offer across Shropshire.
- Increase our resilience by developing our fundraising capability and making best use of our assets.

1.7 A detailed action plan has been developed based on the draft strategy which will feed into specific team and individual's work plans. This Strategy will also inform the wider work on the Cultural pledge currently being undertaken across the cultural sector in Shropshire.

## 2.0 Recommendations

2.1 Members are asked to approve the Shropshire Museums strategy, 2018-2023, attached at Appendix 1.

2.2 Members are asked to delegate responsibility to the Head of Infrastructure and Communities, in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Culture and Leisure services, to finalise a detailed five-year action plan linked to the delivery of the strategy.

### REPORT

## 3.0 Risk Assessment and Opportunities Appraisal

3.1 There are no significant risks related to the development and implementation of the strategy. See Appendix 2 for a copy of the Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment, which did not identify any specific issues.

3.2 The Shropshire Museums Strategy offers significant opportunities for the service to improve its impact on the people and communities of Shropshire, thereby contributing to the wider visitor economy and economic development aims of Shropshire Council.

3.3 The strategy, is set in the context of Shropshire Council's three high-level outcomes

- Healthy people
- Resilient communities
- Prosperous economy.

## 4.0 Financial Implications

4.1 There are no significant financial implications from the development and implementation of the Shropshire Museums Strategy.

## 5.0 Background

5.1 Shropshire Museums Service secured £72,890 of funding under the Resilience programme of Arts Council England in August 2016. As well as supporting the

development of the strategy itself, this funding allowed the service to trial a range of innovative outreach projects and activities from 2016-2018 which have all helped to inform the strategy.

- 5.2 Several focus groups were held with staff, volunteers, members of Friends groups and other stakeholders to review the current museums provision and to look at the service's values and objectives. In addition, fact finding visits were undertaken to a number of other museums by varied groups of staff and volunteers. All this activity contributed to the development of the strategy, which was co-ordinated by Project Officer, Martha Mondon.
- 5.3 The draft strategy has been shared with all those involved in its development ahead of this meeting. Overall, the response was very positive with stakeholders recognising the importance of the new direction for the service expressed within the strategy, though one response expressed concern regarding funding for its implementation.
- 5.4 Issues raised in the consultation included:
- Need to change the main exhibits at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery and create exhibits with a 'wow' factor
  - Need to improve the presentation of Charles Darwin's story within Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery
  - Need to improve the presentation of Fine Art within Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery
  - Enjoyment of volunteers in supporting the Museums Service
  - Excellent education service provided by the Museums Service
  - Emphasis on the national and international importance of objects within the Museum Collections
  - Concern regarding securing funding for the implementation of the strategy
  - Need for improved collection of customer data at Shrewsbury Museum & Art Gallery
  - Concern about procedures for disposal of museum objects
  - Recognition of the importance of Shropshire Museums for visitors to Shropshire
  - Need to reflect a greater diversity of audiences in the photographs included in the strategy
- 5.5 Individual comments included:
- 'What an exciting and ambitious future is portrayed! The strategy sets out a clear pathway for the future of the service and I wholeheartedly agree with the general themes it describes.'
  - 'I am greatly heartened by the broad ranging and forward looking Strategy document, and in particular to making greater use in the future of the collections of the museums in Shropshire.'
  - 'We welcome this paper as a valuable contribution towards establishing the museum service's future direction'

## **6.0 Shropshire Museums Strategy, 2018-2023**

- 6.1 The proposed Shropshire Museums Strategy, 2018 to 2023, is included as Appendix 1.

- 6.2 The strategy is fundamental in setting the direction of the Museums Service as it faces a future of increasing challenge. It will shape day-to-day service provision; articulating a clear vision which will drive programming of exhibitions and events as well as informing who we should work with as partners and funders. The purpose of the strategy is to document explicit objectives for the service over the next five years, to specify steps in the plan to achieve these, and to identify how we will measure our success.
- 6.3 **Mission** - We will work as a team to ensure that all of our customers have an enjoyable experience of our museums and collections. We will focus on attracting families, embracing their diverse make-up and needs. Our services will benefit the health and wellbeing of our local communities and we will strengthen our resilience by planning for the future.
- 6.4 The strategy is underpinned by five core values:
- 6.5 **Customer Experience.** We want all of our customers to have an enjoyable experience of our museums.  
The days of simply opening the doors to a good quality collection are well and truly behind us. We will understand our customers' needs and wants and strive to meet those so that all customers have a wonderful experience. Customers' expectations are high and we will place their experience at the heart of our service.
- 6.6 **Family focus.** We want to attract families into our museums.  
Museums are uniquely placed to create wonderful experiences between the people who visit. Traditionally museums have concentrated on the experiences that occur between object and customer; we want to take this a step further and focus on using our objects and spaces to foster wonderful experiences between customers in the groups in which they naturally visit. Families are the natural group to focus on. Their diverse make-up and needs will drive us to provide an inclusive service; we will not simply provide activities for children but think holistically about the needs and wants of the entire family.
- 6.7 **Health and wellbeing.** We want to benefit our local communities.  
We know that the collections we hold, the beautiful spaces in which we house them and the exhibitions, activities and events which we deliver benefit the health and wellbeing of individuals and communities. As does engagement with our museums as a volunteer. We will recognise, cultivate and promote this benefit across all areas of our service.
- 6.8 **Resilience.** We want to prepare for the future.  
The financial future for local authority museums is set to remain uncertain. The expectations of key stakeholders, including funders, are high and the resources with which to deliver the service are diminishing. We are therefore committed to delivering the Strategy, increasing our fundraising capability and seeking multiple sources of income. We will be forward thinking; making best use of our assets to generate income and establishing partnerships that open up new audiences and funding opportunities.
- 6.9 **Teamwork.** We want to be an efficient and effective team  
In order to deliver the strategy we need a motivated, skilled and collaborative team of staff and volunteers. We will all work to foster an environment where ideas and

concerns are listened to and acted upon. We will invest in our professional development and personal networks across the sector. We will share learning. We will value each other and help to create a happy motivated team who are supported to deliver a wonderful experience for all our customers

6.10 These values will shape how we deliver our objectives.

**Objectives:**

6.11 **Provide a high quality, well organised and accessible collection that supports the values of the Museums Service and helps us to tell Shropshire's stories.**

6.12 Shropshire Museums Service has a wonderfully eclectic collection that has grown organically over many years. It encompasses over 300,000 old, new and curious items from ice age mammoth bones to Roman tombstones, 500 million year old fossils to extinct creatures and farming equipment to armour. Our ceramic, archaeology and geology collections are of national importance.

6.13 However, it also poses problems. While the collection continues to grow and age the resources with which to care for, interpret and exhibit it have diminished and will remain insufficient for the foreseeable future. This poses a significant challenge for the Museum Service.

6.14 Our collection is the foundation upon which the rest of the service sits. As such a great deal is required of it; it needs to be high quality, organised and accessible, able to support our values and tell the stories of our county. This goes hand-in-hand with promotion of the beautiful, fascinating and surprising objects which we have in our care.

6.15 **Provide a place where all customers feel welcome, comfortable, educated and excited to return.**

6.16 Shropshire Museums are beautiful and fascinating spaces. However, in a marketplace where there is increasing competition for leisure time it is not enough to simply open the doors to our buildings to make our collection publicly accessible.

6.17 A good understanding of our actual and potential customers' needs will ensure the long-term survival of our museums and help us to develop welcoming, comfortable, exciting and educational customer experiences.

6.18 **Proactively engage with partners to welcome a diverse audience into our museums and to strengthen the cultural offer across Shropshire.**

6.19 Shropshire Museums have developed some excellent partnerships with external organisations. However, while the financial future for local authority museums remains uncertain, building partnerships that open up new funding opportunities, engage new audiences, raise our profile and enable us to deliver new and exciting activities, events and exhibitions is fundamental to securing a sustainable future for our museums.

6.20 **Increase our resilience by developing our fundraising capability and making best use of our assets.**

- 6.21 After almost a decade of central government funding cuts, our museums have become adept at maximising limited resources to keep the doors open. However, low revenue investment has left a legacy of limited capacity across the service, including our capability to secure vital additional funding to invest in customer experience and our collections.
- 6.22 While the financial climate remains uncertain it has never been more important that we make best use of our assets in order to develop sustainable sources of income that directly fund Museums Services, and; develop our fundraising capability in order to secure long term funding from a wide range of sources.
- 6.23 Resilience is also about investing in our people; having a dynamic and diverse volunteer community and Friends' groups who are excited and engaged with our museums, who are vocal advocates for us in Shropshire and who experience tangible benefits from being involved with our museums.

## **7.0 Conclusion**

- 7.1 The Shropshire Museums Strategy sets out four strategic objectives for the service for the period 2018-2023, and five values which will shape how the objectives are delivered. The Strategy has been developed with input from staff, volunteers and other key stakeholders. It reflects a service which is ambitious while taking account of the challenges facing local authority museums.
- 7.2 The strategy will be implemented and monitored through an action plan delivered by staff across the service. The strategy will be reviewed annually.

**List of Background Papers (This MUST be completed for all reports, but does not include items containing exempt or confidential information)**

Responses to consultation, August 2018

**Cabinet Member (Portfolio Holder) - Cllr Lezley Picton**

**Local Member - All members**

**Appendices**

Appendix 1 Shropshire Museums Strategy, 2018-2023

Appendix 2 Equality and Social Inclusion Impact Assessment