

Extract from the Minutes of the Meeting of the Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee held on 8 November 2022

Carriage Museum Options

Councillor Russell, the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts, introduced a report setting out options for the future of the Carriage Museum and recommending an approach which offered the opportunity for organic growth in opening hours and the number of visitors. The Lead Member explained that:

- The Carriage Museum had been closed during the pandemic, but it had opened on three Saturdays so far in 2022, on each occasion attracting over 100 visitors with positive feedback. The Museum had been opened in conjunction with other events taking place in the town such as the River Festival.
- The former Economic Regeneration and Leisure Committee agreed at its meeting held on 19 April 2022 that the Member of the Executive with responsibility for the Carriage Museum under the new governance arrangements be asked to review the opening hours of the Museum to ensure that it is accessible to the public. Subsequently, this Committee, at its meeting held on 5 July 2022, approved the Maidstone Museums' Forward Plan which included as a priority a review of the Carriage Museum and its operation with a short-term goal to open the Museum using volunteer staff. The purpose of the report was to respond to these commitments.
- Four options had been identified as follows:
 - Option 1 – Do nothing
 - Option 2 – Close the Museum and Disperse the Collection
 - Option 3 – Revise the Operational Model for the Museum
 - Option 4 – A New Carriage Museum for Maidstone
- Option 3 was the preferred option as it provided a sustainable and realistic model for the future of the Carriage Museum. Volunteers would be used to open the Museum more regularly, starting with regular Saturday opening in the summer. This would contribute to the wider cultural offer of the Borough. Making space and improving the quality of the displays would create a more exciting and visitor-friendly offer. This option would require only a small spend, using some existing resources.

Members considered that Option 3 represented a realistic solution at the present time and indicated that they would like all elements of that option to be addressed in a timely manner. The Museums' Director confirmed that the first step would be to have the Museum open more often with the assistance of volunteers.

In response to questions, the Lead Member indicated that she was willing to look at the potential in the longer term to develop the Carriage Museum as a Transport Museum to reflect more generally the science and technology of vehicles and present a more STEM-based alternative to the main Museum. The Leader of the Council sounded a note of caution that, in the present economic

climate, the priority was to focus on the delivery of objectives in relation to Maidstone Museum.

RESOLVED TO RECOMMEND TO THE LEAD MEMBER FOR LEISURE AND

ARTS: That all elements of Option 3 for the future of the Carriage Museum, as set out in the report, be adopted.