

Local Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Committee – Tuesday 28 February 2023

Staffordshire History Centre Update

Recommendation(s)

That the Committee note:

- a. The progress update for the project.
- b. The revised costs and income.
- c. The feedback from the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee

Report of Director for Economy, Infrastructure and Skills (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke on-Trent-City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. The Joint Archives Committee was updated on progress of the project at the meeting on 8th August 2022. This report brings an update on progress of the activities programme, procurement and the timeline for the project. It also includes feedback from the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee which considered a report on 3 February 2023.

Progress update on activities

2. 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 fully booked 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.

3. 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 37 organisations represented.
4. 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.
5. From April to December 2022 the project team have delivered 36 activities and engaged 1000 participants. Four student placements have been completed. 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.
6. 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 has been created to align with the new website.

Progress update on capital work

7. 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.

8. 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.
9. The Staffordshire Record Office and William Salt Library sites were handed over to Pave Aways Limited on 1 February 2023. Work has started on the site to clear the buildings and begin demolition in preparation for construction.
10. 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.
11. Imagemakers started work with the project team in November revising the designs to RIBA stage 3 and are now working on the RIBA 4 stage which will be shared with the Heritage Fund mentors. The staff team have been contributing suggestions for items from the collections to form part of the exhibition with alternatives to enable rotation of items. The star object will be a carriage from the museum collection to make a statement at the entrance.

Mitigation of costs and fundraising

12. 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.
13. 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.
14. The project team identified several external funding opportunities before the full construction costs were known. Staffordshire County Council also increased its capital contribution to the project. The successful funding bids include:
- a. UK Shared Prosperity Fund with £250,000 allocated within Stafford Borough Councils government grant. This funding will contribute to the public realm work including a green walkway through the site connecting North Walls to Eastgate Street. It will support biodiversity and link two parts of the town centre.
 - b. Wolfson Foundation grant of £100,000 towards the Interpretation Plan for the History Centre.
 - c. Staffordshire County Council's climate change team allocated £28,048 as a contribution towards the direct project costs associated with the green roof and air source heat pumps in the new strongrooms.
 - d. Staffordshire County Council's cabinet approved an additional £250,000 towards the project on 14 December 2022.
 - e. The Joint Archives Committee is asked to approve an additional £40,000 from the reserve as detailed in the finance update.
 - f. The project costs were reviewed and value engineered to reduce them by £391,000.
 - g. The National Lottery Heritage Fund approved a grant uplift of up to £894,699 on 24 November 2022.
15. 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.

16. The programme for completion of construction of the Staffordshire History Centre has been delayed by approximately 10 months. The delay is due to a more complex procurement process, reviewing project costs, and submitting additional grant requests.
17. 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. The programme has been adjusted to take account of this.
18. The interpretation development has been aligned to fit in with the construction timetable. The content development is to be completed by summer 2023 with sign off by the end of the year.
19. It is estimated that construction will complete in summer 2024 when the site will be handed back for fit out. The planned opening will be autumn 2024.

Feedback from Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee

20. A report was considered by the Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 3 February 2023. The report was very well received and it was noted that the Staffordshire History Centre project was a good news story for Stafford and the whole county. Members of the committee asked about:
 - a. How the project had addressed green issues. Information was provided about the passive construction of the strongrooms and the green roof.
 - b. The security of the exhibition space and the items that will be on display. Security arrangements and content of exhibitions was confirmed.
 - c. Wider development around the site. It was clarified that funding was only available for the History Centre site but that the car park would be resurfaced and the walkway through the site would enhance the local area.
21. The committee agreed the recommendations and requested a further update and visit to the site in the summer of 2023.

Legal Implications

The legal agreements between Staffordshire County Council and the William Salt Library were approved for completion by the Council's cabinet on 14 December 2022. The Trust agreed completion at its meeting on 23 January 2023. The solicitors for both parties completed the agreements on 1 February 2023.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

Procurement of goods and services for the project complies with Staffordshire County Council's procurement framework. Costs have been closely monitored and reviewed with external successful funding applications ensuring the project could continue.

Climate Change Implications

The project balances online access and physical access to services and collections to offer options for remote use and not necessarily travel to multiple locations. Any new buildings will be compliant with modern standards for energy efficiency and minimise impacts on climate change. Opportunities to attract additional funding to increase energy efficiency will be pursued. The project includes elements to improve the outcomes for wildlife and the environment. These elements have received financial support from the climate change funds held by Staffordshire County Council.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Prosperous Overview and Scrutiny Committee 3 February 2023 report:
[Staffordshire History Centre update](#)

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