

Maidstone Museum Capital Expenditure

Final Decision-Maker	ERL
Lead Head of Service	John Foster
Lead Officer and Report Author	Victoria Barlow
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report proposes four possible uses of the museum's capital allocation in order to fulfil a requirement to make the best use of museum spaces, improve accessibility to collections and reduce net revenue costs for the museum. Each proposal is considered in light of the budgetary savings and associated staff restructure to ensure that there is both financial and staff capacity to successfully carry out the project.

Purpose of Report

Decision

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. That the committee accept recommendation 3, the refurbishment of one of the museum's galleries

Timetable

Meeting	Date
ERL	20 April 2021

Maidstone Museum Capital Expenditure

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	We do not expect the recommendations will by themselves materially affect achievement of corporate priorities. However, they will support the Council's overall achievement of its aims as set out in section 3 [preferred alternative].	Victoria Barlow
Cross Cutting Objectives	This project will contribute to the cross-cutting objective: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Heritage is Respected It will do this by improving the access to history and heritage for residents	Victoria Barlow
Risk Management	The risks of each option are laid out in the report	Victoria Barlow
Financial	There is a budget of £389,000 in the approved capital programme for the Museum Development Plan.	Senior Finance Manager (Client)
Staffing	<i>We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.</i>	Victoria Barlow
Legal	Acting on the recommendations is within the Council's powers as set out in section 12 of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. The Act give powers to local authorities to provide and maintain museums and do all things which may be necessary or expedient for or in connection with the provision or maintenance thereof. However, museums are not a statutory service. The Committee must be satisfied that the proposed refurbishment of the of the museum's British Archaeology Gallery is necessary or expedient for or is in connection with the provision or maintenance of the museum, and the cost of the	[Legal Team]

	refurbishment is within the Council's approved budget.	
Privacy and Data Protection	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
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	[Policy & Information Manager]
Public Health	We recognise that <i>the</i> recommendations will have a positive impact on population health or that of individuals.	[Public Health Officer]
Crime and Disorder	The recommendation is unlikely to have an impact on Crime and Disorder	Victoria Barlow
Procurement	On accepting the recommendations, the Council will then follow procurement exercises for procurement of design and build consultants. We will complete those exercises in line with financial procedure rules.	[Head of Service & Section 151 Officer]

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

At the P&R committee of November 2020, it was agreed that significant savings be made to the museum budget, that the museum work closely with Maidstone Museum Foundation on future funding and that **a further report is presented to the committee setting out how the existing capital allocation to the Museum can be used to make the best use of our existing spaces, address accessibility to the collections and reduce the net revenue costs of the museum.**

In response, museum staff have considered ways in which the museum spaces could be improved to meet the relevant objectives. Consultation also took place with representatives of the Maidstone Museum Foundation.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

Four options have been identified for consideration by members of ERL:

3.1 Option1 Conversion of Westspace (the former café) into a temporary exhibition gallery

3.1.1 A new Temporary Exhibition Gallery would require three major elements; a suitable and stable environment to preserve a range of organic and non-organic materials, flexible display equipment and a high level of security.

Conversion to a functioning gallery would require the following as a minimum:

- Removal of the current kitchen and making good
- Removal of access ramp and replacement a wheelchair lift
- Air handling or HVAC system to provide a stable environment with maximum cycling of 10% in band 50-65% relative humidity in a 24 hour period
- Museum quality display cases in a variety of styles (ave £7k-£10k each fully configured with internal lighting and dehumidifying cassettes)
- Total covering of natural light sources
- Installation of a flexible and dimmable lighting system able to achieve appropriate UV and Lux levels
- Storage area for unused equipment and packaging
- Wall hanging system or display board system for 2-d material
- Demountable walls to divide and provide more wall hanging space
- Close sealing door to front courtyard to prevent pests such as insects or mice entering from a planted area
- If there was any intention to borrow items from national museums, the space would need to meet standards for the Government Indemnity Scheme (which means that the museum does not have to separately insure loan items) and, in particular, the requirement that a gallery must have two secure doors between the gallery and the exterior of the museum.

3.1.2 Benefits

The space would be a new attraction which may attract new visitors and additional spend or donations

The conversion would give a clear purpose to a large, currently empty space

The gallery is accessible from the courtyard at the front of the museum and is therefore more visible to potential visitors

3.1.3 Risks

The major argument against this project is that it is not really required. We currently have sufficient space for Temporary Exhibitions upstairs. The recent staff restructure means that we will henceforth show only 2 exhibitions a year and they will be created in-house. It is unlikely we have material enough to create the larger exhibitions needed to fill this space. The current gallery also has level access via a lift which would need to be installed in Westspace.

This option would leave the current temporary exhibition gallery empty and unused. This is wasteful and likely to cause complaint by the Bentlif Trust who have an interest in the room. Current figures suggest that just 8% of general visitors pay to visit temporary exhibitions and so it would take a significant length of time to gain any return on the capital investment

The current environmental conditions in Westspace are currently the least stable in the museum and significant investment in HVAC would be necessary to control this. We would need both a system able to both humidify and dehumidify the

large space. As well as the initial costs of installation of such a system, the running costs in terms of maintenance and power are also significant. In addition, it would take significant works to make the gallery Government Indemnity Scheme compliant. Previous plans included the closing off and re-purposing of the courtyard which would add significant costs for construction and gardening works. Although the Government Indemnity Scheme only covers national and DCMS-sponsored museums, many civic and regional museums have accepted its standards as a baseline for agreeing loans. Without it, our options would be limited in this area. The current gallery is already compliant.

3.1.4 Affordability

Figures prepared by Innes Architects as part of the Transformation project suggest that the construction work on the gallery and courtyard would cost up to £150,000 (exc fees) which leaves the residue to pay for the fit out, lighting, HVAC and equipment. Barring any unforeseen additional spend, the project could be completed within the budget but would need careful management to ensure this.

3.1.5 Timescales

The gallery is in use until July 2021 but the project could commence during the financial year 2021-22 and is likely to take 6-9 months to complete

3.1.6 Permissions needed

Planning Permission
Listed Building Consent
Consultation with Bentlif Wing Trust

3.1.7 Resources

This option would require capital funding to carry out the conversion work but an on-going concern would be the cost of maintaining air handling equipment. In addition, its easy access to and from the main road and Fremlin Walk would require a staff member to provide security cover during opening hours and this would be very difficult to resource from proposed staffing.

3.2 Option 2 conversion of Westspace a room for income generating events and external hire

3.2.1 Currently the museum has two small spaces which it uses as venues for meetings and small events. The creation of a space capable of hosting events for a larger audience or small conference would seem to present an obvious opportunity for maximising the use of the space whilst generating new income. Conversion would require the following as a minimum:

- Removal of the current kitchen and making good
- Removal of access ramp and replacement a wheelchair lift
- Improved central heating to enable longer use of the room which gets very cold
- Provision of fast, reliable WiFi at this end of the building
- Black out blinds for all windows
- Storage area for unused equipment and furniture
- Provision of a new toilet

- New seating in the form of individual chairs and tables alongside a retractable seating system (2 aisle 50 seat system is approx. £25,000)

3.2.2 Benefits

Potential hire income is increased. A larger room would allow us to expand our market into larger meetings and small conferences which in turn would increase income generation. A bigger flexible space would allow us to provide a wider range of activities with greater income likely from ticket sales. This might mean we could accommodate local community group activities, school events or commercial hire for leisure activities such as yoga or weight watchers. If, as anticipated, the Adult Education Centre is closed in the next few years, it is also possible we could offer some of the activities currently provided by KCC and secure that income while providing a popular service. This diversity of activity would allow us to target under-resourced audiences and improve the Diversity and Inclusivity of our offer to new audiences. The availability for occasional museum activity would make collections work such as auditing, decants and possible volunteer projects easier and more efficient to run.

3.2.3 Risks

The assumptions above in relation to increased audiences and spend have not been market tested so there is a risk of investing with no definite return. A growth in room hire could easily out-strip our ability to resource meetings, conferences or events properly. We are unable to offer in-house catering or dedicated front of house staff during such events. Our experience of meeting hire is that organisers frequently change plans with little notice or have unplanned requirements. A professional conference venue would have staff dedicated to addressing this. The museum is an attractive venue but must provide a professional service to compete with hotels or other venues such as the Hazlitt Theatre. Larger, higher profile events would need wider marketing to attract audiences which potentially double current event crowds. We have very little marketing budget and rely on the Communications Team for all our services in this area. The current museum WiFi in this area will not be suitable for external hire. Reliable, fast internet is a given in today's market and coverage within the museum could best be described as patchy.

There is also a significant drawback in the layout of the room in the form of two columns on the west side of the room which limit usable space and affect sightlines. Any set up would have to be carefully designed to make best use of available space.

3.2.4 Affordability

Less construction work would be necessary for this option and so the Innes figure could probably be reduced by at least £50,000. Even with £25,000 for seating and, say £10,00, for table, chairs and other equipment, the whole project could be comfortably brought in under budget.

3.2.5 Timescales

The gallery is in use until November 2021 but the project could commence during the financial year 2021-22 and is likely to take 3 months depending on lead in times for equipment.

3.2.6 Permissions Listed Building Consent

3.2.7 Resources

On-going staffing resources are a concern. Previously meetings have been facilitated by front of house staff and the administrator. Both of these roles have been reduced in the new structure and the capacity to react to the needs of hirers is lessened at the same time we would hope to grow the customer base with organisations expecting higher standards of service. It is unlikely that this gap could be filled with volunteers.

Changes to business post-Covid also pose a risk if businesses continue to meet online and there is less demand for room hire in general.

3.3 Option 3 The refurbishment of a display gallery

3.3.1 One of the drivers for the Vision adopted in the Museum Transformation Plan agreed by members in 2018 was the poor and outdated standard of some of the museum's galleries. The transformation of the Ancient Lives gallery provided a benchmark to judge our other galleries against and while data does not allow us to assert cause, there has certainly been a rise in visitor numbers of roughly 20,000 in the past few years aligning with its opening. We propose that the most appropriate gallery would be the British archaeology gallery on the first floor which has many issues with its current presentation but is at the heart of the building.

It must be said that the production of Ancient Lives was carried out to a timetable which fitted the requirements of the Property Services team and for a very small amount of money. Savings were made by the re-use of freecycled equipment and cases. Those cheaper options are unlikely to be available again. The proposed gallery would tell a much greater story in terms of scope and chronology and fill a much increased floor space.

The project would include:

- Definition of the stories being told, what periods are covered and what the narrative approach would be
- Research of the periods and the local picture
- Object research and documentation to discover what we hold that tells the stories and is viable for display
- Object conservation and preparation for display by an external specialist contractor
- Appointment of designers and work to create the physical experience including digital and interactive elements
- Activity Plan creation and implementation to ensure the involvement of groups and individuals (eg, Maidstone Archaeological Society, KAS, residents in significant geographical locations, partners with concern for specific elements such as disability access, marginalised stories etc)
- Decant and storage of current exhibition material
- Gallery fit out and replacement of Withdrawing Room floor by Property Services
- Marketing

3.3.2 Benefits

A new gallery would be a visible and popular addition to the museum attracting more visitors and increased spend. This option would continue the work of delivering the new museum vision without the need to involve major funders such as the National Lottery, the project can be carried out at a pace that is determined by MBC and not an external body. An exciting new project would revitalise the image of the museum among stakeholders, residents and staff. Community involvement with the development of the gallery would engage new groups and individuals in our work and their heritage.

This would be a key project in going forward with Kent Archaeological Society and regularising our relationship with them and the status of their collections. It would allow us to identify and agree long term loans for those parts of the collections we are interested in. This will set the scene for inevitable future negotiations should KAS plans for a new Collections Centre come to fruition. British archaeology of one kind or another is always on the history National Curriculum and so presents the most opportunities for learning opportunities, paid services to schools and interest from families and specialist audiences alike.

3.3.3 Risks

This would be, by far, the most expensive option and expenditure would have to be tightly controlled. There may be a possibility of further funding from local sources including the Oldham Trust, but no fundraising campaign, on which the project is contingent, will be launched.

This would be a huge project to deliver on revised staff capacity. Although this might seem the most 'fun' option for staff because it is closest to what many went into museum work for, this work couldn't be delivered alongside a full programme of other work. It may be necessary to budget for extra staff resource (either individuals or hours) and would be critically necessary to reduce work in other areas and to allow a realistic timescale of activities.

The gallery is a major meeting point of routes round the museum and so works here would cause significant disruption but for a limited time.

This option still leaves Westspace empty in the medium term.

3.3.4 Affordability

The budget for the space available is not generous but is workable. The usable space in this gallery is 112 square metres and based on a budget of £350,000 this allows for £3,000 per sqm for fit out. Of course, that doesn't cover all other costs involved with research and preparation but could be reduced to, say £2,000, to help cover those other expenses.

3.3.5 Timescales

See Appendix 1

Appendix 1 shows an illustrative timeline for the major project elements. It should be noted that while the timeline is based on previous experience and industry standards, the exact programme will depend on a number of items including the number and calibre of volunteers available, the complexity of the final build, the condition of items in the collection etc.

3.3.6 Permissions

Listed Building Consent

3.3.7 Resources

Staff capacity to deliver is the largest concern. There is an option to capitalise some staff costs which would be helpful and may be where potential donations are useful. If this project were to go ahead, there would need to be a firm agreement around the hours available and other priorities to be dealt with alongside this work. Future running costs of the gallery would also need to be discussed as part of the design of any gallery. However, a gallery such as this would provide many opportunities for volunteers and others such as archaeology groups to get involved in the day to day delivery of related activities.

3.4 Option 4 minimal refurbishment of Westspace as an events and hire space and development of a new public gallery

3.4.1 This option would combine elements of 2 and 3, bringing Westspace back into use at a manageable level whilst concentrating on the development of the archaeology gallery

Conversion would require the following as a minimum:

WESTSPACE

- Removal of the current kitchen and making good/minimal redecoration
- Removal of access ramp and replacement a wheelchair lift if financially viable
- Provision of fast, reliable WiFi at this end of the building if financially viable
- New blinds to windows
- New chairs and tables

GALLERY

- As above

3.4.2 Benefits

This option combines the most essential elements of two other options, each of which has significant benefits

3.4.3 Risks

There is a not inconsiderable risk that splitting the available spend may mean that not enough improvement is made to Westspace to attract new hirers nor is the archaeology gallery sufficiently exciting and visually appealing to attract new users to the museum so that the whole investment is made for insufficient return

3.4.3 Affordability

This option would remove possibly £20,000-25,000 from the exhibition budget and would mean it is much more likely that some level of external funding is required but it would still be a relatively small amount.

3.4.4 Timescales

Whilst the Westspace work could be done any time after July, the whole project would still take approximately 36 months if both projects were able to commence concurrently and the work to Westspace required minimal museum staff input.

3.4.5 Permissions

Planning Permission (for access changes to the exterior door)
Listed Building Consent

3.4.6 Resources

With the support of Property Services to deliver the Westspace element of this option, the concerns that remain would be those as detailed at Option 3 above

4 PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 4.2 The preferred option is number 3, the refurbishment of the British Archaeology Gallery.
 - 4.3 This option delivers core museum product and delivers against the museum 20 year plan.
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5 RISK

The risks associated with this proposal, including the risks if the Council does not act as recommended, have been considered in line with the Council's Risk Management Framework. That consideration is shown in this report at paragraph 3. We are satisfied that the risks associated are within the Council's risk appetite and will be managed as per the Policy.

6 CONSULTATION RESULTS AND PREVIOUS COMMITTEE FEEDBACK

- 6.1 Consultation has taken place with the Maidstone Museum Foundation who support the report's recommendations
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7 NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 7.1 Since the funding for this project is in place, work to programme the project could begin immediately.
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8 REPORT APPENDICES

Appendix 1. Estimated timescales for Option 3