

Cabinet

17 October 2018

Durham History Centre update



Report of Corporate Management Team

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Purpose of the Report

- 1 To update Cabinet on progress with the Durham History Centre project proposal.

Executive summary

- 2 The Durham History Centre project has progressed significantly since the proposal was considered by Cabinet in January 2018.
- 3 Bringing together separate heritage collections and refurbishing Mount Oswald Manor 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 The public and stakeholders were consulted on the proposal and their comments helped to shape a funding application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for grant support. 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 was therefore highlighted as a key element of the project proposal submitted to the HLF for funding consideration.
- 5 The funding round was heavily over-subscribed and the whilst the application was not successful on that occasion, we received very positive feedback from the Heritage Lottery Fund grant committee and were encouraged to re-submit the proposal without significant change to the next round of funding. A second application was consequently submitted in August 2018, the outcome of which is expected before Christmas.
- 6 Discussions have been held with the owners of other complementary collections and initial heads of terms for the acquisition of the property and site have been drafted with the landowner.
- 7 If the application for funding is successful, the council will need to develop and submit a detailed application for funding, which will require a detailed design

specification, digital strategy and activity plan for the service and site. We will also apply to other funders for targeted elements of the proposal.

- 8 In anticipation of securing the necessary funding for the project, a project board has been established to support and oversee this exciting development.
- 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.
- 10 Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of this report and the progress being made on the History Centre project proposal.

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 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.

The Archive

- 15 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 provides a comprehensive record of the industrial and social history of the local area going back almost 900 years. 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 by visiting the Record Office.
- 16 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.

- 17 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.
- 18 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.
- 19 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.
- 20 360 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.
- 21 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.
- 22 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

- 23 A countywide search for suitable sites for the relocation of the archive and records office was undertaken.
- 24 A longlist of 40 potential sites was considered and this was further refined by assessing the sites against the public requirements for linked facilities, good accessibility and transport links, HLF advice on the importance of accessible public transport, and lessons learned from other successful bids for funding for similar projects across the country.
- 25 A shortlist of eight sites was considered further with the potential sites assessed in terms of location, tenure, flood risk, contamination risk, public accessibility and potential match against the strategic objectives for the project
- 26 Following the exercise, Mount Oswald Manor on the outskirts of Durham City was identified as the preferred location, a decision endorsed by Cabinet in January 2018.
- 27 Mount Oswald Manor 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.

- 28 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.
- 29 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.
- 30 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.
- 31 The Archive and Record Office would be co-located with other cultural and service assets at Mount Oswald Manor to create a much more attractive service offer and public destination/venue.
- 32 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.
- 33 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.
- 34 Enhanced education facilities would be provided to improve the popular service offer to schools across the region, alongside exhibition space, research facilities and space for volunteers.
- 35 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.
- 36 Mount Oswald Manor 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.

- 37 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 substantial worse case contingency, given that detailed costings have yet to be undertaken.
- 38 Subject to securing Heritage Lottery funding, we would be aiming to open the new Durham History Centre by the end of 2022.

Consultation

- 39 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. Appendix 2 summaries the main findings from the consultation.
- 40 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, adult talks and behind the scenes tours.
- 41 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.
- 42 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 an 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, with the right programming.
- 43 We also held facilitated group discussions with people with learning and physical disabilities and a youth forum.
- 44 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.
- 45 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.

Current position

46 The Director for Transformation and Partnerships is the Project Sponsor and a project team, chaired by the Head of Strategy, has been established. The team incorporates all the skills and disciplines needed to manage, develop and deliver the project proposal and progress to date is outlined below.

Heritage Lottery Funding

47 In January 2018, Cabinet agreed to the submission of a Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) application for grant funding up to £4 million.

48 The HLF is a non-departmental public body accountable to Parliament via the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS). The HLF distributes the heritage share of National Lottery funding, supporting a wide variety of projects across the UK and decisions about individual applications and policies are entirely independent of the government. The projects HLF fund vary from restoring natural landscapes to rescuing neglected buildings, from recording diverse community histories to providing life-changing training.

49 Other funders do not provide the scale of funding required by this scale of project and as a local authority, many other sources of funding are closed to us. A round one HLF bid was therefore submitted in March 2018.

50 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.

51 We re-submitted the application on 16 August 2018, for a decision in December 2018. Timescales for the project remain unchanged and we still aim to open the new building in 2022, subject to HLF funding. While we have been encouraged to re-submit the proposal, it should be noted that we will continue to face strong competition for funding from other heritage project proposals.

Additional funding options

52 If we are successful in securing HLF Round 1 funding approval, we will pursue other sources of funding for specific aspects of the project. We will apply for capital funding to fit out the exhibition area and learning space, and to integrate art into the project design. We will pursue revenue funding to support the activity plan and for outreach and learning as part of our long-term plan to support the project legacy.

Negotiations with landowners

53 A heads of terms agreement has been developed with Banks Group to acquire the manor house and surrounding greenspace. Subject to securing funding approval, this will be developed further.

National Accreditation

- 54 The council's Record Office, has recently been awarded Archive Service Accreditation. Only five per cent of the 2,500 archives in the UK hold the accreditation. This prestigious national honour was received in September 2018 in recognition of Durham County Record Office's excellent practice and services.
- 55 Accreditation is the UK quality standard for archives, recognising good performance in all areas including management, the care of unique collections and what the service offers to its entire range of users.
- 56 Liz Rees, former Chief Archivist of Tyne and Wear Archives Service and member of the accreditation panel said: "Accredited Archive Services ensure the long-term collection, preservation and accessibility of our archive heritage. The award is a national benchmark, recognising high standards in archive practices. Durham County Record Office were in a very strong position, and this award is a tribute to everyone involved. Many congratulations."
- 57 Between 2017 and 2018, outside visitors engaged with the archive 900,000 times in person, via the website and through enquiry services. The panel noted the Record Office's excellent relationship with volunteers, including those who have worked on the Durham at War project which engaged over 250 volunteers to create an interactive mapping website.
- 58 Whilst acknowledging the limitations of the current accommodation in County Hall on the service, the assessors commented positively on the History Centre proposal and complimented the council and its partners on their vision for the scheme and the impact it would have on local heritage services.

Next steps

- 59 The decision for HLF Round 1 is expected in December 2018. In anticipation of receiving a successful outcome, we are currently planning for the 'development phase' which entails providing more detail on the project proposals including a detailed business plan and conservation plan. Our intention would be to submit a HLF Round 2 application by August 2019.

Project board

- 60 A project board to develop the project concept has been established on a provisional basis in anticipation of securing funding for the project. Relevant Cabinet Members, Corporate Directors and Heads of Service are involved, along with our partners Darlington Borough Council, Durham University and Durham Cathedral. If HLF approval is received, delegated authority will be sought for the board to oversee and direct the project, with day-to-day project management decisions further delegated to a project director, leading the project team.

Activity plan

- 61 An activity plan will be developed, covering interpretation, community engagement, formal and informal learning, volunteering and training, in line with the HLF's Activity Planning Guidelines (October 2012).

62 Consultants will be appointed to begin developing the activity plan in advance of the HLF decision. There will be a break clause in the commissioning agreement with the consultants, with the development work only continuing beyond December 2018 if HLF funding is received.

Design brief

63 As part of the project, the Grade II listed Mount Oswald Manor will be restored and a new build extension added to provide the optimum conditions for the records. The capital works will deliver enhanced educational facilities, exhibition space, research facilities and space for volunteers.

64 We are currently developing the specification for the proposed ground floor exhibition. Once agreed, we will seek to procure exhibition designers to develop Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) 3 proposals for this space.

65 The overall project has already been taken to RIBA 3 by Ryder Architecture. Their design and cost plan will form the basis of the HLF submission. Once we have heard from HLF in December, we will need to procure further development of the design proposal to a more detailed level.

Digital strategy brief

66 The History Centre proposal has digital culture and digital thinking embedded across its service offer. There would be a focus on learning and activity programmes including: digitisation projects including a new website; online resources for schools and leisure users; digitisation of collections and events such as a 'hackathon'; family and community activities and projects; formal learning activities; events and tours; and training and volunteering activities.

67 A Digital Consultant will be appointed before the end of 2018 to work with the project team to create a Digital Strategy in time for a Round 2 HLF application in August 2019. The contract will include a break clause in December 2018 in case our Round 1 HLF application is unsuccessful.

Conclusion

68 Transforming access to and preserving the county's written heritage, the Durham History Centre project would bring together five archive and collection services in a Grade II listed building, creating a flagship facility where 'stories begin' and people can discover and explore national and internationally-significant collections.

69 Mount Oswald 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.

70 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.

Recommendations

- 71 Cabinet is recommended to note the contents of this report and the progress being made on the Durham History Centre project proposal.

Background papers

Cabinet, 13 July 2016, Update on the Office Accommodation Programme and Outline Business Case for a New Headquarters - Joint Report of Ian Thompson, Corporate Director Regeneration and Economic Development Lorraine O'Donnell, Assistant Chief Executive

Cabinet, 17 January 2017, 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

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Appendix 1: Implications

Finance – At this stage there has been a small revenue spend to support consultation, project development including architectural design work and the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF). Should HLF funding be awarded, then the cost is estimated at £10.8 million - £13.7 million (with the higher figure including significant worst case contingency allowance at this early stage).

Staffing – The number of staff required to provide a revised customer offer is dependent on the outcome of further detailed service design work, but would take advantage of opportunities to improve efficiency through the co-location of services.

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.

Equality and Diversity / Public Sector Equality Duty – The impact of any new building on people with protected characteristics would be considered as part of further detailed service design work.

Accommodation – This project would provide long term, dedicated accommodation for the County Archive and County Record Office, for Historic Registration, Historic Environment Record, Local Studies, the Durham Registrar's Office, and potentially other heritage collections.

Crime and Disorder – none.

Human Rights – none.

Consultation – Consultation has been undertaken in 2015 and 2018. Further consultation with stakeholders and interested parties will be undertaken in the development phase for HLF Round 2 submission.

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

Disability Issues – See equality and diversity.

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.

Appendix 2: Durham History Centre consultation responses

Summary

A consultation seeking views on the proposed Durham History Centre took place January – February 2018. The survey received 607 responses.

- 83% of respondents were in favour of the proposals, whilst just 11% disagreed with the proposals
- 73% of respondents believed that we should offer all seven functions at the new centre:
 - Copies of birth death or marriage certificates
 - Durham County Record Office and archives
 - Historic archaeological and environmental records
 - Local history books and photographs
 - Military/DLI collection
 - Registration of births, deaths and marriages
 - Venue for weddings and ceremonies
- The most popular activities and learning opportunities all received over 80%:
 - Exhibitions about County Durham and North East life
 - View visiting exhibitions
 - Multi-media access to historic records
 - Adult talks about history and heritage
- Respondents highlighted the following as important facilities for the centre all received over 80%:
 - Disabled access
 - Easy access via public transport
 - Parking
 - Seating area for taking a break/refreshments
 - Exhibition space

- 21% of other comments on the proposed project were positive comments towards the DLI collection being located together.
- The main comments from focus groups, AAPs, letters of support, organisation responses etc. which were not counted as part of the survey can be grouped into four groups: positive, things to take into consideration, ideas and other.

Positive

- General support
- Support for the proposed service model
- Bringing the DLI collection together
- Expertise of current staff
- Restoring a listed building
- Use of storage facilities / opportunity to collect new and vulnerable records
- Education
- Volunteering opportunities
- Sustainability

Other

- Unsuitability of current DCRO facilities
- Timescales / coordination with HQ relocation
- Accessibility to Mount Oswald (mix of positive, negative and neutral comments)
- Location (mix of positive, negative and neutral comments)
- Bishop Auckland register office

Things to take into consideration

- Café / refreshment facilities
- Disabled access / facilities
- Importance of marketing
- Name of facility – not 'office'
- Outreach activities
- Need to make the facility welcoming with knowledgeable staff/volunteers
- Importance of grounds / use of outdoor space
- Partnership working
- Volunteer facilities

Ideas

- Miner's historical records
- Archaeology museum
- Durham History Museum
- Art exhibitions / art gallery
- Changing exhibitions e.g. then and now photographic exhibitions, DLI , mining and railways
- Dementia café, benefits of collections on people with dementia

- Work experience opportunities
- Non-users are Interested in history relevant to them e.g. family, history of village or house
- Packaging and bar coding boxes ahead of move
- Digitisation
- Parking
- Funding
- Cost
- Space to showcase personal research
- Music events
- Catering facilities for wakes / Christenings etc.
- Meeting/conference/training facilities
- Activity plan – changing activities, hands on activities, training sessions. Interactive, informative and fun activities