

To: City Executive Board

Date: 2nd December 2009

Item No:

Report of: Head of City Development

Title of Report: Museum of Oxford

Summary and Recommendations

Purpose of report: To seek a decision from the City Executive Board on the future of the Museum of Oxford.

Key decision? No

Executive lead member: Councillor Bob Price

Report approved by: Michael Crofton-Briggs

Finance: Anna Hedges, Group Accountant

Legal: Jeremy Thomas, Head of Legal Services

Environmental Development: John Copley

Policy Framework: - stronger and more inclusive communities
- Improve the local environment, economy and quality of life

Recommendation(s): That the City Executive Board:

1. Reviews the proposed three options on the future of the Museum of Oxford and confirms
2. whether it wishes the closure of the Museum to go ahead on 1st January 2010, or
3. alternatively selects one of the other courses of action.

1.0 Background and Introduction

During the 2008/9 budget round a decision was made by the City Council to cut the operational budget of the Museum of Oxford by 100%. Following further review it was agreed to amend this decision by decreasing the budget by 50% during 2009/10 and then by a further 50% in 2010/11.

The reason for this decision was to allow a period of time for officers to investigate potential options for the museum's future, with a view to identifying a sustainable method of operation. That exercise has now been carried out and the current report confirms how the budget decision will be implemented but also presents a number of options for consideration by members.

2.0 Existing Museum Service Delivery

As a result of this year's savings requirements museum staffing and opening hours have been reduced. The museum opens five days a week and operates with five part-time staff, but still delivers a full programme of temporary exhibitions and educational activities. Museum operations are now being supported through an excellent volunteer programme introduced in July 2009 and facilitated through Oxford Civic Society.

The museum is benefiting from participation in a 'Renaissance in the Regions' programme being run through the university museums and involves the county museums service. The programme involves two projects hosted by the Museum of Oxford and involving two newly appointed Renaissance project officers: a reminiscence officer, and community volunteer officer.

The Reminiscence officer is working in partnership with Hands On Oxfordshire Heritage (Oxfordshire County Council) to deliver core reminiscence sessions to regular groups across the city, develop creative projects with local artists and arts agencies, and develop sustainable partnerships with service providers and target user groups.

The Community Volunteer Officer is working in partnership with the University Museums to work with difficult to reach groups such as ethnic minorities, homeless, asylum seekers and young offenders within key target areas of the city, i.e. East Oxford (Blackbird Leys, Rose Hill, Cowley, Botley Road, Barton). The museum's collections and displays are providing a catalyst to engage non-users to explore their city and cultural heritage, and then interpret it through exhibitions at the museum or within their own communities, in empty shops, open spaces or community centres.

The projects have a total revenue budget of 160k to be delivered over an 18 month period.

3.0 Review of the Museum of Oxford

In June 2009 a project steering group was set up to consider the museum's future. The group comprises representatives from key partner stakeholders:

Oxfordshire County Council (Heritage and Arts division)

The County owns the collections displayed within the museum and maintains these through a service level agreement with the City Council.

Oxfordshire Archives Service

Responsible for the documentary elements of Oxford's material heritage (some of it stored in Oxford Town Hall).

Oxford Preservation Trust (OPT)

Through a management partnership with the visitor attraction company, Continuum, OPT runs Oxford Castle Unlocked, which interprets the Castle's history.

Oxford Civic Society

The Civic Society is a strong advocate for the Museum of Oxford and is providing volunteer support for the museum's front-line services.

Oxford University Museums

The University Museums are proactively engaging with the Museum of Oxford; through resource and project support. This developing relationship provides the basis for exploring future partnership working.

Oxford Brookes University

This local university has a major community focus, and a strong arts and humanities remit.

In August the steering group appointed Stuart Davies and Associates consultancy to undertake a research study and options appraisal to inform a decision of the future of the Museum of Oxford. Stuart Davies was selected as he is regarded as one of the UK's foremost authorities on the Museums sector and is President of the Museum's Association.

The consultant's brief was:

1. To investigate a viable long-term vision for what a future Museum of Oxford might look like and produce an options appraisal identifying key partners, possible locations and key audiences.
2. Put forward proposals for the short-medium continuation of museum service delivery that engages with visitors and non-visitors in ways that are affordable, accessible and meet council priorities.
3. Propose a recommended course of action for consideration by members

The draft consultant's report has been completed and is appended to this report (Appendix 1).

4.0 Key findings of the Consultancy report

The consultants have identified the following options for the future of museum delivery:

1. Do nothing – i.e. closure at the end of March 2010 with no substantial plan for City Council museum services in the future
2. City Council to maintain an operational level of funding in current location; but this does not create a realistic solution to the problem
3. City Council to increase funding, including refurbishment of displays (possibly with the aid of an HLF application)
4. Creation of a charitable trust to run the museum with an annual grant provided by Oxford City Council
5. Relocate to new premises (city centre or elsewhere) in physical/operational partnership with other institutions
6. A new, collaborative and distributed model of museum delivery throughout the city.

This options appraisal exercise was combined with a process of consultation with stakeholders that identified a strong desire for a new and innovative Museum of Oxford that has a community rather than tourism focus, and therefore could be located outside the city centre. On this premise, the consultants undertook consultation with partner stakeholders to investigate possible options, including that of a future museum facility elsewhere in the city. The outcome of this exercise was that there are several potential partnership options that need to be explored further:

1. Restoration and expansion of the existing museum within the Town Hall, and operation as a charitable trust.
2. Community focussed museum and archive facility at the developing County History Centre, Cowley (in partnership with the County Heritage and Arts service)
3. Oxford gallery space at the Ashmolean Museum (in partnership with the University Museums)
4. Museum facility as an extension to Oxford Castle Unlocked
5. Dispersed Museum model, in which displays and exhibitions are created at various locations around the city (in partnership with University museums and County Heritage and Arts service)
6. Community/ collaboration model, a project based scheme in which local communities are engaged in creating their own creative interpretations of their heritage (in partner with University museums and County Heritage and Arts service).

The Davies report concluded that, given the short timescale available to resolve the museum's future, the option to continue and to develop within the existing location (ie option 1 above) is the most realistic way forward. It also

concluded that closing the museum, even for an interim period could be counter-productive, and recommended that, to enable ample time for this and other options above to be given serious consideration, the Museum of Oxford should remain open for a further 12 months

This proposal is presented as Option 2 below.

5.0 Options Appraisal

Following evaluation by the steering group of the draft Davies document three key options are set out below for the way forward, together with the implications of these in terms of service delivery, existing commitments and cost.

Option 1; Closure of the museum

Under this option the museum would close on 1st January 2010, though some staff would be retained until the end of March 2010 in order to undertake the task winding down the operations, cancelling commitments and clearing the museum office spaces.

Closure will incur costs to the City Council. These include:

1. redundancy payments;
2. cost of maintaining the museum space in the Town Hall.
3. cost of removing the exhibits;
4. additional contractual and insurance costs, as the City Council is tied into its SLA with the County Council until November 2010.

In addition recharges from other Council departments form a large part of the museums budget; these would still have to be borne by the council. Once these are taken into consideration the net cost would be £23,198 in 2010/11.

In addition the County Council has provided a further figure of £98,000 for dismantling and removing collections. This figure would be open to negotiation with the City Council's contribution being subject to a Spend to Save bid.

A breakdown of the estimated costs of closure is presented in Appendix 2.

Further work will be required under this option to close in consultation with MLA, and our Renaissance partners, the County Museums service and university museums to ensure the Renaissance funded project continues.

Option 2 : Consultancy recommendation

Delivery of a multi-phased scheme that would require keeping the Museum of Oxford open for another 12 months to enable key long term options for a revitalised Museum of Oxford to be explored fully. During this period an intensive programme of developmental activity would be undertaken involving:

1. Follow up consultancy support to review and develop new proposals for the museum at the Town Hall including:
 - A development plan identifying the future operating mechanism as a charitable trust and creation of a viable business plan
 - Review of museum spaces including new museum entrance from the Town Hall foyer and expansion into Long Room / café areas
 - Identifying the thematic content of future displays
 - Identifying funding sources and preparing grant applications
2. Developing the Dispersed Museum concept as an innovative parallel initiative; drawing up a new Museums strategy which identifies neighbourhoods to be targeted, details the exhibits to be created, and plans the associated activities (including the development of Community Archives). A part of this would be a Business Plan and preparation of an application to the HLF.
3. Building on the new Renaissance projects to developing a focused outreach programme that engages diverse communities in interpreting their heritage through community and museum based exhibitions and displays. This project would use the museum spaces as a canvas for local people to formulate their own ideas of what the future museum of Oxford should take.
4. Create an Oxford City Museum Partnership that enables the City, County, University, OPS, OCS etc to work more closely together to develop a plan for future museum delivery and coordinate the most effective and efficient use of resources.

Under this scheme the proposed cut of £90,000 in the Museum of Oxford's 2010/11 budget would be restored. In addition the museum would require a development budget of £30k to fund consultancy research and the appointment of a part-time Development Officer to support the preparation of full development proposals, thus giving a total budget increase for 2010/11 of £120k.

Option 3 : Close the museum yet plan for a new Museum

This is the option that combines option one and two. So while the museum is closed as per option one, the consultant's recommendation 2 to 4 in option two are also carried out. Under this option the museum would close, and some of staff made redundant, the collections and displays would not be retained. As with Option 1 the museum would close on 1st January 2010, with some staff retained until the end of March 2010 in order to undertake the necessary tasks.

This option would also require consultancy research and the appointment of a part-time fixed term Development Officer at a total cost of £30k to lead on developing the concepts for future delivery, and preparing details for fund-raising.

Once these are taken into consideration the estimated cost in 2010/11 is £53,198.

A breakdown of the estimated costs of closure is presented in Appendix 2.

Closure of the museum will of course have significant implications from a reputation perspective. However this could be minimised through choosing Option three.

6.0 Level of risk: The lists are highlighted in Appendix 3

7.0 Climate change / environmental impact:

In the short-term, closure of the Museum of Oxford could have environmental benefits in terms of energy saving, although the City Council would be required to maintain environmental conditions in the museum at appropriate levels to ensure the collections are maintained under stable environmental conditions.

If Museum options to be taken forward involve adapting existing buildings or constructing any new buildings then these works should recognise the Council's declared intention is to reduce carbon emissions from its own buildings and operations by 25% by Mar 2011 and 3% year on year beyond this, as well as provide wider leadership on climate change issues (Corporate Plan, OSP). So any Oxford City Council building projects should back up this commitment.

As the Council planning framework requires larger commercial developments to meet its Natural Impact Resource Assessment (NRIA) criteria, then any internal projects should demonstrate leadership across Oxford by complying with the requirements of the NRIA policy, most specifically by meeting 20% of the energy requirements from on-site renewable energy generation (or by reducing carbon emission by an equivalent amount from advanced energy efficiency measures).

8.0 Equalities impact:

Closure of the museum would have a negative impact on the City Council's equalities programme in that the museum's community outreach project would no longer take place. If the Renaissance project could be relocated to the university museums, target communities continue to benefit, but not through City Council activities.

9.0 Financial implications:

The financial implications for each of the proposed options is set out within the body of text above and in Appendix 2.

10.0 Legal Implications:

The City Council responsibility for the Museum of Oxford is a non-statutory one, and it does not own the collections. As such it has a legal right to close the museum, and return the collections to the County Council.

11.0 Conclusion:

The City Council's current budget means that the museum will close on the 1st January 2010 (**option one**). However, officers as requested have also investigated other options with the help of an expert consultant.

Despite the work to-date more time is required to develop with partners the long term option of providing a new museum worthy of the City. In the meantime there is an exciting shorter term Dispersed Museum idea to help local communities engage with their history. Those consulted would wish the City Council to keep the museum open for a further year with its significant support from volunteers (**option two**).

However option two would require CEB not only foregoing the additional budget saving set for 2010/11 but also finding extra money for the development work.

So officers are also offering for consideration a **third option**, in which work is carried out on developing the longer term museum plan with the Museum Partnership but with a modest requirement for additional budget. It could be argued that keeping the museum open might become a barrier to ensuring that something new is planned for the longer term (*as some might continue to lobby for its retention*).

12.0 Recommendation:

That the City Executive Board:

1. Reviews the proposed three options on the future of the Museum of Oxford and confirms
2. Whether it wishes the closure of the Museum to go ahead on 1st January 2010, or
3. Alternatively selects one of the other courses of action

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List of appendices: Appendix 1: Draft Consultants' report
Appendix 2: Budget tables
Appendix 2: Risk register

Version number: final