

Cabinet

16 January 2019

**Durham History Centre –
Next Steps**



CORP/TAP/01/19/1

Report of Corporate Management Team

Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships

**Councillor Ossie Johnson, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Tourism,
Culture, Leisure and Rural Issues**

Councillor Joy Allen, Cabinet Portfolio Holder for Transformation

Electoral division(s) affected:

Countywide.

Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update members on progress with the Durham History Centre project, and agree the next steps and funding.

Executive summary

- 2 The Durham History Centre project has progressed significantly since the proposal was considered by Cabinet in January 2018, and since the last project update to Cabinet in October 2018.
- 3 Bringing together separate heritage collections and refurbishing Mount Oswald Manor House to create a joined-up and integrated service operating from a fit-for purpose, attractive and historic building has generated a lot of excitement locally and within the region.
- 4 Public and stakeholder consultation has shaped the proposal. Over 600 individual responses to the consultation were received, with overwhelming support for the project proposal. Respondents were keen on exhibitions, multi-media access, interactive engagement and especially the inclusion of the DLI/ military collection in the new centre.

This was supported by 96% of respondents and is therefore a key element of the project proposal.

- 5 The January 2018 Cabinet report set out the estimated range of capital costs for the scheme between £14.8 and 17.7million, and agreed that these would be included in future MTFP plans. The report also agreed the submission of an external funding bid. Whilst we have been unsuccessful in applications for this heavily oversubscribed HLF funding, in line with the widespread public support for this scheme, it is recommended that we agree to progress the Durham History Centre project.
- 6 It is recommended that the Council complete purchase of the Manor House at Mount Oswald, and continue with detailed design of the proposed scheme. As outlined in the October 2018 report this will include development of a digital strategy and activity plan to widen participation in the service and the site.
- 7 At the same time, it is recommended that we continue to seek and apply for other funding sources to support both revenue and capital aspects of the scheme, in particular the digital strategy, exhibition fit out and the activity plan.
- 8 Whilst ongoing revenue costs can be met within existing service budgets, one off revenue costs will need to be funded either from a small dedicated revenue budget for the project, from general reserves (decant and dual running costs) or external funding.
- 9 The Durham History Centre project would bring together five archive and collection services, alongside Durham Register Office, in a Grade II listed building, creating a flagship facility where 'stories begin' and people can discover and explore national and internationally significant collections.

Recommendation(s)

- 10 Cabinet is recommended to:
 - (a) Agree to continue with the Durham History Centre project;
 - (b) Note the forecast maximum capital requirement of £17.7 million and that further bids to fund the scheme will be submitted as part of development of MTFP (9) £6.6 million and MTFP (10) £3.3 million;
 - (c) Note the ongoing focus of the project team to manage costs through value engineering;

- (d) Note that as reported in January 2018, ongoing revenue costs can be met from available resources;
- (e) Note that one off revenue costs will be met from a mix of a dedicated project budget, general reserves for decant and dual running costs, alongside further external funding bids to support the new centre, in particular to support exhibitions and activities;
- (f) Authorise the Corporate Director, Regeneration and Local Services and the Corporate Director, Resources in consultation with the Portfolio Holders for Strategic Housing and Assets and Finance to continue the negotiations with the landowner to acquire Mount Oswald Manor House;
- (g) Agree to further public consultation on the design of the scheme, exhibition and activity plans.

Background

- 11 The County Archive is an unbroken record of the historic county of Durham, stretching back almost 900 years. Its written and photographic records provide a unique insight into the history and heritage of the county, its people and local communities.
- 12 As it stands, the archive accounts for a significant amount of the floor space in County Hall and contains over five miles of storage. It is fast out-growing its current accommodation and additional storage capacity needs to be provided to enable the service to collect, preserve and store future historic documents and continue the unbroken record of the history of the county.
- 13 On 17 January 2018, Cabinet agreed to progress development of a new 'Durham History Centre' to accommodate the archive and other collections of historic records and documents, as part of a wider cultural and service development for the county. Mount Oswald Manor House on the outskirts of Durham City was identified as the preferred location.
- 14 Cabinet agreed to consult with stakeholders and interested parties and to continue negotiations with the relevant landowners. Subject to the outcome of the consultation and negotiations, Cabinet also agreed to the submission of a funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 15 In October 2018 Cabinet received a project update which set out progress in developing the scheme, including the outcome of consultation and links to other heritage collections.

The Archive and Durham County Record Office (DCRO)

- 16 The council has a statutory requirement to preserve public records and the County Archive and Record Office is a hugely popular and highly valued council service. It is an unbroken record of the historic county of Durham, stretching back almost 900 years. Its written and photographic records provide a unique insight into the history and heritage of the county, its people and local communities.
- 17 Each year, the service is accessed over one million times as people search for records and historical information online, over the telephone or in person. The service is provided by highly skilled and professional staff, who work with volunteers to preserve, document and interpret records and promote public access through research projects and outreach programmes with local community groups and schools.
- 18 The archive has been based in County Hall since the building opened in 1963. Over time, as the building has aged and the archive has grown, the accommodation has become outdated and unsuitable, and there is insufficient future storage space for this important heritage asset.
- 19 The National Archive (TNA) inspected DCRO in July 2017 and noted: "it is becoming difficult to operate effectively and efficiently due to the increasingly apparent constraints imposed on the service by the configuration of the building.
- 20 TNA granted us approval as a Place of Deposit on a short-term basis until a longer-term solution is found to the accommodation problems. If we do not have a solution, we severely risk TNA limiting or removing our Place of Deposit approval, jeopardising our ability to preserve and protect the County's heritage.
- 21 The archival storage rooms are almost full and there is a need to modernise the accommodation and service offer. Archive strongroom 1 which is located below the canteen, has recently been flooded which highlights the need for fit for purpose accommodation.
- 22 In July 2018, a flood occurred in the restaurant kitchen, caused by a mains leak from the tap and water 'rained' into the strongroom, affecting approximately one quarter of the room.
- 23 360 linear metres of shelving were affected by the flood. No archives have been lost, but the drying and recovery process will continue for some time to come. Boxed archives received some protection from their boxes, but volumes were affected more as they are not boxed. We have replaced 200 boxes to avoid any increased risk of a mould outbreak.

- 24 Most affected archives have been treated by archives staff, but it was essential to send the largest and most damaged volumes to disaster recovery specialists for freeze drying and conservation. Some volumes and papers have been subject to mould growth as a result of the flood, and require cleaning.
- 25 Ongoing monitoring of the collection will be necessary for several months to ensure mould does not spread and at this stage, the cost of replacement boxes, conservation materials, and specialist disaster recovery work totals almost £20,000.

Mount Oswald

- 26 A countywide search for suitable sites for the relocation of the archive and records office was undertaken.
- 27 Following the exercise, Mount Oswald Manor House on the outskirts of Durham City was identified as the preferred location, a decision endorsed by Cabinet in January 2018.
- 28 Mount Oswald Manor House is a Grade II listed building. It was built in 1800 and was owned by Thomas Wilkinson, a former mayor of Durham City. The building and estate were acquired by Durham City Golf Club in 1928 and as well as being the club house, the manor also became an established conference and functions venue in the city, specialising in civil wedding ceremonies, proms, society dinners and large functions and events
- 29 The building has sufficient space for the archive's current and future requirements as well as the co-location of other collections and services and is in an accessible location, on a principal bus route and adjacent to the Howlands Park and Ride site on the southern approach to Durham City.
- 30 The site is also very close to the Durham University's Botanic Garden and Oriental Museum (both heritage assets) and the new colleges and conference/events venue the University is building as part of the wider Mount Oswald estate re-development.
- 31 A key aspect of the history centre proposal is the restoration of this heritage asset, bringing the redundant building back to life to provide fitting and attractive accommodation for history or records related services.
- 32 The Archive and Record Office would be co-located with other cultural and service assets at Mount Oswald Manor House to create a much more attractive service offer and public destination/venue.

- 33 Experience elsewhere has shown that co-locating and massing cultural and heritage assets and services has increased service usage, attracted more external funding and created more sustainable service provision.
- 34 All of the council's written and photographic history records, would be brought together alongside the Durham City Register Office and other heritage and military collections with shared values and functions, into an integrated service, which would provide improved public access to important resources.
- 35 Enhanced education facilities would be provided to improve the popular service offer to children and young people from schools across the region, alongside exhibition space, research facilities and space for volunteers.
- 36 This option would meet the current and future needs of the Archive and would provide The National Archives Inspector with assurance that the council is able to provide fit-for-purpose storage and accommodation for its current and future archival records. It would enable us to maintain existing service provision and the co-location with complementary collections and services including DLI records, offers the prospect of appealing to a broader range of audiences and attracting more service users.
- 37 Mount Oswald Manor House would also become the new home for the Durham Register Office which would offer significantly enhanced facilities for weddings and civil ceremonies in a historic setting. This would include the relocation to the new site of the existing Durham Register Office from Aykley Heads House along with all the registration records and ceremony rooms from the Bishop Auckland Register Office. The Registration Service would retain a presence in Bishop Auckland for the registration of births and deaths.
- 38 The initial capital cost estimates for this project range from £14.8 million to £17.7 million, with the upper end of the range including a contingency allowance, given that detailed costings have yet to be undertaken. In January 2018 Cabinet agreed provision for funding as part of its medium term financial plan. Whilst the Council's application to the heavily over-subscribed Heritage Lottery Fund has been unsuccessful, the project can still be taken forward within this cost envelope.
- 39 County Durham has a distinct identity, its social and political landscape shaped by the Prince Bishops and its industrial heritage. Its communities have a deep sense of their history and heritage, but their story is not well told. Mount Oswald Manor House provides the

opportunity to create Durham History Centre and tell the important story of Durham's working people and families.

Consultation

- 40 Consultation in 2015 shaped the initial thinking for the project. In line with Cabinet's consideration of the project proposal and the Mount Oswald site, further consultation via a county-wide survey was undertaken in January 2018 to prepare for a Heritage Lottery Fund application.
- 41 Over 600 individual responses were received from a broad range of people. 83% of respondents supported the proposal and the co-location the collections in the same site. Respondents were keen on exhibitions, multi- media access to collections, talks for adults and behind the scenes tours.
- 42 Of particular note, was the very strong support for the inclusion of the DLI/military collection in the new centre, with 96% of respondents supporting its inclusion. This was therefore highlighted as a key aspiration of the project proposal submitted to the HLF for funding consideration.
- 43 Two non-user focus groups were also held with parents of children under 11 years and adults aged over 55 years. The participants had never heard of the archive, thought that County Hall was a purely administrative centre and could not believe that such fascinating collections were on their doorstep. The focus groups demonstrated that an administrative location such as County Hall was a barrier to building awareness of the archive amongst service non-users and that people were far more likely to access a multi-use venue like Mount Oswald Manor House, with the right programming.
- 44 We also held facilitated group discussions with people with learning and physical disabilities and a youth forum.
- 45 In addition to consultation with the public, we consulted with 18 key partners including the DLI Trustees, Durham Cathedral, Durham University, The Friends of Durham Record Office, Beamish Museum, Bowes Museum, The Auckland Project and the Durham Miners' Association.
- 46 We also consulted all 14 area action partnerships (AAPs). All AAPs expressed excitement, enthusiasm and recorded their unanimous support. The Mount Oswald location was viewed by all as the best way to ensure good access to archival and heritage assets right across the county. East Durham AAP wrote "we were especially pleased to hear about the location and building identified, as it is well-known and an

accessible spot near to one of the park and ride schemes.” A number of AAPs also suggested that the history centre activity plan could include collection tours and temporary exhibitions in local communities across the county.

47 If the project is taken forward, a further public consultation is proposed to help develop:

- (a) the detailed design of the building;
- (b) access arrangements;
- (c) exhibition and activity plans.

48 There has been unprecedented enthusiasm for this project. All 14 AAPs expressed excitement and recorded their unanimous support. The consultation has shown the value and importance our residents place on their heritage.

Heritage Lottery Fund process

49 A round one HLF bid was submitted in March 2018. In June 2018, we were advised that the bid was positively received and highly recommended to the national board. There was strong regional support for the project, however it was unsuccessful due to the funding available for allocation at that meeting being significantly over-subscribed. We were consequently advised to re-apply with only minor changes to the project proposal required.

50 We re-submitted our round one HLF bid in August 2018. In December 2018, we were advised that the bid was strong and recommended to the national board with the highest priority. However, despite being a strong bid, it was again unsuccessful due to a very high number of applications being assessed at the meeting and a limited budget.

51 Whilst it is disappointing to not receive an HLF grant, the work undertaken to produce the HLF application has been instrumental in developing the project to an advanced and deliverable stage.

- (a) We carried out an extensive consultation period sooner than we would normally have done, this has given us a better understanding of the public’s opinion towards and expectations from the project. It means the project has been developed with the public from the beginning;
- (b) Our activity planning work was developed following public consultation and has helped develop better plans to engage the public with the heritage;

- (c) The business planning work has given us a good understanding of both the existing market and our potential market. It began our thinking on management and staffing for the various stages of the project and how five distinct services will work together at Durham History Centre. The business planning work also concluded that Durham History Centre offers a sustainable financial proposition;
- (d) We worked with services to understand their storage requirements, future storage accrual rates, their spatial needs and the relationship between these. This enabled us to progress the design to RIBA Stage 3 which means the design is at a more advanced stage. We can now progress to detailed design, working with all stakeholders, and get a more accurate understanding of the overall build and operating costs.

Project benefits

52 The project offers many benefits:

- (a) Our heritage will be better managed: management of the archives is currently difficult because they are spread across a myriad of small rooms designed to be offices, which have security, fire suppression and asbestos issues. The new Record Office at Mount Oswald will be in a purpose-built extension, which will have efficient management and production of the written records and objects at the heart of its design;
- (b) Our heritage will be in better condition: new archive storage at Mount Oswald will be built to comply with the newly published standard BS4971:2017, which will ensure long-term survival of the records and the DLI storage will be built to achieve Museum Accreditation standards;
- (c) Our heritage will be better interpreted and explained: Durham's heritage will be better interpreted and explained through a brand new permanent display, featuring star and never-before-seen objects, married with archives to tell their unique and fascinating stories. A new changing exhibition space will give us the opportunity to showcase the breadth of collections at the History Centre;
- (d) More people and a wider range of people will have engaged with our heritage: activities will be designed to meet the needs of children and young people and older visitors and families from across local communities, delivered both in house and in communities. Our benchmark data shows that our current

audience lacks diversity and through our participation surveys we will be able to track and measure the change;

- (e) People will have learnt about heritage: learning will be at the heart of the project. People will learn about heritage through the exhibition space, activities, schools programmes and the new website will enable everyone to engage with their heritage;
- (f) People will have had an enjoyable experience: our activities will be fun and engaging. For example, people will be engaged in storytelling and imaginative activities inspired by the archive and object collections, house and grounds. An initial exhibition is planned to feature the history of the manor house itself told through the eyes of its former residents, including the cooks, gardeners, groundsmen, and family, including former DLI members and civic leaders, giving a unique insight into life in Durham through Georgian and Victorian times;
- (g) The local area will be a better place to live, work and visit: there are over 160,000 people living within 15 minutes' drive of Mount Oswald and 8,000 people living within one-mile walking distance. In the next four years this is set to grow by a further 2,000 students and 300 families. The exhibition spaces and community programmes will be used by local people and larger events, such as the Heritage Open days, will draw in a wider community. We will restore Mount Oswald and provide a focal point for the community, offering free Wi-Fi and green space.

Main implications

Proposed way forward

- 53 The proposal for Durham History Centre has received unprecedented public support. In order to meet the public expectations and enthusiasm for this scheme, and because of all the benefits the scheme would bring, it is proposed to progress the project at Mount Oswald Manor House without HLF support.
- 54 A like for like archive facility was provided as an option to Cabinet in January 2018. Whilst this option would cost less, it would require a new design and so would take longer to deliver. Importantly it would not respond to strong public opinion that we offer all functions at the new centre or provide exhibition space. It would not align with the vision to transform access to and preservation of County Durham's heritage, creating a flagship facility where 'stories begin' and people can discover and explore the collections.

- 55 A benefit of moving forward without HLF involvement will be a 3 month shorter timescale for project delivery, as we will not be constrained by HLF decision points and approvals. If we had been successful with HLF our anticipated opening date would have been winter 2022 however without HLF we expect to be operational from summer 2022. The registration service could relocate summer 2021. The earlier date for the registration service is attributed to the longer time the archive strongrooms need to acclimatise before records can be safely relocated. DCRO is expected to leave County Hall spring 2022.

Capital implications

- 56 In January 2018, Cabinet agreed that the Medium Term Financial Plan would incorporate a capital cost range to deliver the project of £14.8 million to £17.7 million with the upper end including contingency. As we now do not have an HLF contribution the council will be required to finance all of the capital costs. A capital bid of £7.8 million was approved as part of MTFP (8) for the History Centre development. A further £6.6 million bid has been submitted as part of MTFP (9). The remaining £3.3 million bid for 2021/22 will be made as part of the MTFP (10) process and will be a pre-commitment if Cabinet agree to move forward with the development.
- 57 We will work hard to reduce costs through value engineering, and to attract external funding from other sources. We would need to engage architects to understand possible cost reductions and consult with services to ensure the revised design meets the service needs. Other funders do not provide the same scale of funding as HLF but we would hope to receive funding to contribute to specific elements of the project for example the exhibition space fit out or educational facilities.

Revenue implications

- 58 The January 2018 Cabinet report explained that ongoing revenue costs can be met within existing service budgets.
- 59 The report also highlighted that one off revenue costs associated with decant costs and double running costs of buildings estimated at £270,000, would be met by general reserves, but this did not include funding for any activity plan and the implementation of a new digital service offer, which it was hoped could be met through HLF grant.
- 60 The activity plan with an associated exhibition programme and new digital offer will increase engagement and excitement towards the facility when it opens, however the breadth of this will be dependent on securing external funding. An option will be to seek a revenue only HLF grant. Bids under £1 million are decided at the regional board, and

given the strong regional support for the project we are hopeful that some level of funding could be achieved. If we are not successful in further funding applications then we may need to consider an additional one off revenue allocation to kick start the new centre activities programme. It will also be possible to look to utilise existing council capacity in education outreach and community engagement to support activities.

- 61 There is also a need to reconsider programme management capacity as the delivery stage of the scheme commences. Whilst construction project management is accounted for within the capital scheme costs, a full time programme manager to oversee the programme and develop the new business model for the new centre is recommended for the next phase of work.
- 62 A sum of £276,193 is earmarked in the Office Accommodation Capital Reserve to finance revenue costs associated with the early development of the History Centre. The sum required is presently being reviewed but it is expected that further resources will be required to ensure the development is successfully delivered. Any additional reserve requirement will be actioned as part of the 2018/19 Final Revenue Outturn process.

Legal implications

- 63 In order to progress the project will need to acquire Mount Oswald Manor House. We are in advanced negotiations with the owner to acquire the Manor House for a nominal amount. Subject to Cabinet approval to progress Durham History Centre we will continue to press forward with a view to exchanging legal documentation, conditional on planning, to advance the purchase. In the event that the purchase is not completed, the Council will need to consider alternative options.

Economic implications

- 64 Heritage is important to County Durham's economy. Heritage is one of the key assets attracting 4.2 million visitors each year to Durham City. This tourist economy is worth £198 million a year to Durham City and £806 million to the wider county, sustaining over 11,000 jobs.

Conclusion

- 65 This is an unrivalled opportunity to preserve, promote and celebrate our county's wide and varied history. There are numerous benefits and unprecedented support for the Durham History Centre proposal, which an archive only facility could not deliver.

- 66 This project will transform access to and preservation of County Durham's written heritage. Five services will be brought together in the Grade II listed manor house at Mount Oswald, creating a flagship facility where people will be able to discover and explore the County's national and internationally significant collections.
- 67 More than a building, Durham History Centre would be at the heart of a new audience-focused service reaching out across County Durham through activities, digital programmes and partnerships, reconnecting people with their heritage, taking an active part in discovering and making history.
- 68 The project would be a catalyst for change, with five services working together in one building, defining a new type of archive and using the diversity of collections in surprising and innovative ways to engage new audiences and create new encounters with heritage.

Background papers

- Report to Cabinet 17 January 2018; Aykley Heads Strategic Employment Site, DCC Headquarters Full Business Case and Future options for the County Archive; joint report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships, Ian Thompson, Corporate Director of Regeneration and Local Services, John Hewitt, Corporate Director of Resources
- Report to Cabinet 17 October 2018; Durham History Centre update; report of Lorraine O'Donnell, Director of Transformation and Partnerships.

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Appendix 1: Implications

Legal Implications

The archives service is subject to national archives and records management legislative requirements, including requirements associated with the custodianship of the records of other agencies and bodies. Section 224 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires the council to make proper arrangements for documents in its custody. Section 10 of the Registration Services Act 1953 requires the council to provide a registry office for its Superintendent Registrar of Births, Deaths and Marriages. The council has the power under S.120 of the Local Government Act 1972 to acquire land for the purposes of its functions.

Finance

Confirm the capital allocation of £17.7million for the Durham History Centre, including contingency.

Note that ongoing revenue costs will be met within existing budgets.

One off revenue funding from general reserves, estimated at £270,000, was agreed by Cabinet January 2018 for the one-off decant and double running of buildings costs associated with the archive move. In addition it is recommended that other one off revenue costs continue to be met through the £276,193 Office Accommodation earmarked reserve, and any additional reserve requirement is identified and actioned as part of the 2018/19 Final Revenue Outturn process.

Consultation

Consultation has been undertaken in 2015 and 2018. Further consultation with stakeholders and interested parties will be undertaken as the project develops.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty

The project brings several linked services into a single location which should reduce the need to travel for service users. The location has good transport links with a park and ride facility directly opposite and good bus links. Accessible parking would be available at Mount Oswald Manor House. The project would aim to enhance digital access to the archive and registration records, which is a positive potential impact for all protected groups but particularly for disabled residents and visitors as it provides an alternative for some purposes to visiting the facility. The project is still at an early stage, but

accessibility and equality considerations would be built into future design work. All consultation will be as inclusive as possible in order to capture feedback from a broad range of people including protected groups.

The impact of the project on people with protected characteristics will continue to be considered as part of further detailed work.

Human Rights

None.

Crime and Disorder

None.

Staffing

Staff within the services affected by the proposals have been consulted about the project, and are aware of the proposals for the new facility. We will continue to consult with affected staff as appropriate.

Accommodation

This project would provide long term, dedicated accommodation for the services and collections listed in the main body of the report.

The proposals include the relocation of the registration service at Aykley Heads House and Bishop Auckland Register Office. Arrangements are being made to ensure that the registration service still has a presence in Bishop Auckland for the registration of births and deaths.

Risk

A detailed risk assessment is being undertaken as part of this project. Any risks arising during the project will be managed and mitigated by the project group. Until the legal papers are exchanged there is a key risk that negotiations with the site owner to acquire the site are unsuccessful or delayed. Officers continue to liaise with the landowner to mitigate this risk. In the event that negotiations do not progress, the Council will need to consider alternative options.

Procurement

The appointment of specialist professional services to progress the proposal is managed in line with the council's procurement process.