

Local Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee - 20 November 2014

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service: Heritage Lottery Fund Bid for Staffordshire History Centre

Recommendation(s)

1. That this report updating the Joint Archive Committee on the progress of the project be received.

Report of Director for Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Place (Staffordshire County Council) and Assistant Chief Executive (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations

2. The focus of this project is to bring together onto one site Archive Service collections from Lichfield and Stafford alongside those of the William Salt Library to enable the Service to transform the way it operates. This will enable both Services to change the visitor experience, preserve priceless archive material and expand record storage facilities to meet the current and future storage demands and also comply with the required British Standards. It will also enable both services to be delivered more efficiently and ensure the long term sustainability of the Archive offer within Staffordshire.
3. At the Joint Archive Committee on 19 June a report was presented on proposals to relocate the William Salt Collection and Lichfield Record Office Archives to the Staffordshire Record Office site. This report is updating the Committee on the progress of the project since then.

Background

4. A stage 1 Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) bid was submitted in April 2014 seeking funding to extend Staffordshire Record Office to provide new storage and facilities for the collections in Lichfield Record Office and the William Salt Library. Total project costs were £4.3 million with 11% matched funding from the County Council. This included £50,000 from the Archive Service reserve approved by the Joint Archive Committee in November 2013.
5. The bid was rejected by HLF in July 2014 but with resubmission welcomed. Rejection on a first attempt is not unusual and HLF does not always leave the door open for a second submission. Written and verbal feedback on the bid was received as follows:
 - The Board were supportive of the Council's approach to bring the three collections together but felt that the project needed a much better overall vision

to demonstrate how the public could be encouraged to engage with the fantastic collection of archives more clearly.

- They thought that the application did not outline the potential future use of the William Salt Library building and it was considered that this should be further explored as part of the options of scoping the project
- Further consideration needed to be given to public consultation with regard to the potential closure of the archives and William Salt Library Building
- The budget towards activity costs was considered to be relatively low and activities would be delivered in one year which raised concern

Verbally we were told that resubmission would be welcomed and reiterated the strong competition we are up against at this level. It was clear that they understood the quality and significance of the collections and the need to safeguard them however a clearer vision on how people would engage with them was required.

6. The Project Board met in August to discuss the feedback and it was agreed that further work was possible to improve the bid. The Board agreed that employing a consultant with the right skills and expertise was essential and also commissioning a new design through a competition to achieve the following:

- A new the vision for the project and the Service as a whole
- Further stakeholder engagement especially with non-users
- Exploring options for use of the William Salt Library Building
- Developing a strong activity programme
- A new design reflecting the vision for the Service
- Preparation of a second stage 1 bid with the project team

7. A report was submitted to the County Council Strategic Property Board in September requesting £20,000 to enable the appointment of a consultant to work with the Project Team and support further consultation with stake holders and non users. It was estimated that this would be approximately six months work and with a timescale of resubmission of the bid in April or June 2015. The Strategic Property Board approved the funding with specific emphasis on a new vision for the Archive Service to enable it to truly transform its current delivery model to one that attracts a broader range of users accessing the collection in a variety of ways and also provides an affordable and sustainable funding model for the future.

8. A Project Team was formed and has met twice since August. It includes a range of officers and representatives from the Friends of the Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service and Friends of the William Salt Library. The meetings have enabled positive conversations to take place between the Trustees, Archive Service and the Friends and a new approach to be developed. Other stakeholders will be invited onto the team to ensure representation of user interests but also attract new supporters to the project.

9. The William Salt Library Trust has led a piece of work to look at future uses of the William Salt Library building. This work is ongoing. A new Project Enquiry has been submitted to HLF and they have responded requesting a meeting with the team. This time the key contact is the Head of HLF West Midlands, a more senior adviser than on the previous bid. The new Project Enquiry has changed the project name

to 'Staffordshire History Centre' establishing a fresh start, approach and development of a more inclusive offer that encourages new ways, means and types of user to access the collections not just for research but for enjoyment. It will focus on seeking partnerships, using volunteers and creating exciting opportunities to showcase these collections as a cultural attraction.

10. On 5 November a consultant, Janice Tullock Associates, was selected to work with the Project Team on a new vision, new approach and new bid. The consultant will start work in November and brings a strong track record from similar projects, understanding of HLF requirements, and an ability to work with a variety of partners and bring them together around a single vision. They have worked on high profile projects such as Archives+ at Manchester Central Library and the new Heritage Quay at Huddersfield University Archives. Their statements about previous experience are at Appendix 2.

Conclusion

11. The rejection of the HLF bid in July was disappointing but not unusual. It has given the Project Team an opportunity to reflect on the feedback and develop a new approach involving stakeholders in the decision making. The allocation of funding to employ a consultant brings additional capacity and creativity to the project. The development of strong vision for a sustainable and resilient Archive Service will ensure benefit regardless of whether HLF funding is secured or not. The focus will still be on attracting investment to save on service delivery costs but the vision will also provide a plan for transforming the Service without HLF funding and delivering a sustainable funding model for the future.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

A new vision for the Archive Service will focus on engagement with a wider range of groups and encourage access to the collections.

Legal implications:

The partnership agreement between the Trust and the County Council remains in place for the new bid.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The project will enable savings to be made on building maintenance of approximately £75,000 and also make more efficient use of the existing Staffordshire Record Office site. The Service will also be able to find further savings by running just one public access site rather than three.

Risk implications:

The main risk to the project is that the Heritage Lottery Fund bid may not succeed but the consultant will work with the team to have an alternative plan in place.

Climate Change implications:

The project will focus on delivering energy efficient buildings and reducing maintenance costs.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

No significant implications.

Report author:

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List of Background Papers

Nil