

SUBJECT: VISION FOR SHIRE HALL TO BE REALISED

MEETING: Cabinet

DATE: 16th July 2025

DIVISION/WARDS AFFECTED: DRYBRIDGE

1. PURPOSE:

- 1.1 To inform members of progress on the final stage of the Shire Hall Museum Monmouth which is a significant initiative for our authority, transforming Shire Hall into an accessible destination within Monmouth's historic heart.
- 1.2 To propose the next phased approach to the new provision with the adaption and refit of Shire Hall creating new galleries, learning and community spaces, and enhance the visitor welcome.
- 1.3 To approve the financial budget for the delivery stage of the project.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS:

- 2.1 To note the progress of the Development Phase, which includes RIBA stage 3 (a developed design) incorporating the Monmouth Museum Collections and a Community Learning Facility.
- 2.2 To approve the final phase to realise the Shire Hall becoming a flagship sustainable cultural destination and community facility.
- 2.3 To approve a £300,000 capital contribution from capital match to facilitate the next phase of works.

3. KEY ISSUES:

- 3.1 Shire Hall, built in 1724, is Grade I listed as a building of outstanding national importance. It is one of the most important secular buildings in Monmouthshire, due to architectural quality and historic associations, having been site of the Chartist leader trials, 1840. It holds high social significance for the people of Monmouth, previously acting as a ballroom, theatre and meeting venue, it remains very important to local community pride.
- 3.2 The Shire Hall project is a significant initiative for our authority, transforming Shire Hall into an accessible destination within Monmouth's historic heart. The vision is

for Shire Hall to be a place where our communities and visitors can discover, celebrate, and share our diverse stories, incorporating inclusive and relevant displays, rooted in public participation. It will be an inspiring learning hub, incorporating visible object storage with improved conditions for our internationally significant collections.

- 3.3 Improvements to the heating system and energy efficiency will increase the Grade I listed building's environmental sustainability. Versatile spaces will be created to support income generation, providing a long term, financially resilient future for Shire Hall.
- 3.4 Volunteering, community participation and activity programming will result in an increased visitor base and widened audience profile, informing a strategy to reduce barriers to under-served audiences, making Shire Hall Museum a place where everyone's heritage can be enjoyed.
- 3.5 Investing in the Shire Hall project at this time provides opportunity to be involved in shaping future improvements to the town, benefit the project lifetime and beyond. These place making plans are being developed by MCC in partnership with its key towns to create spaces that attract town centre residents and visitors, contribute to the public realm increasing local economy. Should the project delay, Shire Hall will not feature in these plans.
- 3.6 There is opportunity for Shire Hall's vision to feature in the revised Destination Management Plan which guides the running of the county's tourism sector. MCC are currently consulting with businesses, services, tourists and residents on their views. It aims to develop a tourism economy that avoids negative impact on the environment while ensuring a positive experience for visitors and residents.
- 3.7 The project aims to create a modern, engaging museum space within Shire Hall, a Grade I listed building. The new museum will feature improved galleries, learning and community spaces, and enhanced visitor welcome, all of which will contribute to a better visitor experience.

DEVELOPMENT PHASE

- 3.8 Initial discussion took place with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Council were successful in securing £349,928 in June 2023, MCC provided Capital Match funding of £116,643 to secure a Development Phase project of £466,571. This enabled completion of the development phase of the project. Through a parallel NLHF project MCC secured a further £241,697 to update our collections management systems and to work with communities to showcase local collections from Monmouth at the Shire Hall and at community venues.
- 3.9 Between August 2023 and January 2024, , the Shire Hall project team were appointed to take forward the development phase, and Purcell were appointed

as the main contractors for the development phase with Redman being the museum specialists who would design the exhibition spaces.

- 3.10 The overall development phase designs propose changes to make the approach to the building more open, the entrance foyer more transparent and welcoming, and a clearer visitor flow between the displays on each floor and the community learning facility. The scheme also creates a new, larger learning space for all ages, maintains flexible community spaces, continued accommodation for the Town Council and a larger shop / visitor information presence,
- 3.11 The proposals allow for a new visitor flow on the ground floor and subsequent floors, including community exhibition and learning spaces. The main displays on the first floor, would use the full room volumes and the circulation spaces. The community room will comprise open storage and will operate as a facility to be used by the community and visiting exhibitions. The project also fully integrates the historic courtroom and cells into the visitor journey; all intended to create attractive animated spaces for visitors and community use.
- 3.12 The proposed works will better announce the building, engage with, and animate its immediate space in Agincourt Square contributing to the public realm enhancements to draw visitors through the town centre.
- 3.13 As part of the development phase, further detailed work has been carried out to ensure museum standard environmental conditions are met and identify clear energy efficiency and security standards; to ensure the design details align with building conservation requirements.

4. Listed building consent was submitted to Monmouthshire County Council on Application DM/2024/01531 11th December 2024, planning committee approved Listed Building consent on the 11th March with full approval received from CADW on 11th April 2025 to carry out refurbishment relating to environmental controls, acoustics, sinks and storage. Please note Planning Permission was not required.

DELIVERY STAGE

- 4.1 To realise our ambitions for the Shire Hall and to secure its long term future, we submitted our application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in February 2025.
- 4.2 Plans submitted as part of the development phase process and exploring the cost plan, current costs for the delivery stage are estimated to be in the region of £2,802,392. This will be funded through a variety of sources, external grant, fundraising, and both internal capital match and borrowing.
- 4.3 We have a good track record of securing external funding and are exploring several grant funders who can fund interim, delivery phase and long-term support to the Shire Hall Museum. [REDACTED]

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- 4.4 There is a current grant application in place with SPF for £63,000, we have identified grants that we will submit under the Welsh Government Culture Capital grant for £200,000 and Esmee Fairbairn £30,000 - £100,000. Other grants of interest and potential application are The Clore Duffield Foundation Learning Spaces £200,000; Health and Wellbeing in Museums Fund £60,000
- 4.5 We are exploring sponsorship with national companies with specific themes of Nelson, and Charles and Eleanor Shelley-Rolls through connecting with women in science.
- 4.6 We will undertake further work with our fundraising consultant to look to generate other grants, sponsorships or donations of £509,542 throughout the delivery phase of the project (as detailed in Appendix B). This leave a funding gap of £300,000 that we are looking to fund through capital match over the two years of the project.
- 4.7 Notification of successful funding streams is expected late June 2025 with an anticipated Delivery Phase start date of August 2025. Major milestones are recruitment of delivery phase staff team; removal of current artifacts from Market Hall by December 2025; construction for new galleries, improved heating, security and reception layout by Spring 2026; installation of new exhibitions and displays and embedding the educational activity programme; reopening of Shire Hall Museum early 2027.
- 4.8 In terms of releasing the section of the Market Hall the museums currently occupy; this would be realised through moving to the next phase of delivery at the Shire Hall by the end of 2025. This will include using the new museum stores at Chepstow and Abergavenny museums and the offsite store to house the collections. Vacant space in the Market Hall is currently advertised for letting by MCC's Estates Department, and opportunities to repurpose will continue to be explored as relocation away from the property progresses

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

- 5.1 Creating a museum and community offer at Shire Hall better tells the Monmouth story, it addresses 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. Better facilities will support children and young people, lifelong learning, wider community engagement and involvement.

- 5.2 The adaption and refit of Shire Hall will create new galleries, learning and community spaces, and enhance the visitor welcome. The proposed works will better announce the building, engage with, and animate its immediate space in Agincourt Square contributing to the public realm enhancements to draw visitors through the town centre.
- 5.3 The inherent purpose of MonLife is to make the best possible contribution to improving the quality of life for all the communities, aligning to Community and Corporate Plan, 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.
- 5.4 The improvement to the heating systems and changes to how we store our collections will improve our environmental sustainability record.
- 5.5 The Shire Hall has lift access to all floors and will ensure more people can view future displays and exhibitions.
- 5.6 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.

6. OPTIONS APPRAISAL

Option	Benefit	Risks	Comments
Not to proceed with next phase of Shire Hall Museum Monmouth	None	<p>Does not allow for further development of the Shire Hall to create a sustainable community facility that supports culture and economic benefits to the town</p> <p>Does not allow for future use of the current museum accommodation in Market Hall and therefore puts our collections at risk including the Nationally Significant Nelson Collection</p>	Does not progress the ambitions set out in the Museum Forward Plan

To proceed with phase 3 and finalise the internal designs of the Shire Hall and	<p>Establishes a new accessible destination within Monmouth's historic heart.</p> <p>Provides the opportunity to create a community facility at Shire Hall in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.</p> <p>Allows future options for Market Hall to proceed.</p>	<p>Sufficient resources need to be secured to ensure that the phase 3 offer meets public expectations and maintains Museum Accreditation standards.</p> <p>The risk of increased costs of supplies and other collections work which are dependent on attracting external funding, therefore not proceeding in a timely way.</p>	Supports the case for external grant.
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7. EVALUATION CRITERIA

- 7.1 Progress will be evaluated against the relevant MonLife Business and Service Delivery Plans, and through the Shire Hall Project Board. The framework will incorporate performance indicators including visitor numbers, visitor satisfaction, learning outcomes and income targets.
- 7.2 Interim milestones will be set by funders to see progress being made and final outcomes of the delivery phase of the project.

8. REASONS:

- 8.1 The provision of a contemporary offer in Monmouth is identified within the MonLife Business Plan and provides a way to better tell the Monmouthshire story in an integrated, engaging and more sustainable way.
- 8.2 The project will create a high-quality public facing offer for the community and visitors of the town and county. It will be a prominent community asset that offers learning, cultural experiences and shared spaces for activities and events. Investing in key aspects of this visitor attraction will increase footfall, contributing to tourism and the local economy, add vibrancy to the town centre and support artistic, cultural, and heritage activity.
- 8.3 The creation of a new cultural resource at Shire Hall will contribute to the emerging Cultural Strategy; Destination Management Plan objectives of developing the county's cultural product offer and increasing tourism footfall, and key aspects of the Community and Corporate Plan 'Our towns will need constant and creative re-imagining if they are to retain their role as retail centres, visitor attractions and motors of our county's economy.' The Shire Hall project links strongly to this.

- 8.4 During the Development phase the project team at the Shire Hall successfully engaged with 19 different local groups. This included the town council as a tenant of the Shire Hall; the Chamber of Commerce; a local visually impaired group (MONVIG); Monmouthshire Housing Association; local parents; a youth group, local Ukrainian residents; a local dementia group; MAGIC and a local LGBTQIA+ group.
- 8.5 An Activity Programme has been developed based on the ideas and activities that emerged during the public consultation process throughout the development phase. Responding to feedback from both long-standing supporters and previously underserved groups will instil confidence in our stakeholders that their views matter.
- 8.6 Our vision is that **Shire Hall will be an accessible destination within Monmouth's historic heart where our communities and visitors can discover, celebrate and share our unique stories.**

Through effective collaboration and communication between stakeholders and partners, we will:

- I. Remove the barriers that our communities and visitors face in order to widen our audiences
- II. Give our communities and visitors a greater opportunity to explore, discover and learn through a programme of activities and events designed by and for them
- III. Improve the wellbeing of our audiences through engagement with our collections and activities
- IV. Use our stories, collections and activities to enable our audiences to try something new
- V. Create the best possible visitor experience that makes people want to come and visit
- VI. Champion the environment to help change attitudes and behaviours

We will create an offer that will draw in our priority groups of Local residents, Adults on lower incomes, Families on lower incomes, Schools in lower income areas, Individuals living with dementia and their carers, Neurodiverse audiences - alongside our more general visitor audiences.

8.7 The successful implementation of the above aims will help ensure the long-term sustainable future of Monmouth's culture and heritage offer.

9. RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS:

- 9.1 The estimated costs of completing the delivery phase are **£2,802,392**. This includes construction costs of £2,024,941, External Professional Fees £334,835 and Project team, training, fees, digital, marketing and recruitment of £442,616.

	Budget £
Purcell Riba Stage 3	1,271,824
Redman Riba Stage 3	942,476
Object Repairs	120,000
QS (Internal MCC/Alliance Leisure)	25,476
Digital	7,400
Project Team (Staff, Training, Travel, Fees Other)	399,166
Recruitment	1,000
Publicity	2,000
Evaluation	20,000
Other	13,050
	2,802,392

Proposed Financing

	£
MCC Capital	234,000
WG Transformation Grant (Approved)	228,850
Wolfson Grant (Approved)	30,000
National Heritage Lottery (Approved)	1,500,000
Capital Match (In Application)	300,000
Grants and Fundraising	509,542
	2,802,392

Grants and Fundraising

	£
In Application	
SPF	63,000
WG Culture Capital	200,000
Esmee Fairbairn	100,000
	363,000
Other Grants and Fundraising	146,542
	509,542



9.3 There is risk associated with the grants and other funding of £513,542, of which £363,000 is at grant application stage or will be by 31st August 2025, we have sufficient levels of confidence of being able to generate the funding identified in these bids. We will look to fund the remaining funding gap of £150,542 through other grants, fundraising and sponsorship. If this is not achievable any future funding will require a further decision on how this funding will be met. We have collaborated closely with a fundraising consultant to explore the opportunities available to MCC. After analysing the comprehensive fundraising strategy, it is understood that other grant opportunities will be our top priority initially for securing additional funding. The directorate has been extremely successful over the past few years in securing grant funding. Consequently, we have approved the creation of a part-time fundraising position, which will focus on initial grant bids and relationship building with potential sponsors and donors. This will position us optimally to achieve the funding required to complete the delivery phase.

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

10. CONSULTEES:

DMT Customer Culture and Wellbeing
SLT
Cabinet
Ward / Monmouth members
Performance, Finance and Resources Manager
Monmouth Town Council

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS:

Appendix A - Equality and Future Generations Evaluation
Appendix B – Shire Hall Museum Business Plan
Appendix C – Shire Hall Fundraising Strategy 2025
Appendix D – Museum Design Report (3) Redman

12. AUTHORS & CONTACT DETAILS:

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