

**SUBJECT: SHIRE HALL / MONMOUTH MUSEUM**

**MEETING: Council**

**DATE: 24 June 2021**

**DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: DRYBRIDGE**

**1. PURPOSE:**

- 1.1 To inform members of progress on the feasibility study to establish a new cultural destination at the Shire Hall Monmouth including the relocation of the current Monmouth Museum and the review of museum collection storage.
- 1.2 To propose a phased approach to the new provision.

**2. RECOMMENDATIONS:**

- 2.1 To note the progress in undertaking a feasibility study to establish a new cultural offer at Shire Hall incorporating the Monmouth Museum and the review of museum collection storage.
- 2.2 To approve the establishment of an initial phase within Shire Hall and to confirm that Monmouth Museum will not reopen in Market Hall.
- 2.3 To reopen key areas of Shire Hall for public use, subject to Covid regulations and any restrictions required to allow the completion of the phase 1 provision incorporating temporary museum displays.
- 2.4 To approve a £250,000 contribution from capital receipts to facilitate the initial phase of works, as recommended by Cabinet on 9 June 2021. That in turn will also provide a match funding contribution to the Levelling Up Fund bid for Monmouth that would if successful enable the longer term vision to be achieved.
- 2.5 Future reports be presented to members as the long term proposals for Shire Hall, Monmouth and for museum collection storage are further developed.

**3. KEY ISSUES:**

- 3.1 Undertaking a feasibility study to establish a new cultural offer at Shire Hall incorporating the Monmouth Museum, including consideration of the implementation of an initial phase and options for a second phase to showcase the building and collections was approved in December 2020.

- 3.2 Innes Associates were appointed to undertake the study and it has progressed since January 2021 supported by a project team. Its scope includes examining the feasibility and phasing of an enhanced cultural destination at the Shire Hall, and to support that an assessment of collection storage options across all museum sites.
- 3.3 The study has confirmed the potential to create an exceptional, integrated visitor attraction that engages and inspires existing and new audiences: *“Powerful stories will be told about the history of Monmouth, beautiful and intriguing objects will be displayed in a magnificent setting, learning opportunities will be offered to all ages and the attraction will provide the possibility of continued third-party bookings and shop-generated sales. The project will maximise the value of this heritage asset, enhancing the vibrancy of Monmouthshire and promoting a deeply rooted sense of place”*.
- 3.4 The overall concept proposes changes to make the approach to the building more open, the entrance foyer larger and more transparent, and a clear transition to the main display area on the first floor. The scheme also creates a new, larger learning space for all ages, maintains bookable and flexible community spaces, continued accommodation for the Town Council and a larger shop / visitor information presence,
- 3.5 This would allow for a new visitor flow on the ground floor, including creating community exhibition and learning spaces. The main displays on the first floor, would use the full room volumes and the circulation spaces. The whole building will be used as a resource for storytelling, fully integrating the historic courtroom and cells into the visitor journey; all intended to create attractive animated spaces for visitors and community use.
- 3.6 The study suggest the building is suitable for museum use and the conversion can be achieved respecting the buildings historic importance and listing. Further detailed work will be required to ensure essential museum environmental conditions, energy efficiency and security standards; to confirm the acceptability of the design details with respect to building conservation requirements; and to refine the cost plan which is currently estimated to be in the region of £2.6M, subject to further detailed design.
- 3.7 In addition the study has reviewed the longer term museum storage strategy, as Shire Hall would only accommodate limited museum storage necessitating further provision elsewhere. The previously approved Museum Forward Plan envisaged a new centralised store, potentially as part of the re-provision of Monmouth museum. After discussion with potential funders, review of likely capital / revenue costs and carbon footprint the preferred option is now a decentralised storage strategy rationalising the use of space and environmentally controlled storage across all of the museums sites, supported by expanded off site stores. The museum storage strategy will be subject to further consideration by Cabinet.
- 3.8 This approach involves utilising the former conservation labs in Chepstow museum as stores and considering options for further off site storage – the basement at Chepstow Leisure Centre has been identified as a potential location, but requires more detailed assessment. The storage strategy is not costed and further detailed assessment is now required of individual collection requirements, security and environmental controls.

- 3.9 Delivery of the longer term vision will depend on resourcing and critically access to external funding. In respect of the long term ambitions for the Shire Hall museum it is proposed to include the full proposals within the Monmouth Levelling Up (LUF) bid to UK Government. Further reports will be presented to Cabinet as the long term proposals for Shire Hall, Monmouth and museum collection storage are refined.
- 3.10 Given the longer term strategy and the need to resolve the museum's current accommodation, and develop a more robust business model for Shire Hall, an initial phase is identified. This would comprise of the local history collection, temporary exhibition space, the Shire Hall courtroom and cells, learning space, shop and visitor information. It is proposed to develop the storytelling brief for the longer term provision through a wide consultative process including gauging visitor and community responses to temporary displays.
- 3.11 The estimated costs of the phase 1 provision including the necessary security and environmental adaptations, conserving collection objects for display and addressing immediate collection storage needs is in the order of £250,000. This will also be included as potentially eligible expenditure within the LUF bid. Subject to resolving detailed issues and consents it is anticipated that this provision would be in place later in 2021.
- 3.12 The proposals are informed by the wider retail assessment undertaken across all MonLife attraction and museum sites supported by the Cultural Services Fund. An overall business plan and staffing proposals are under development. It is anticipated that the combined facility and staffing will allow for extended opening hours compared to the current museum and the intention is to utilise the initial phase to explore options such as early evening opening.
- 3.13 In the ordinary course of events Monmouth Museum would have reopened after its winter closure. However given the Covid restrictions in place until recently both venues have remained closed to public use. In order to progress the collection review and associated tasks required to prepare for a move it is impracticable for Monmouth Museum to reopen in Market Hall. It is therefore proposed that key areas of Shire Hall will reopen for public use, subject to any temporary opening or access restrictions required to allow the completion of the phase 1 provision incorporating the temporary museum displays.
- 3.14 In terms of Market Hall the site is currently identified as a potential site to act as a hub for regional working. Feasibility works are being commissioned to assess options, cost implications and that will run alongside external funding sources being secured. The Market Hall also has the potential of being included in the LUF funding proposals for Monmouth.

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

- 4.1 Creating the offer at Shire Hall better tells the Monmouth 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 children and young people, lifelong learning, wider community engagement and involvement.

- 4.2 The inherent purpose of MonLife is to make the best possible contribution to improving the quality of life for all of the communities, aligning to Public Service Board priorities from the Well-being Plan and Assessments. The positive engagement and activities with communities, customers and staff will enable a focus on investment in key aspects of this new visitor attraction to ensure the culture and business thrives and that it contributes to the economy, add vibrancy to the town centre and support artistic, cultural, heritage and tourism activity.
- 4.3 The Shire Hall has lift access to all floors and will ensure more people can view future displays and exhibitions.
- 4.4 The safeguarding responsibilities of the Authority and partners are fully integrated into the identification of appropriate actions, and reflected within MonLife’s culture and documentation for these services.

## 5. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option	Benefit	Risks	Comments
Not to proceed with merging the heritage offers at Shire Hall and Monmouth Museum and explore collection storage options	None	Does not address the shortcomings in the Monmouth museum, the need for change in the business model for Shire Hall and the long term museum storage issue.  Does not allow for future use of the current museum accommodation in Market Hall.	Does not progress the ambitions set out in the Museum Forward Plan
To proceed with phase 1 and explore the longer term ambitions to establishing a new attraction at Shire Hall and resolve collection storage options	Provides the opportunity to creating a new attraction at Shire Hall that tells the Monmouthshire story in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.  Will develop a clear strategy to resolve long term museum collection storage.  Allows future options for Market Hall to proceed.	Sufficient resources need to be secured to ensure that the phase 1 offer meets public expectations and maintains Museum Accreditation standards.  The risk of later phases, which are dependent on attracting external funding, not proceeding in a timely way.	Supports the case for external grant.

## 6. EVALUATION CRITERIA

6.1 Progress will be evaluated against the relevant MonLife Business and Service Delivery Plans. 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 tell the Monmouthshire story in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.

7.2 The creation of a new attraction at Shire Hall will contribute to the Destination Management Plan objective of developing the county's cultural product offer.

## **8. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:**

8.1 The estimated costs of the phase 1 provision includes the necessary security and environmental adaptations, conserving collection objects for display, moving and addressing immediate collection storage needs. Cabinet on 9 June 2021 recommended to Council that a £250,000 contribution from capital receipts be approved to facilitate this initial phase of works. The investment will in turn also provide a match funding contribution to the Levelling Up Fund bid for Monmouth that would if successful enable the longer term vision to be achieved.

8.2 It is not anticipated that there will be any additional revenue consequences on the combined Shire Hall and Monmouth museum budgets.

8.3 The cost of delivery of the full long term adaptation of Shire Hall is currently estimated, subject to further detailed design, to be in the region of £2.6M, and will be dependent on securing external grant funding from a variety of sources. As indicated above it is proposed that the project forms part of the Monmouth LUF bid. In addition external funding will be sought to support the full community engagement proposals.

8.3 The collection storage proposal have yet to be costed as further detailed assessment is required prior to a further report to Cabinet.

## **9. CONSULTEES:**

SLT

Cabinet

Ward / Monmouth members

Monmouth Town Council are supportive of the projects inclusion in the Monmouth LUF bid. Monmouth Field & History Society have presented a range of member's views from support, to concerns over the suitability of Shire Hall, a preference to refurbish and expand within Market Hall, and concerns over long term commitment to the Nelson collection.

**10. BACKGROUND PAPERS:**

Appendix A - Equality and Future Generations Evaluation  
Appendix B – Feasibility Study extracts

**11. AUTHORS & CONTACT DETAILS:**

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