

**Review of Maidstone Museum**

<b>Final Decision-Maker</b>	ECONOMIC REGENERATION AND LEISURE COMMITTEE
<b>Lead Head of Service</b>	John Foster
<b>Lead Officer and Report Author</b>	Victoria Barlow
<b>Classification</b>	Public
<b>Wards affected</b>	<i>High Street and All Wards</i>

**Executive Summary**

*The report explains the existing Museum services and costs of operations and sets out a number of options to reduce costs and the implications on service delivery.*

**Purpose of Report**

*Decision*

**This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:**

1. That the objectives for future service provision for Maidstone Museums in paragraph 1.2 are agreed including a revenue savings target of minimum of 25% (£186,000) are agreed
2. That the savings and charging proposals set out in Option 4 are agreed in principle and further work is undertaken to refine the savings identified, the service offer and charging policy and a further report is presented to the Committee.

**Timetable**

<b>Meeting</b>	<b>Date</b>
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee	12 <sup>th</sup> November 2020

# Review of Maidstone Museum

## 1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
<p><b>Impact on Corporate Priorities</b></p>	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure</li> <li>• Safe, Clean and Green</li> <li>• Homes and Communities</li> <li>• A Thriving Place</li> </ul> <p>Accepting the recommendations may materially harm the Council’s ability to achieve A Thriving Place. We set out the reasons we think, nevertheless, the proposed action remains the best approach within section 3.</p>	<p>John Foster Head of Regeneration and Economic Development</p>
<p><b>Cross Cutting Objectives</b></p>	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Heritage is Respected</li> <li>• Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced</li> <li>• Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved</li> <li>• Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected</li> </ul> <p>The report recommendation(s) impairs the achievement of the cross-cutting objectives as its reduces access to the Museum’s collections and suspends opportunities for temporary exhibitions and learning opportunities. It will make it harder for health inequalities to be addressed and reduced.</p>	<p>John Foster Head of Regeneration and Economic Development</p>
<p><b>Risk Management</b></p>	<p>Refer to paragraph 4.1 of the report</p>	<p>John Foster Head of Regeneration and Economic Development</p>

<b>Financial</b>	Accepting the recommendations will result in net savings of £186,000. In the absence of these savings the authority would have to identify savings elsewhere, contrary to the direction from Policy & Resources Committee at its meeting on 16th September.	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team
<b>Staffing</b>	Accepting the recommendations will lead to a need for savings that may put staff at risk of redundancy.	John Foster Head of Regeneration and Economic Development
<b>Legal</b>	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in the Constitution.	Team Leader Contracts and Commissioning
<b>Privacy and Data Protection</b>	Accepting the recommendations will increase the volume of data held by the Council. We will hold that data in line with our retention schedules.	Policy and Information Team
<b>Equalities</b>	The introduction of admission charging may impact upon those on low incomes. An equalities impact assessment will therefore be required	Policy & Information Manager
<b>Public Health</b>	We recognise the recommendations will impact on the health and wellbeing of staff working at the Museum.	Public Health Officer
<b>Crime and Disorder</b>	The recommendation will have a negative impact on Crime and Disorder. The Community Protection Team have been consulted and mitigation has been proposed	Head of Service or Manager
<b>Procurement</b>	There are no procurement issues arising from the recommendations	Head of Service & Section 151 Officer

## 1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 On the 16<sup>th</sup> September The Policy and Resources Committee (P&R) considered a report on the Strategic Plan Review – Update on Priority Milestones. It set out the acute impact that COVID-19 has had on the Council's financial position, the implications for the Medium-Term Financial Strategy, the need to consider new operating delivery models and options around service prioritisation. As part of this process the Committee noted the contribution that the Museum makes to the quality of life of residents

and visitors but agreed that **“The direction of travel here may need to be more modest, focussing on unlocking governance constraints and making the best use of our existing spaces.”**

- 1.2 In order to guide this review of options, Officers have produced a set of objectives which it is proposed should guide future service provision:
  1. To produce a minimum 25% net saving or £186,550
  2. Access to the main Museum’s collections is maintained
  3. Any changes made are reversible

## Background

- 1.3 Maidstone Museums consists of three museums; Maidstone Museum, Queens Own Royal West Kent Regimental Museum (QORWK) and the Tyrwhitt-Drake Museum of Carriages (The Carriage Museum). Maidstone Museums is an Accredited museum and houses one of the most important regional collections in the South East. Its collections of over 650,000 artefacts and specimens include internationally important collections and are recognised as being outstanding in their diversity and quality.
- 1.4 Both the Maidstone Museum and the QORWK Regiment Museum are located in the Grade 2\* listed museum building on St Faith’s Street, Maidstone. The Tyrwhitt-Drake Carriage Museum is located within a Grade 1 listed tithe barn a 10 mins walk from the main museum building.
- 1.5 The Maidstone Museum 20-year Plan was adopted by Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee (HCL) in July 2017. A bid in 2019 to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to deliver the transformation of all the galleries envisioned in the 20 year plan was unfortunately unsuccessful. However ERL Committee have adopted these plans as the preferred long term vision for the Museum.
- 1.6 The Museum delivers a programme of events and temporary exhibitions each year. Staff undertake talks and tours and deliver school holiday activities. There is an education programme working with schools currently funded by Arts Council England (ACE). Staff respond to research enquiries and organise loans of the collection to outside bodies. Rooms within the building are available to hire and children parties are encouraged. Work continues to document and conserve the collection and identify new ways of displaying the artefacts and promoting the collections. This includes a recent successful grant award to create an animated film. Staff on the front desk provide tourist information, supported by the Visitor Economy Team.
- 1.7 A Cultural and Arts Officer is on a fixed term contract to deliver the adopted Arts and Cultural Strategy.
- 1.8 The Museum houses the collections of three separate charitable trusts:
  - 1 Queens Own Royal West Kent Regimental Trust: The Council is sole trustee of the Regimental Museum Charity. Ownership of the Trust’s assets passed

to the Council which now has responsibility for managing, curating and insuring the collection.

- 2 The Brenchley Trust was established to maintain, preserve and exhibit the collection of objects of Natural History, Mineralogy and Ethnography presented by LJ Brenchley to the Maidstone Museum. The museum is currently responsible for the care, management and accreditation of the collection.
  - 3 The Bentlif Wing Trust: A Deed of Variation signed in 2009 places obligations on the Council to conserve, store and provide cleaning, maintenance, supervision and security for the Bentlif Wing and its collection. Curatorial services are provided, as are legal, minuting, and financial services. The Deed gives the Trust control of access and use of some rooms within the building.
- 1.9 In addition, the Museum is supported by the Maidstone Museum Foundation (MMF). MMF is an independent charity supporting the museum by raising money for projects and educational activities. Whilst appreciative of the support and individual efforts of the MMF board, the Museum Director will seek to redefine the relationship between the museum and MMF regarding fees and how they are used. Several years ago, income from donation boxes were made over to MMF for the purposes of claiming gift aid. This money is returned to the museum as grant aid or support for projects at the request of officers but only with MMF board approval. We will seek to return this income to the museum directly to the museum so that counts towards museum income rather than MMF. In 2019 this accounted for £6,036 with no gift aid claimed, according to MMF annual accounts.

#### 1.10 Museum Visitor Figures

Year	2017-18	2018-19	2019-20
Visitor Numbers	52,613	63,770	78,029

- 1.12 In 2019-20 the museum was visited just under 80,000 times, a record for recent times. However, due to Covid-19 it was forced to close from 19<sup>th</sup> March until 14<sup>th</sup> July 2020. Visits since re-opening have been very subdued and based on visits since July, we anticipate the total for 2020-2021 will be as low as 30,000. While this is line with similar organisations, it is a significant fall and will be reflected in lower income in the museum shop as well as from room bookings, activities and events. It is impossible to predict exactly when figures will return to their pre-Covid high but based on business recovery plans in other sectors, it may be up to five years.

#### 1.13 Use of Volunteers

- 1.14 The museum has for many years been supported by the work of volunteers from the local community. Currently there are approximately 30 active volunteers. Volunteers work in all areas of the museum.
- 1.15 While there is no opportunity to directly replace paid staff with volunteers, there are areas in which more volunteers could be involved. Acting as

gallery guides, volunteers would be able to talk to visitors about what they are seeing, share handling objects, signpost visitors to other galleries and generally be a welcoming presence.

- 1.16 Volunteers are not a free resource (they are entitled to travel and out of pocket expenses and require officer time, to be reduced under all proposals, for recruitment and management) but they will undoubtedly play a greater role in the museum in future.

### 1.17 Cost of Service

Table 1 shows a summary of the cost of the current service:

	Saveable Budget	Non-saveable Budget
Expenditure	609,150.0	
Museum Buildings	273,080.0	Most of these building costs would be incurred in all options, such as business rates and insurance. Some savings would be made in lower utility bills and cleaning contract fees.
Income	-136,030.0	
Direct Recharges		28,100.0
Indirect Recharges		126,110.0
TOTAL	746,200.0	154,210.0

## 2.AVAILABLE OPTIONS

2.1. The following options have been identified as they have the potential to generate the necessary savings:

1. Close the Museum, access by appointment only and for special events.
2. Open 2 days a week
3. Annualised hours equivalent to opening 3 days a week
4. Annualised hours equivalent to opening 4 days a week

2.2 Options 3 and 4 would enable the Museum to open 3 days or 4 days a week all year round respectively. However, an annualised operating model might be more beneficial whilst delivering the same savings. It would enable the Museum to respond better to quieter and busier times of the year by, for example opening 5 or 6 days a week during the busy times whilst potentially closing altogether in the quieter months, say January. This will be investigated further.

2.3 All four options include the closure of Maidstone Carriage Museum. The Carriage Museum has been unable to reopen this year after the Covid-19 because the Risk Assessment showed that it would be impossible to introduce a one way system and the space in the building is not large enough to allow social distancing for visitors or staff. In addition, it has only one narrow staircase between the two floors of display and only one door in and out. The Carriage Museum was previously open 12 hours a week from

April to September. Visits have dropped in the last three years from 1409 to 982.

2.4 Table 2 shows the potential savings available for each option which is calculated from savings in staffing costs, revenue budget, loss of existing income and possible income from charging.

Table 2

	Current saveable budget	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
	Existing days and hours	Close the Museum, access by appointment only	Open 2 days a week	Annualised hours equivalent to opening 3 days a week	Annualised hours equivalent to opening 4 days week
Staff costs	£492,400	£105,447	£171,394	£203,188	£326,000
Non Staff costs	£116,750	£35,780	£34,215	£57,120	£93,000
Building costs	£273,080	£273,080	£273,080	£273,080	£273,080
Existing Income	-£136,030	-£13,920	-£22,920	-£27,420	-£84,490
		£0			
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>£746,200</b>	<b>£400,387</b>	<b>£455,769</b>	<b>£505,968</b>	<b>£607,590</b>
<b>SAVINGS</b>	<b>£0</b>	<b>£345,813</b>	<b>£290,431</b>	<b>£240,232</b>	<b>£138,610</b>
NB Not all savings are achievable in the first year due to redundancy costs and payment protection policy may apply to certain posts					
Possible Income from Charging					
Charging entrance fee @£3 per head	Current service	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3	Option 4
Assumes 50% drop in visitor numbers to 40,000	£120,000	£0	£48,000	£72,000	£96,000
Charging entrance fee @£3 per head					
Assumes 75% drop in visitor numbers 20,000	£60,000	£0	£24,000	£36,000	£48,000

2.5 Admission charging

2.6 Options 1, 2 and 3 achieve or exceed the savings target without charging. Only Option 4 would require an additional action to reach the savings

target; this could include the introduction of admission charges or a broader approach to introduce a "Civic Card" which is charged for and incentivises visits to a range of our facilities including the museum, Lockmeadow and the leisure centre for example.

- 2.7 Charging for the museum itself could be trialled with little or no new investment. Although the council does hold information about overall visitor numbers to the museum it does not hold data on the details of numbers of adults, children or families that visit or how often a visitor might re-visit the Museum. This information would help inform how much the entrance fee should be for an adult, child or family, and what type of entrance tickets might be attractive e.g. single entry or annual pass. The figures given in Table 2 are therefore estimated using £3 as the entrance figure for a visitor.
- 2.8 Members should be aware that very few museums of the size and nature of Maidstone's make a significant portion of income from admission charges. Of 10 similar museums in the South East, 6 are free to enter. The other 4 charge between £4 and £12 for an adult annual ticket but also receive part funding from other bodies such as the Ministry of Defence, a charitable Trust and a Local Authority. Indeed, Dover Museum was forced to remove a charge after a trial period in which its visitation fell dramatically and the amount collected was considerably less than that previously spent in the shop or given as donations.
- 2.9 Option 4 therefore assumes a reduction in the number of visitors prepared to pay for entry. It is not possible to know what this might be without further research. However, if a 75% reduction is assumed, charging could generate £48,000 in additional income. This, together with staff and non-staff savings of £138,610 would result in a total saving of £186,610, which meets the required savings target.
- 2.10 As already explained in paragraph 1.10, the Maidstone Museum Foundation (MMF) charge a membership fee to become a MMF member. Membership of the MMF enables members to benefit from reduced fees to certain Museum run activities. Contributions to the donations box are also given to the MMF. In order for charging to be introduced this arrangement would have to change as visitors would not expect to pay for a ticket and donate as well and MMF membership will not be able to offer free access.
- 2.11 The following areas have been previously considered and have either failed to generate a net profit or have been shown to fail where they have been implemented elsewhere in Kent and the South East.
  - Museum Shop – The shop provides a welcome part of the service for visitors but operates at a net loss when the retail supervisor's costs are considered
  - Museum Café – Neither internal nor external operation of a café was successful due to low passing trade and the proximity of chain restaurants in Fremlin Walk
  - Grant funding of core services- Whilst staff have been very successful at attracting project grants, most funders will not replace existing staffing or core revenue costs



- Room Hire/Parties – There is not enough demand for either of these services to provide a significant income and to convert spaces for permanent tenants would require significant capital investment with no proven demand

2.12 The impact on service delivery is set out in Appendix 1. The Learning Service is currently funded from an external grant. If this grant is not renewed in March 2021, the service would cease to operate after August 2021 and two members of staff will be made redundant. Further work is needed to assess the impact on the delivery of the following activities too:

- Talks, activity sessions and events for adults (e.g. monthly Lates) 1,135 people attended in the last full year of operation 2018/19
- Holiday and weekend activities for children (e.g. summer activities, Father Christmas) attended by 1,051 people in the same period
- Cur8 young Curators Group 10 meetings attended by 10 people each
- Café Culture club for isolated elders 10 meetings attended by 20 people each but there is some overlap with the same people coming to multiple sessions
- Guided Tours of galleries and stores attended by 49 individuals
- 20 Volunteers cataloguing and researching collections provided 1,000 work hours
- Enquiries (individual, free of charge enquiries are not counted) and photograph reproductions for 40 people
- Collections development (collecting and accessioning new items into the collection)
- Participation in national events in the building or via social media
- Grant-aided projects such as the development of Roman Death and Local History sessions for young people or Translation of Japanese engravings by a PhD student while cataloguing

2.13 There are several opportunities afforded by new technology, particularly in the area of enabling access to collections even when the museum is closed and in learning. In and of themselves, they do not contribute to the savings targets and may require an initial investment, but they would help to fill a gap in access which would result from reduced opening hours. These opportunities are explained further in Appendix 2.

2.14 The benefits and disadvantages of each option is considered in Appendix 3.

2.15 In summary Option 1 is not recommended as access to the collection would become appreciably more difficult and is the hardest to reverse.

2.16 Option 2 is not recommended as it vastly exceeds the savings target by unnecessarily restricting the number of days the Museum opens.

2.17 Option 3 generates the savings target required without introducing admission charging. However, the result would be a much-reduced service, more limited public access and the reduction in hours would mean the loss of skills and expertise through the likely departure of existing staff. The work on museum collections would be reduced to minimal caretaking and recording.

2.18 Option 4 generates the savings required through a mixture of reduced operating hours (staff time) and the introduction of admission charging. The loss of skills and expertise through the departure of existing staff would be less severe. It preserves the core elements of museum operation and accreditation is likely to be retained so will not affect its ability to apply for grant aid. This option is likely to gain most support from the various Trusts and other stakeholders such as Kent Archaeological Society.

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### **3. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS**

3.1 The preferred option is Option 4 for the reasons set out in paragraph 2.18.

### **4. RISK**

4.1 The following main risks have been identified:

4.2 The key risk in recommending Option 4 is the reliance on the introduction of admission charging to achieve the required savings target. The continuation of Covid related social distancing restrictions and further lockdowns would expose the Museum to loss of income from charging. Careful pricing and ticketing options need to be researched to make charging as attractive as possible. Options can be trialled at little cost. Ways to mitigate the impact of charging on low income households could be introduced.

4.3 Skilled and experienced staff may choose to leave the Museum and part time contracts may be difficult to fill. Consultation with staff may reveal ways of minimizing these impacts whilst achieving the staffing reductions required.

4.4 Reputational damage may take many forms for example:

- Loss of trust which might damage the willingness of future funders to invest in the service
- Loss of trust which might damage the willingness of other institutions to lend artefacts to the museum. Current lenders include The British Museum, The V&A Museum, The Royal Mews and The Horniman Museum and Gardens.
- Loss of trust which might damage the willingness of donors to present objects of interest to the museum.

It will therefore important that the Council emphasise to the public and wider media the Council's continuing significant investment in culture. An annualised operating model responds more commercially to peaks and troughs in demand and could be considered better value for money should this be introduced.

### **5. CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK**

5.1 This report is confidential and so there has not yet been any consultation with staff, Members or other key stakeholders.

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## **6. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION**

6.1 The savings recommendation of Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee will be presented to Policy and Resources Committee 25 November. A further report will be presented to Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee following further refinement of the preferred option.

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## **7. REPORT APPENDICES**

Appendix 1 Implications for Service Delivery for each of the options  
Appendix 2 Use of Technology and Innovation  
Appendix 3 Benefits and Disadvantages of each of the options

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## **8. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

None