

Local Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke-on-Trent Joint Archive Committee – Tuesday 27 February 2024

Staffordshire History Centre Update

Recommendation(s)

That the Committee note:

- a. The progress update for the project.

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:

The Joint Archives Committee was updated on progress of the project at the meeting on 2 August 2023. This report brings an update on progress of the activities programme, procurement, and the timeline for the project.

Progress update on activities

1. From April to December 2023 the project team have delivered 54 activities and engaged 2,461 participants. During the Summer the Service delivered the Archive Animals events at six libraries across Staffordshire. The event engaged families in creative activities to design a museum, learn about the collection and take part in interactive storytelling. The feedback is being used to shape the interpretation content at the History Centre. Other events included co-curation outreach for the food themed touring exhibition with a Holiday and Activities and Food (HAF) group; the Staffordshire History Festival and walking tours of Eastgate Street.
2. The co-curation and production model was shared at a West Midlands Museum Development conference. It has been praised by both the National Lottery Heritage Fund and attendees at the conference for its innovative approach to genuinely engage young people in selecting items to feature in exhibitions and activities.

3. Five student placements have been completed and all slots are booked for 2024. Partnership work with the North Staffordshire College Group continues and new model is in place to reach each new KS5 year group. A new project is underway with Abbots Bromley Primary School to create video content for the interpretation. Eighteen school sessions have been delivered on and offsite and 1208 pupils engaged up to December 2023. This is 26% of the target figure. There are 58 teachers engaged in the schools' network. The first term of the adult learning course, *Knowing where you stand*, has completed and the second term has started. Evaluation provided positive feedback with 10 attendees in the first term and 9 continuing the second term.
4. Two community projects are underway. The first is working with collaborative doctoral award student on their project to raise aware of black history collections. The student is managing a volunteer group to identify relevant material. The second is the Eastern European recipe book project for which further research has been completed. The project team are also supporting the Staffordshire Poet Laureate in creation of a research group looking LGBTQ+ history.
5. 'A Case for the Ordinary' Asylums exhibition closed at the Ancient High House, Stafford on 12 Dec 2023 (addition to original programme). Rugeley Power Station and Climate Change pop-up exhibitions are continuing to tour libraries and community venues during 2024. Formal and informal learning resources have been developed to accompany 'Beneath our Feet' touring exhibition, which opened at the Ancient High House, Stafford, on 27 Jan 2024. Work with three community groups to co-curate content and interpretation for the touring food exhibition, 'Knowing Your Onions' is planned for late 2024. Initial planning for the 2025 touring exhibitions including 'A Day at the Seaside' and another on the archaeological discoveries at the History Centre site is underway. There have been 82,208 visitors to our touring exhibitions up to December 2023.
6. Digitisation of collections is continuing with 317 photos from McCann collection complete and 480 transparencies from Michael Fisher collection digitised by volunteers. 7,000 photographs from the 1948 Staffordshire aerial survey are being digitised by Icam. These will be geo-referenced and made available on Staffordshire Past Track during 2024.
7. To the end of December 2023, a total of 7,446 books and pamphlets have been catalogued by the project cataloguer, Collections Officer and volunteers (62% of target). 564 Name Authorities have been created by the project cataloguer.

8. In total, 88 volunteers are working on the project to index, catalogue, digitise, research, and preserve our collections. Up to December 2023 they have donated 2,684.5 hours which equates to £53,690 (based on the Heritage Fund rate of £20 per hour for skilled volunteers) in matched funding for the project during 2023-2024.

Progress update on capital work

9. Construction progress continues with some areas showing a slight delay on programme. The strong room concrete slabs are complete to the roof. There have been delays to the brickwork due to bad weather.
10. Refurbishment and reconfiguration of the Staffordshire Record Office is progressing well. Partitioning, plastering and screeding work in public areas is complete and the mains gas is connected. Redecoration is underway and this area is on schedule.
11. Work on the Covered Courtyard has had some issues with wet weather affecting the timbers, but this has been resolved. There were delays to delivery of the Bauder system, but this has now been installed. There are some delays in the exhibition area, but it is overall on schedule.
12. Separation of the William Salt Library building is complete except for a first-floor link to enable work to progress. Refurbishment and restoration of the building is continuing. Structural work to the walls and basement has been completed. Roof repairs will also be carried out to the library building. There are delays in this area due to listed building consent requirement, but this is not time critical.
13. Work is progressing on digital interpretation, with Imagemakers and WideSky. Initial designs for digital labels three digital interactives and the welcome screen have been developed with pilot content. The digital and analogue interactives will be tested with family audiences. Work on developing the audio tour and accessible versions thereof is underway, working with community and access groups. Object and document lists have been finalised and work is progressing on labels and organisation of items within the curated wall display.

Progress reports to NLHF and programme

14. Six progress reports and claims have been submitted to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). An update on the costs and grant payments will be brought to the next Committee once work on the end of financial year has been completed.

15. The NLHF mentors and Senior Investment Manager visited the site in October and were impressed with progress. At the most recent meeting in January, they commented that the project was being delivered very well and the team worked in a collaborative manner. The mentor for the activities was very complimentary on the co-production work to develop school and family activities.
16. Based on the revised programme from commencement of construction on 1 February 2023 the project is on schedule. Construction is estimated to complete in summer 2024 with anticipated opening date of autumn 2024.

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:

National Lottery Heritage Fund progress reports
Staffordshire History Centre data collection spreadsheets.

Contact Details

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