

Report of: David Tucker, Interim Business Manager Leisure and Parks

Title: Review of Delivery of Museum Service

Ward: All

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Key Decision: No

Lead Member: Cllr Mary Clarkson

Scrutiny responsibility: Community

RECOMMENDATIONS

That the Executive Board agrees to:

1. Support the Museum of Oxford in strengthening its future, uniqueness and established expertise in the interpretation of local literature as part of wider council initiatives to build pride in the city.
2. Support the Museum of Oxford in developing collaborative partnerships and projects with the Story Museum.
3. Maintain dialogue and consultation between the Story Museum and Oxford City Council in order to maximise the profile of the city as a visitor destination.
4. Support the Museum of Oxford in acting as Oxford City Council's specialists and point of contact regarding museum issues.

1. Summary

Members have asked for a report on possible support for the Story Museum within the context of wider museum initiatives.

This report will provide context by highlighting the role of literature at the Museum of Oxford, summarise the Story Museum project and identify opportunities for supporting the Story Museum, particularly through collaboration with the Museum of Oxford.

Oxford is unique in its heritage of children's literature and this subject is an established area of expertise and popularity within the services provided by the Museum of Oxford. It is important for the Museum of Oxford to continue this specialist area, develop its important collections and expand interpretative methods. This is part of the museum's remit to develop and represent the city's history and culture, create a sense of pride and attract tourism.

The Story Museum is an exciting new project to develop a centre for children's literature. It has the potential to offer a high profile visitor attraction in the city. The project has developed from the Museum of Oxford's literature specialism and the potential to explore this subject in greater depth.

This report recommends a continued collaborative approach between the Museum of Oxford and the Story Museum and recommends dialogue between the Story Museum and Oxford City Council to maximise the profile of Oxford as visitor destination.

In the short term there are opportunities for project partnerships between the Museum of Oxford and Story Museum, for example on events and exhibitions, while the longer term plans for the city museum within the Town Hall are tested and developed as part of the Town Hall Feasibility Study.

In the longer term there are opportunities for the two organisations to collaborate, for example on marketing initiatives, to maximise resources and potential. Should the Feasibility Study suggest that the museum's longer-term future should not be in the Town Hall, there is also potential for the Museum of Oxford and Story Museum to investigate a shared space elsewhere in the city.

2. Council's Vision and Strategic Aims

The Museum of Oxford is the city council's dedicated museum service that focuses directly on delivering council objectives. It is the only Museum in Oxford to tell the history of the city, its community and the university. The Museum's mission statement is to work in partnership to develop a sense of identity and pride in the city and deliver a unique, sustainable, inclusive cultural, tourism and life long learning resource for Oxford, its communities and visitors.

In creating a sense of pride and marking the city on the map as a visitor centre, the Museum of Oxford has an established record of interpreting the important specialist subject of Oxford's literary connections.

3. Background

3.1. Literature at the Museum of Oxford

For many years the museum has included literature-based activities in its programme of education and special events and exhibitions. These are often the most popular and well-attended activities. The Museum has attracted

significant grant funding for literature based projects and acquisitions and the museum has an established network of partners and links in this subject area.

Literature-based activities and links at the Museum of Oxford include:

Galleries and collections

Displays and personal belongings of Alice Liddell (Alice in Wonderland)

Special Exhibitions

Exhibition every year since 1997 on literature subject including: Inspector Morse (1997), Looking for Alice (1998), The Oxford Inklings (1999), Journey into Middle Earth: The Life and Times of JRR Tolkien (2002), The Third Man (2004)

Funding and Projects

£120k raised to purchase items relating to Alice Liddell
£35k for website project with British Library

Education and Events

'Adventures with Alice' Education Pack for schools and families
Family Literacy Course with primary school
Literary Festival activities
Regular family and children's events inspired by Alice and literature links including storytelling, puppet making, mask making

Partners

Established links, website project, joint marketing and sponsorship with partners to develop literature and literacy links for example with Christchurch College, Blackwells, The British Library, BBC

Visitor feedback and the past success of activities show that there is a large demand for the Museum of Oxford to continue to provide services related to the subject of Oxford and its literary associations.

3.2. The Development of the Story Museum

The Story Museum is an innovative new project. Established in 2003, the project's aim is to create a centre for children's literature, located in Oxford due to its national significance in the field of literature.

The project developed from the success of literature-based exhibitions at the Museum of Oxford and the potential for the subject of Oxford literature and children's literature to be explored in more depth than was possible within the existing site of the Museum of Oxford.

The project grew into a more ambitious plan to build a centre aimed at helping people discover and explore children's literature. The Story Museum is a charitable company and became a registered charity in 2004. The project operates as a 'virtual museum', running a public events programme since

August 2005 and a schools programme since November 2005. Future plans include developing a children's website and national touring exhibition.

4. Consultation with the Story Museum

The Museum of Oxford has consulted with the Story Museum to identify possible support for the project by the authority.

The project has gained past support from Oxford City Council through joint development ideas for the project with the Museum of Oxford.

The Story Museum has suggested possible future support for the project by being consulted where relevant on council strategies and planning documents, for example in the areas of tourism, culture and arts. The project would also welcome a statement of support and confirmation of dialogue with the authority.

The Story Museum currently rent from Oxford City Council a small office in the Town Hall. The project is looking for larger office space, but none are available within the Town Hall at present. The Story Museum has been notified that financial support from the authority can be requested by applying for a grant towards office rent.

The Story Museum is also interested in booking Town Hall rooms for public events and hiring the new Town Hall Gallery space as a venue for a touring exhibition. The authority has made available grants towards the hire fee of the Gallery for community purposes. The project will soon have in post a dedicated fund-raiser to seek grants and will contact the authority and relevant officers to identify suitable grants, for example towards office and gallery hire costs.

The Story Museum is looking at various options for location of the visitor centre, but the ideal option is to find a home in Oxford. The project is looking to identify a building or site for the project within the city and has already been in contact with the authority but would welcome further opportunities to work with the council to identify possible locations.

In the context of wider museum initiatives, there is specific support for the project by the authority via collaboration with the Museum of Oxford. The project has stemmed from a joint initiative with the Museum of Oxford and there are many possible opportunities to work together and maximise resources. The Museum of Oxford, as the authority's museum service, provides a first point of contact for matters relating to the museum sector.

5. The Story Museum within wider Museum initiatives

5.1 Oxford – a national centre for Museums and Children's Literature

Oxford is a national centre for museums and heritage outside of London. The Museum of Oxford and potentially the Story Museum have key roles in developing the city as a heritage attraction.

Oxford is also unique in its heritage of children's literature. The city has links to some of the country's best-loved writers for children, including JRR Tolkien, Lewis Carroll, Kenneth Grahame, CS Lewis and Philip Pullman. The Museum of Oxford's remit is to interpret past and present culture to create a sense of place and pride in the city, and literature in all its forms plays an important role. The Story Museum project aims to celebrate Britain and particularly Oxford's contribution to children's literature, and complement Oxford's role as a world centre of learning, language and literature.

In the context of wider museum initiatives, there is potential for increasing use of the Museum of Oxford and Story Museum by referring to each other and working together to attract larger and wider audiences to the venues and to the city. Subjects represented by each organisation can be interpreted through different perspectives and explored further by visiting both organisations. There is also potential to share resources and create joint projects.

5.2 Museum of Oxford Initiatives: Short-Medium Term

The Museum of Oxford has a remit to develop to provide a more sustainable service. It is important for the museum to develop its existing expertise, networks and object collections relating to city's literature in order to attract wider audiences and develop the sense of place and pride in the city. The museum has plans to develop the existing programme of literature based activities in the short term, for example:

- *'Literary Oxford'* (draft title) special exhibition, exploring Oxford's books, plays, poetry and drama, as part of Oxford Inspires events of 2007, including developing existing relationship with BBC on literacy initiatives.
- Ongoing collecting policy to collect objects relating to literature to represent the history of the city.
- Incorporation of Literary Oxford research into permanent displays
- Further events for families and children inspired by the museum's collections and the city's links to literature.
- Further schools sessions and national curriculum links e.g. literacy hour.
- Building on links established with partners on joint projects and marketing.

The Story Museum and Museum of Oxford have identified that over the next few years there are opportunities for collaboration to provide shared events, special exhibitions and loans of objects. The Museum has an existing wide network of collaborative partnerships with other heritage and visitor attractions and this is a further opportunity to develop reciprocal partnerships.

5.3 Museum of Oxford initiatives: Longer Term

Option 1: Expanded Museum in Town Hall Cultural Hub

The plans for a cultural hub in the Town Hall, including an enlarged Museum of Oxford, are currently being tested in a HLF funded feasibility study.

Development of the Museum within the Town Hall cultural hub will allow the museum to further develop its interpretation of the city's history. As a significant part of the city's society and culture, an enlarged museum will also be able to further explore its existing expertise and collections related to literature. The option of expanding within the Town Hall will allow close association of the Museum of Oxford with wider council cultural activities.

If the Museum of Oxford expands within the Town Hall, there will be opportunities for the Museum of Oxford and the Story Museum, as separate venues, to develop interpretation of literature subjects that complement each other. The two organisations could also develop joint projects such as events, exhibitions and marketing initiatives to maximise visitor potential.

Option 2: Museum moves to alternative location

Should the Town Hall cultural hub not include the Museum of Oxford, there is also a possible option for the Museum of Oxford and Story Museum to look to occupy a shared space elsewhere in the city. This option has many possibilities, but for the Museum of Oxford it is long term, higher risk and may mean less control by the authority as a major stakeholder in the museum service. Funding for the museum in this option could be uncertain. If the HLF is considered as a major funder in such projects, it must be borne in mind that the HLF does not generally support new build projects nor projects that overlap with existing services and historic collections.

6. Recommendations

This report recommends continuing a collaborative approach between the Museum of Oxford and Story Museum while future options are planned and tested.

The Museum of Oxford and Story Museum have a history of collaboration. This report recommends that the Museum of Oxford act as the authority's expertise and point of contact in museum issues. The Museum of Oxford has also established this role with Oxfordshire County Council Museum/Cultural Services as the point of contact in Oxford for enquiries regarding county-wide museum collections.

The Museum of Oxford's longer term future is being tested at present as part of the Town Hall Feasibility Study. The Story Museum is also investigating its future. It is recommended that both organisations maintain links while future options evolve and develop in order to seek opportunities to maximise resources and visitor potential and to keep open options for future collaboration.

The Museum of Oxford and the Story Museum can play key roles in drawing new audiences to each other and developing the city's significance in terms of museums and literature. This report also recommends maintaining consultation and dialogue between the Story Museum and Oxford City Council in order to maximise the profile of the city as a visitor destination.

THIS REPORT HAS BEEN SEEN AND APPROVED BY:
Portfolio Holder: Mary Clarkson, Leisure and Culture
Legal and Democratic Services: Jeremy Thomas
Financial Management: Penny Gardner

There are no background papers.