

Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee - Wednesday 3 February 2023

Staffordshire History Centre Update

Recommendations

I recommend that the Committee:

- a. Notes the progress of the project so far, including: procurement of contracts, and strategies to mitigate costs and increase funding for the project.

Local Member Interest: N/A

Report of Cllr Victoria Wilson, Cabinet Member for Communities and Culture

Summary

What is the Overview and Scrutiny Committee being asked to do and why?

1. The Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee is being asked to note the first-year progress of the Staffordshire History Centre project. The committee is asked to scrutinise and comment on the activity so far to inform the next year of the project. It is also asked to note the impact of cost increases and the strategy to mitigate these and increase funding for the project.
2. The comments of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee will be reported to the Joint Archives Committee at their meeting on the 28th February 2023.

Report

Background

3. Staffordshire Archives and Heritage Service comprises:
 - a. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service jointly funded and delivered by Staffordshire County Council and Stoke-on-Trent City Council. The Joint Archives Committee has delegated powers from the cabinets of both local authorities to set the budget, approve plans, policies and service direction. It has two cabinet members from

Staffordshire County Council and one cabinet member from Stoke-on-Trent City Council.

- b. Staffordshire County Museum which is funded and delivered by Staffordshire County Council.
 - c. The William Salt Library collection and building which are owned by the William Salt Library charitable trust. The service is delivered by Staffordshire County Council and the building is currently maintained by the Council under a 99-year full repairing lease.
4. Since 2015 Staffordshire County Council and the William Salt Library have been working in partnership to create and deliver the Staffordshire History Centre project. The new Centre will be located on Eastgate Street in Stafford and will bring the three collections together for the first time. The project will also deliver a four-year programme of activities across the county.
 5. The Centre will be a new attraction and become a key part of Staffordshire's cultural and heritage visitor offer. To achieve this, the project will preserve and repurpose the Grade II* listed William Salt Library town house and cottage in Stafford. The ground floor will be developed as an integral part of the History Centre under a new lease with the County Council. A new link between the Library and Record Office buildings will provide bright, welcoming, spaces for activities and create exhibition and refreshment areas, a shop and browsing space which will encourage visits.
 6. The William Salt Library Trust will let the upper floors as offices for start-ups, freelancers etc. and the Cottage as a residential letting providing an income stream to support the running costs of the project.
 7. New archive storage will be constructed that will protect and conserve documents and collections and enable growth of the collections for the next 55 years. The storage will enable at risk library collections to be held securely for future generations and bring library, archive and photographic collections onto one site at the History Centre.
 8. At the Grade II* listed building we will tell the story of William Salt, his family, collection and library, together with the story of the Georgian town house at 18-19 Eastgate Street. We will encourage visitors to explore the wider building, its garden and local wildlife, and to take part in activities and stay longer.
 9. The Staffordshire History Centre project funding application was submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund in March 2021 with an

original grant of £3.9m awarded in June 2021. Staffordshire County Council's contribution is £2.2m, partnership funding totals £0.234m with £0.721m of volunteer time. The total project costs in November 2021 were £7.1m.

10. The project received permission to start in November 2021 and this report is updating the Committee on progress so far including the activities, and procurement of contracts. The report outlines the recent grant uplift received from the Heritage Fund and strategies to mitigate rising costs due to inflation. Please see paragraph 28 for changes to the costs and funding.

Project Progress Update on Activities

11. From November 2021 – May 2022 the Archive and Heritage Service team focused on the decant of the whole of the William Salt Library (collections, furniture and equipment) and decant of furniture and equipment from Staffordshire Record Office. The trustees of the William Salt Library closed the service in December 2021 to enable the collection to be removed in stages with monitoring of the structure of the Grade II* listed building through the process. As part of the removal process twenty percent of the collection was cleaned and repackaged by volunteers and staff.
12. The public service at Staffordshire Record Office was suspended from March 2022 and reopened in July on a restricted access basis operating from Eastgate House. The archive collections are still accessible through the copying service, and visits where enquiries meet the criteria for access.
13. 'A Case for the Ordinary', the first touring exhibition for the activity programme, was launched on 12 January 2022 at the Museum of Cannock Chase. The research project and exhibition received funding from the Wellcome Trust. It features documents and objects from the service collections of the three Staffordshire asylum hospitals. The purpose of the project was to unlock the stories of the patient experience of mental health in the 19th century, more details about the project can be found on [the blog based on the research](#) by volunteers and a PhD student from Keele University. The exhibition has toured to the Brampton Museum, Newcastle-under-Lyme and the Nicholson Museum in Leek with a smaller pop-up exhibition touring libraries. Visitors to both exhibitions in 2022 totalled 69,028. Comments from visitors included:

'In this day and age (especially in the last couple of years) it brings home that mental health is not new but has been with us for years'

'Thankful that we have progressed in the medical field and have a better understanding of mental health and the effects it can have on a person'.

14. To test alternative ways of opening up access a new collection store tour was trialled at the County Museum in February with local groups. The positive feedback helped to create the final tour which has been delivered successfully throughout the year. A tour was also developed to offer a unique opportunity to see the William Salt Library without the collection in situ and historic features revealed. A very popular guided visit to the building was developed, with tours selling out in minutes. Feedback included 'it was fascinating to see the building in a different way'; 'surprised that the building was so old'; 'the guide was a mine of information'. Both tours attracted 607 participants in 2022.
15. In July we launched a new Staffordshire History Network with an in-person event at Lichfield. The network is aimed at local museums, societies and groups who either hold a collection or research local history. The initial event was oversubscribed and received positive feedback about the opportunities for networking and sharing ideas. We also launched a weekly network newsletter and have delivered an autumn event. Up to the end of December we have 412 subscribers to the network newsletter with 35 organisations represented.
16. Four project staff were recruited in October 2022 to support the Service team in delivering strands of the activity programme. The roles are supported by the Heritage Fund grant for the duration of the project. They include:
 - a. Learning Officer to co-produce, test and deliver educational sessions with schools and colleges and support informal learning.
 - b. Community History Development Officer to work with the History Network, deliver targeted projects with diverse communities and support the outreach activities.
 - c. Collections Interpretation Assistant to research the collections to identify objects for the onsite and touring exhibition programme.
 - d. Project Cataloguer to catalogue part of the William Salt Library collection to increase public access.
17. From April to December 2022 the project team have delivered 36 activities and engaged 1000 participants. Four student placements have been delivered. In addition, 66 volunteers are working on the project to index, catalogue, digitise, research and preserve our collections. Up to December they have donated 2,826.75 hours which equates to £56,535 in matched funding for the project during 2022.

18. During the first year of the project 200 enclosure maps have been digitised thanks to a grant awarded to our Friends group from Midland Ancestors' Jack Kemp Fund. The maps are a key source for local history research and confirming the existence of rights of way. They are being added to the [Staffordshire Past Track](#) website. Other planned digital work is the development of a new website which will be procured in 2023. A digital engagement plan is also being created to align with the new website.

Progress Update on Capital Work

19. To enable the construction contract to be procured in 2022 the design team and project team focused on detailed design development. This included a review of the project to assess whether ground source heat pumps could be included and replace the gas boilers. The costs to include this within the project were prohibitive therefore the boilers have been upgraded to a more efficient model. The photographic store designs and heating methods for the stores were reviewed. The passive design of the new stores reduces reliance on air-conditioning mitigating some of the impact on the climate. The garden at the site will be re-planted with insect friendly plants and a green roof is being included on the roof of the new link between existing buildings. We are seeking climate change funding to support these elements.
20. In January 2022 pre-construction archaeology was completed on site and the investigations were recorded. A YouTube video of the dig was shared to engage people with the project. A watching brief will be operated during the construction phase and building recording of the Grade II* William Salt Library building will be completed. Additional pre-construction surveys were completed.

Procurement of Contracts

21. The key contracts procured in 2022 were the construction contract and the interpretation contract. Removal companies were also procured with the submission of three quotes as the value was below £25,000.
22. The construction contract was first advertised in December 2021 using a two-stage process. The first stage closed in April 2022 with five suppliers submitting compliant bids. Four were shortlisted and taken through to the second stage. At the second stage one supplier submitted a compliant bid which was significantly over the advertised budget. This reflected the challenging market, suppliers being very busy and prioritising existing projects, and the impact of inflation on prices.

23. The bid was evaluated and the cost consultants compared the prices against their estimates. The panel concluded that the quality of the bid, proposed team and method statements met the specification of the bid. The National Lottery Heritage Fund also confirmed that the procurement process had complied with their guidelines. The tender price was held from August to December 2022 to enable a review of project costs and to seek additional funds. The contract has now been awarded to Pave Aways Limited.
24. The interpretation contract covers the design and fit out of the exhibition space in the History Centre, features at the entrance and within the garden, signage, and within the ground floor of the William Salt Library. The contract was advertised from 1 -31 July 2022 with four suppliers submitting bids. One bid was not compliant, and another supplier withdrew. The contract was awarded to Imagemakers in August 2022. The company were asked to review costs to reflect the impact of inflation to inform the strategy for mitigating costs.

Strategy for Mitigating Costs and Increasing Funding

25. The Staffordshire History Centre was granted permission to start by the Heritage Fund in November 2021 at a time when the United Kingdom was emerging from the COVID-19 pandemic. The Project Board and Team were aware that managing costs in this climate would be challenging. In addition, the impact of rising energy costs in 2022 and inflation contributed to a complex environment.
26. To mitigate against rising costs the team took pre-emptive action by:
- a. Utilising maintenance budgets for the replacement of the boilers in Staffordshire Record Office as they were due for refresh. Using Property Service budgets to support some of the design elements.
 - b. Using Archive and Heritage Service and William Salt Library budgets for some elements of the project.
 - c. Identifying storage for the William Salt Library collection from within Staffordshire County Council's own properties instead of paying for external storage.
 - d. Using Library Service vans and drivers to reduce the amount spent on removal companies.
 - e. Identifying potential funding streams to apply for grants before the construction costs were known.
 - f. Reviewing and monitoring costs at every project board.
 - g. Continually discussing costs with the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Staffordshire County Council to ensure they were aware of pressures.

27. The project team identified the Wolfson Foundation as a potential fund to support the interpretation work within the project. Applicants needed to be fully accredited under the Archive Service Accreditation Scheme and hold a nationally significant collection. Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Archive Service (part of Archives and Heritage) is fully accredited and the entire archive collection is designated as outstanding by Arts Council England. The two-stage application was confirmed as successful in January 2023 and will bring in an additional £100,000.
28. The project team worked with Stafford Borough Council in July 2022 to include the Staffordshire History Centre within their plans for the UK Shared Prosperity Fund. The project will improve the public realm in Eastgate Street, provide a walkway between North Walls and Eastgate Street, and support biodiversity through the replanted garden. These elements were included in the Borough Council's plans which were confirmed by central government in December 2022 and includes £250,000 towards the History Centre.
29. Prior to submission of the construction tender the design team and cost consultants estimated the likely values for elements. Once the bid was received this was reviewed and compared to the bid. Upon acceptance of the bid the consultants and project team reviewed the budget and identified elements which could be delivered in a different way.
30. The increased construction costs were discussed at an early stage with both Staffordshire County Council's Senior Leadership Team and the Heritage Fund. It was agreed an additional contribution could be made by the County Council and the Heritage Fund invited the project team to submit a grant uplift request. The grant uplift request included underwriting the Wolfson and UK Shared Prosperity Funds if they were unsuccessful. The Heritage Fund approved the grant uplift request in November 2022. Staffordshire County Council's Cabinet approved the additional contribution of £250,000 in December.
31. The total cost of the project is now £8,780,239 with a grant of £4,858,699 from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The total match funding is £3,921,540 which includes Staffordshire County Council funding, grants from other organisations, donations from the friends of the services and in-kind contributions from volunteers.
32. Since the inception of the project in 2015, The Archives and Heritage Team have established a positive working relationship with National Lottery Heritage Fund colleagues. Lottery colleagues provide mentor support, professional advice and offer constructive challenge. This was evidenced through the procurement process and grant uplift application. The Staffordshire History Centre Project Board provide the National

Lottery Heritage Fund with a quarterly update and both teams will continue to meet on a regular basis to ensure that the project timescales are met and that the project is delivered.

Timescales and Next Steps

33. The programme for completion of construction of the Staffordshire History Centre has been delayed by approximately 9 months. The delay is due to a more complex procurement process, reviewing project costs, and submitting additional grant requests.
34. The activity programme has also been impacted by this delay as whilst some activities are planned to be delivered at other venues across the county a significant number are planned at the Centre once it has opened.
35. Construction is due to start on site in February with an estimated completion of summer 2024 and projected opening of the History Centre in autumn of 2024. The period of funded support for activities from the Heritage Fund is currently to December 2025. The Heritage Fund have indicated this can be extended and it is estimated the activities will continue until spring 2026. Thereafter the History Centre offer will be delivered with the core funding for the Archive and Heritage Service. The William Salt Library building will be maintained by the William Salt Library Trust with part of the ground floor leased to the Staffordshire County Council as part of the Centre.
36. The priorities for 2023 are:
 - a. Procurement of the new website in January
 - b. Progressing construction on site from February.
 - c. Developing the interpretation designs.
 - d. Procurement of evaluation and marketing contracts.
 - e. Continuing to deliver the activity programme and embedding new events.
 - f. Supporting the staff and volunteers working on the project.
 - g. Promoting the project through social media, newsletters and press releases.

Link to Strategic Plan

37. The Staffordshire History Centre project directly links to the following strategic priority: 2 Live in sustainable and thriving communities.

Link to Other Overview and Scrutiny Activity

38. No links identified.

Community Impact

39. Refer to CIA guidance on the [Learning Hub](#)

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Staffordshire History Centre Project Board minutes (private)

Contact Details

Assistant Director: Catherine Mann, Interim Assistant Director for Culture, Rural and Safer Communities.

Report Author: Joanna Terry
Job Title: Head of Archives and Heritage
Telephone No.: 01785 278370
E-Mail Address: joanna.terry@staffordshire.gov.uk

