

Museum Transformation Plan: 6 month review

Final Decision-Maker	Heritage, Culture and Leisure
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Lead Officer and Report Author	Victoria Barlow, Museums Director
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

This report provides an update on the Museums 20 year Plan which was adopted by this Committee on 4 July 2017.

This report makes the following recommendations to this Committee:

1. To note the review of progress towards the completion of the 2018/19 Action Plan of the Museum 20 Year Plan.

Timetable

	Date
Heritage, Culture and Leisure	02/10/2018

Museum Transformation Plan: 6 month review

1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 1.1 The museum's 20 Year Plan was adopted by Heritage, Culture and Leisure Committee at the July 2017 meeting. Following a decision by Members at the committee meeting on 6 March 2018 that the museum should remain a Maidstone Borough Council service, members requested a regular review of progress against the action plan objectives. This report will update members on the two main projects currently in progress. A detailed update on all actions can be found at Appendix 1.
- 1.2 The Action Plan for 2018/19 focusses on two main areas of delivery; the transformation of the museum and the development of a new café at the east end of the building.
- 1.3 The complete reordering and renewal of the museum is necessary if we are to provide residents with a "**vibrant and active service... regularly used by many members of the local community and visitors from further afield, which engenders a feeling of ownership and pride**". (*Maidstone Museums 20 Year Plan*). The Access Audit carried out by GDA Architects in 2016 identified a number of barriers to physical access to all galleries which must be overcome and flexible space is necessary if we are to provide opportunities for events, activities and community group use. Prior to the opening of Ancient Lives in 2017, no large scale display improvements had been completed since 2003. Most of the galleries are much older than this and have become worn and out of date. Museum practice and visitor expectations has also moved on in this time with an emphasis on residents as participants in a shared community history, new methods of telling stories through technology including Virtual and Augmented Reality and increased public expectations of a family-friendly visit.
- 1.4 The consultation carried out so far, has revealed that, while there is a high value placed on the current museum experience (Trip Advisor reviews are 88% Very Good or Excellent), there are areas of improvement visitors would like to see. These include ease of access to all parts of the building for those with mobility issues or children in pushchairs, greater interactivity and play elements, more for teenagers and older children as well as a large number of requests for more dinosaurs! Our staff will be out and about at events across the borough in the next month, gathering the views of both visitors to the museum and people who have never visited. This latter group will be asked about barriers that may have prevented them visiting and what

we could do in future to attract them. Venues confirmed so far include Headcorn Aerodrome, Yalding Farmers' Market, Lock Meadow Market and Cycle Fest in Jubilee Square. In July we also held the first in a number of Memories Days events. Based around different industries and local firms, these events invite former workers to come along and meet others, often ex-colleagues, and have their memories of working life recorded for future use. Consultation for members and other stakeholders, such as the museum strategic board, will take place over the autumn and we will continue to inform and consult various interested groups, such as The Kent Association for the Blind, throughout the transformation period.

- 1.5 As part of the discussions around the need for Transformation planning, two things became very clear. The first was that our local history is very poorly served by the current displays; the second that we need to better explain how the international collections, including those from Japan and the Pacific region, came to be in Maidstone and their importance. This we will do by completely re-ordering the museum into two parts.
- 1.6 Downstairs, the displays will look at the history and development of Maidstone and the borough from pre-history to the present, our identity as Maidstonians by birth or adoption, and experiences of life in the borough. The areas to be covered in detail will be refined in tandem with our research and object selection but is likely to cover all or many of the following:
 - Pre-historic settlers along the Medway
 - Roman Maidstone
 - Anglo-Saxon burials and the wealth of high status objects locally
 - The development of the town around the river in the mediaeval period
 - Industrialisation and urbanisation in the borough in the 18th and 19th centuries
 - The history of Chillington Manor
 - The twentieth century, wars and changing populations
 - Working life and leisure
 - Society inc law and order, health and politics
 - Who are Maidstonians?
- 1.7 Whilst retaining a focus on the Queen's Own Royal West Kent Regiment, our military displays will be enhanced to include the presence of Royal Engineer and Gurkha Units in the borough.
- 1.8 In the upstairs spaces, collections from all inhabited continents will show how Maidstonians travelled, collected and brought specimens back to the borough. We will explore what the collections tell us

about the originating communities. Linking similar activities across cultures will allow us to show how the collections brought information about the lives of different communities to the early visitors to the museum before the days of widespread travel, TV or the internet. We will also be able to better highlight artefacts of international significance. Areas of display are likely to include:

- The Grand Tour
- The opening up of far distant countries and the British Empire
- Who were the collectors
- Souvenirs and contemporary collections
- The natural world and issues affecting our world eg biodiversity, climate change, modern farming and historical collecting of insects, butterflies, eggs etc.

1.9 Alongside these major changes to layout and storylines in the museum, new flexible spaces for events, activities and community use will need to be created if the museum is to fulfil the vision of becoming a Community Hub in the town centre. This could include facilities for film screenings, retractable seating for larger audience numbers than currently possible, storage for tables and other equipment ; an investment which will also allow for an increase in room hire fees.

1.10 The second major project underway is a study into the feasibility of relocating the café from its current home to a site covering the current Canoe Gallery and Godiva Courtyard. The intention is to create a modern facility providing a service to not only museum users but also park visitors and those arriving in the town via Maidstone East railway station. In turn, it will also open up the rear of the museum which currently provides a solid barrier to entry. Innes Associates, an architectural practice in South London has been appointed to prepare a study, laying out the concepts for design and use of space. Two main concepts have been identified and these will be brought before committee at the appropriate time. In the meantime, work to refine and cost these continues. The existing café is most likely to be converted into Temporary Exhibition space.

1.11 We are actively exploring opportunities to raise funding to help with and accelerate the delivery these projects and are working with Maidstone Museums Foundation to establish a fundraising strategy with them by the end of the year. We have also submitted and expression of interest to the newly launched Cultural Development Fund and will hear in September if we are being invited to proceed to full application.

2. PREFERRED OPTION AND REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

2.1 That members note the progress made against the plan.

3. RISK

Risks related to this matter were detailed in the report to committee in July 2017. Since that report the risks identified have not significantly changed.

4. 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	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Risk Management	This report is presented for information only and no risk management implications	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Financial	The capital programme agreed by Council on 7 March 2018 includes £435,000 for the Museum Development Plan. It is envisaged that this will be used to fund the initiatives described in this report, with the opportunity taken wherever possible to identify match funding in order to achieve a greater impact from our investment.	[Section 151 Officer & Finance Team]
Staffing	We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing.	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Legal	Under Section 3 of the Local	Team Leader

	Government Act 1999 (as amended) the Council as a best value authority has a statutory duty to secure continuous improvement in the way in which its functions are exercised having regard to a combination of economy, efficiency and effectiveness. The Maidstone Museum 20 year Plan, the Action Plan for 2018/19 and this report assist in demonstrating best value and compliance with the statutory duty.	(Corporate Governance), MKLS
Privacy and Data Protection	There are no Privacy or Data Protection implications in noting the contents of the report	Team Leader (Corporate Governance), MKLS
Equalities	The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment	Equalities and Corporate Policy Officer
Crime and Disorder	There are no Crime and Disorder implications in noting the contents of the report	Head of Regeneration and Economic Development.
Procurement	There are no Procurement implications in noting the contents of the report.	[Head of Service & Section 151 Officer]

5. REPORT APPENDICES

The following documents are to be published with this report and form part of the report:

- Appendix 1: Detailed update of actions

6. BACKGROUND PAPERS

Maidstone Museum 20 Year Plan