

**SUBJECT: SHIRE HALL / MONMOUTH MUSEUM**

**MEETING: Individual Cabinet Member Decision – Cllr Paul Jordan**

**DATE: 9 December 2020**

**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: DRYBRIDGE**

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To undertake a feasibility study to establish a new cultural destination at the Shire Hall Monmouth, celebrating the history and collections of Monmouth and relocating the current Monmouth Museum. The intent being to create a new offer that is integrated, engaging and sustainable whilst retaining the character of the Shire Hall.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 To undertake a feasibility study to establish a new cultural offer at Shire Hall incorporating the Monmouth Museum, currently located in the Market Hall, to include consideration of the implementation of an initial phase and options for a second phase to showcase the building, the various collections and the town. A further report will be presented to Cabinet as the outcome of the feasibility study progresses.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 Cabinet approved the 2017-2022 Museums Forward Plan in December 2016 and identified the need to re-provide Monmouth Museum with space to tell the Monmouth and Nelson stories.
- 3.2 Staff at the Shire Hall have worked to deliver a sustainable model however with the size, layout, shape and listed building status, it has not been possible to attract the expected level of business or footfall. Other local venues have received investments and compete for similar markets, leaving a smaller market share. Shire Hall has been particularly hard hit by Covid 19, highlighting the vulnerability of a business model that relies entirely on the external market.
- 3.3 The intrinsic value and history of the Shire Hall presents a strong heritage offer around the assizes, the courtroom, local democracy and the Chartism story. This proposed opportunity will ensure that the building is connected with the museum collection in a way that the town can be proud of and a way that delivers a much improved visitor experience.
- 3.4 The Market Hall accommodation requires significant investment to bring the visitor experience up to modern expectations. The remainder of the principal accommodation at Market Hall is vacant or in temporary use therefore relocating to the Shire Hall relinquishes

the building and provides the Council with the opportunity to examine future use and explore opportunities to repurpose the building.

- 3.5 Bringing the offers together provides greater opportunities for learning; both formal and informal (especially with regard to the new curriculum for Wales) and will enrich the learning offer for local audiences and those from further afield.
- 3.6 This opportunity will create a modern attraction that better tells the Monmouthshire story, including the history of the town of Monmouth, the Lady Llangattock / Rolls / Nelson connection, the role of Shire Hall, Chartism etc. in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.
- 3.7 The precise nature of the initial phase needs further assessment but it is anticipated this could include the local history collection, temporary exhibition space, the Shire Hall courtroom and cells, learning space, shop and tourism information and provision of new museum stores.
- 3.8 Further phases depend on success in attracting external funding but should it be successful it would provide the opportunity to expand the offer further and this would include the redisplay and reinterpretation of the Nelson collection. Public engagement and the emerging MonLife Heritage Strategy would support these plans.
- 3.9 A feasibility study will be undertaken to assess the future delivery pathway, options and risks and will include a fully costed and phased plan which will be used to support future funding bids. The study will also include an appraisal of collection storage across all sites and is expected to be funded through CSF grant.
- 3.10 A robust business plan for the new provision will be developed alongside the detailed proposals, in consultation with the relevant stakeholders and presented to Cabinet. The intent would be for the new facility to provide an opportunity for suitable events and activities associated with its core purpose as a heritage attraction, and to accommodate continued use by the Town Council.

#### **4. EQUALITY AND FUTURE GENERATIONS EVALUATION (INCLUDES SOCIAL JUSTICE, SAFEGUARDING AND CORPORATE PARENTING):**

- 4.1 Creating the offer at Shire Hall better tells the Monmouthshire story, it will address the need to improve facilities and the visitor experience and provides a framework for long term development of the offer and the engagement of new audiences improving people's wellbeing. The process of developing new provision allows for full public engagement to help identify the stories important to all our communities. Better facilities will support the education of our children and young people and developing their sense of place within their communities. Creating this new offer will contribute to the economy, add vibrancy to the town centre and support artistic, cultural, heritage and tourism activity.
- 4.2 The Shire Hall has lift access to all floors and will ensure more people can view future displays and exhibitions.

## 5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option	Benefit	Risks	Comments
Not to explore merging the heritage offers at Shire Hall and Monmouth Museum	None	Does not address the shortcomings in the Monmouth museum and the need for change in the business model for Shire Hall;	Does not progress the ambitions set out in the Museum Forward Plan
To explore establishing a new attraction at Shire Hall	Will provide the opportunity to creating a new attraction at Shire Hall that tells the Monmouthshire story, including the current Monmouth Museum and the Shire Hall heritage offer in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.	Sufficient resources need to be secured to ensure that the phase 1 offer meets public expectations and maintains accreditation standards. The risk of later phases, which are dependent on attracting external funding not proceeding in a timely way.	

## 6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 6.1 An evaluation framework will be developed as part of the feasibility study and progress will be evaluated against this and the relevant MonLife Service Delivery and Business Plan. The framework will incorporate performance indicators including visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction, learning outcomes and income targets.

## 7. REASONS:

- 7.1 The provision of a contemporary offer in Monmouth is identified within the Museum Forward Plan and provides a way to better relay the Monmouthshire story in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.
- 7.2 The creation of a new attraction at Shire Hall would contribute to the Destination Management Plan objective of developing the county's cultural product offer.

## 8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 8.1 Cross directorate work is underway to establish costings for the move. The resource implications both revenue and capital will be confirmed as the project plan is developed. Initial estimates suggest a budget of £110k will be required for the move and some further funding required to ensure the essential infrastructure is in place to meet museum accreditation needs. There is currently an application to Welsh Government for cultural services grant which may assist with costs. Additional revenue consequences will be a reduction of income to the Shire Hall as rooms are utilised for museum space however the joining of two buildings into one should deliver savings on expenditure and resources whilst the staffing levels will also need to be considered.
- 8.2 The anticipated feasibility and exploratory costs required prior to a more certain decision will be funded from MonLife service budgets along with a contribution of £20,000 from Property

Maintenance budget. The feasibility will identify the cost of future developments, which will depend upon securing grant funding from other sources.

**9. CONSULTEES:**

SLT  
Cabinet  
Ward member

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Appendix A - Equality and Future Generations Evaluation

**11. AUTHOR & CONTACT DETAILS:**

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