

Maidstone Museum Archaeology Gallery Update

Final Decision-Maker	Not applicable
Lead Head of Service	Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement
Lead Officer and Report Author	Museums Director
Classification	Public
Wards affected	All

Executive Summary

The report gives members an update of progress made towards the creation of a new Archaeology Gallery at Maidstone Museum.

Purpose of Report

Noting

This report makes the following recommendation to this Committee:

1. That the content of the report be noted.

Timetable

Meeting	Date
Economic Regeneration and Leisure Policy Advisory Committee	7 th March 2023

Maidstone Museum Archaeology Gallery Update

1. CROSS-CUTTING ISSUES AND IMPLICATIONS

Issue	Implications	Sign-off
Impact on Corporate Priorities	<p>The four Strategic Plan objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Embracing Growth and Enabling Infrastructure • Safe, Clean and Green • Homes and Communities • A Thriving Place • 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. 	Museums Director
Cross Cutting Objectives	<p>The four cross-cutting objectives are:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Heritage is Respected • Health Inequalities are Addressed and Reduced • Deprivation and Social Mobility is Improved • Biodiversity and Environmental Sustainability is respected <p>The report supports the achievement the Heritage is Respected cross cutting objective by improving the telling of the story of Maidstone earliest beginnings.</p>	Museums Director
Risk Management	Not Applicable	Museums Director
Financial	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The proposals set out in the recommendation are all within already approved budgetary headings and so need no new 	Section 151 Officer & Finance Team

	funding for implementation.	
Staffing	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We will deliver the recommendations with our current staffing. 	Museums Director
Legal	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> No implications, the report is just for noting. 	Interim Team Leader (Contentious and Corporate Governance)
Privacy and Data Protection	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> 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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The recommendations do not propose a change in service therefore will not require an equalities impact assessment 	Equalities & Communities Officer
Public Health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> We recognise that the recommendations will not negatively impact on population health or that of individuals. 	Museums Director
Crime and Disorder	None.	Museums Director
Procurement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Procurement for the gallery is being carried out in accordance with the Council's financial procedure rules. 	Museums Director
Biodiversity and Climate Change	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The implications of this report on biodiversity and climate change have been considered and there are no direct implications on biodiversity and climate change. 	Biodiversity and Climate Change Officer

2. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND

- 2.1 The Archaeology Gallery forms part of the Museum's Forward Plan, which was approved by the Lead Member for Leisure and Arts on 19 July 2022. The Forward Plan aims to improve the quality of the Museum's displays and storytelling and to provide better access to the Museum's collections, thus contributing to the overall strategic priority of bringing people into Maidstone and making it a thriving place.
- 2.2 Since July 2022 work has begun in earnest to ensure that the project will be completed to time and budget by May 2024.
- 2.3 The archaeology of Maidstone was chosen as the subject for a new gallery for two main reasons:
 - the existing display of archaeological material in the upstairs Withdrawing Room is one of the museum's oldest displays and very out of date in terms of presentation style and interpretation; and
 - the opportunity to move this part of the overall story of Maidstone downstairs to the former café area allows for the overarching structure of the museum's Transformation Plan (that we use the two different floors to tell the two stories of Maidstone's history and the impact of Maidstone and its people on the wider world) to be implemented stage by stage.
- 2.4 Although our focus is Maidstone and its borough, it is impossible to discuss life at this time without taking a wider view of the area, the county and the South East as a whole. The concept of Kent, let alone Maidstone, took many centuries to develop. The archaeological story of the borough is one of inhabitation since before the development of modern humans when 'Heidelberg Man' and Neanderthals lived here hunting and foraging. Later through the thousands of years of the Stone Age people continued to spread across Kent farming, making tools and raising families. Later metal tools in copper then iron gave residents even greater opportunities in building homes, artistic and personal expression.
- 2.5 When the Roman Empire brought newer residents from Europe and beyond, Kent was already well used to its culture and so the invasion by the Roman Army did not have the calamitous effect on local society seen in other parts of Britain. When the Roman Army formally withdrew from Britain in the early 400s AD, people moved in from Germany and Scandinavia eventually replacing Roman culture and structures. Known as Anglo-Saxons, these latest arrivals brought their own distinctive styles of pottery, jewellery and religion. Christianity spread across Kent and more widely at this period.
- 2.6 The town of Maidstone as we know it now was really developed after the invasion by Norman troops in 1066. At the time of the Domesday Book in 1086, the village of Maidstone was owned by the Archbishop of Canterbury and possibly had 250 residents, making it one of the larger ones in the area. Over the next 200 years it grew into a town with people working nearby in farming, transporting goods by river and running the market where a large part of Kent bought its food and other supplies. Later in the

middle ages, the Archbishop of Canterbury had a residence built in town and people running industries associated with water such as breweries and thread making works flourished.

- 2.7 The gallery will show visitors how the borough and its surroundings grew, developed and provided a home for people across this period. It will introduce them to individuals representing different eras and different facets of life in our early history. It will do this through use of the artefacts in the collections of the museum and of Kent Archaeological Society, improving the way they are displayed and interpreted with printed text as well as video footage, digital presentations and sound to create an environment which takes visitors to heart of the story.

Project Management

- 2.8 A Project Board has been established to have oversight of the project and its progress. This is especially important as the project is being co-funded by external organisations who have a stake in its success. The Project Board does not interfere with MBC's responsibility for the project but adds a partnership approach to the making of key decisions and recommendations in the areas of finance, scheduling and project planning. Ultimate responsibility for decisions lies with the Project Sponsor, the Director of Finance, Resources and Business Improvement, who acts as the conduit between the Board and elected members.
- 2.9 The other Board Members are:
- Councillor Claudine Russell, Lead Member for Leisure and Arts
 - Mrs Fran Wilson representing Maidstone Museums Foundation
 - Mr Paul Oldham representing the William and Edith Oldham Charitable Trust
 - Mr Clive Drew representing Kent Archaeological Society
 - Ms Nike Azeez, a resident of Maidstone
 - Mr David Taiwo, a resident of Maidstone.
- 2.10 Members of the board are tracking progress on the project with monthly meetings and a work schedule against which individual officers can report progress or advise of concerns. So far, no impediments to scheduled progress have been encountered. However, the project timescale is very tight and so careful scheduling is vital.
- 2.11 A specialist museum design company will be employed on a design and build basis to take the story from paper and the research provided by museum staff and convert it into a three dimensional experience in the gallery through the latest design of built sets, use of lighting, arrangement of display cases and the creation of a graphic template to give the gallery its 'feel'. The appointment of an exhibition design company is under way with the assistance of MBC's Procurement Team. An Invitation to Tender was issued on 2nd February 2023. Site visits took place on 15th and 16th February and the closing date for applications was 28th February. Interviews with the top scoring three tenderers will take place on 15th March.

Research

- 2.12 Five main themes were identified by museum staff as a framework around which research could be shaped. These were chosen as broad topics which were applicable to life across the very long period from the Old Stone Age to the end of the Tudor period. These themes may be adjusted if research suggests it is advisable.

Landscape, environment and climate

How our region's landscape affected the kind of lives people lived here and the impact the lives and industry of people had on the environment.

Movement of peoples and ideas

How Kent became the first part of the UK to be populated and its importance through migration and trade with Europe as well as movement within the UK.

Subsistence and technology

How people made a living, their trades and local industries.

Belief and ideology

How beliefs and religion affected life and death and what we learn from burials.

Style and expression

How art and design developed and the purpose it served in different periods.

- 2.13 Experts in individual historical periods have been appointed to review the museum's collections and to draw out important objects, information and the latest archaeological theories which will inform the stories we tell and the objects we highlight.
- 2.14 The specialists have been drawn from universities and those working in the fields of practical and theoretical archaeology covering the following periods:
- The Early Stone Age
 - The Middle Stone Age
 - The Late Stone Age
 - The Bronze Age
 - The Iron Age
 - Roman Britain
 - Anglo-Saxon (Early Mediaeval) Britain
 - Mediaeval Britain
- 2.15 In addition, an Osteoarchaeologist has been appointed to review skeletal remains in the collection and identify those suitable for scientific analysis which may tell us what the individual looked like, where they came from and their general health in life.

Collections

- 2.16 Since the beginning of the project, 9,128 records of archaeological objects have been updated. This includes adding photographs, updating locations, adding new information and creating new records where none existed before. This represents a significant increase in our knowledge about the objects which will form the basis of the gallery.
- 2.17 This work is critical in providing the information we need to use our collections as evidence for the stories we are going to tell. So far, significant items identified include implements created by 'Heidelberg Man', a common ancestor of both modern Humans and Neanderthals, skeletons of Roman people discovered where Fremlin Walk now stands and possible evidence of grape-growing locally in the Roman period. We expect many more as the specialists work with our staff to review the material we hold.

An Accessible Gallery

- 2.18 The main audience for the gallery will be families. This is a very broad term but in essence means that we want a gallery where children and adults (parents, carers, grandparents or friends) can learn together and share experiences as part of making memories. Whilst the gallery will be used by schools for formal learning visits, the content will not be laid out purely to meet the requirements of the National Curriculum. Designers have been tasked to create a specific area to seat a class of 30 but this area should also be capable of working for the general visitor to take a break or sit and discuss what they've seen. It will also provide another of the museum's Quiet Zones which allow neurodiverse or other visitors who may become over-stimulated to rest and regroup.
- 2.19 In order to make the gallery as relaxed and as fun as possible, we will focus on using simple, non-jargon terms and imagery to explain often quite complex ideas. For example, the Stone Age lasted nearly 3.5 million years while the period of Roman occupation was only 400 years. The easiest way to make this clear to visitors is to use a timeline or other visual representation to show the relative lengths of time.
- 2.20 Over the last five years, Maidstone Museum has established itself as a leading service in museums for children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities. The new gallery will continue this work in ensuring that no child is unable to enjoy what the museum has to offer. Physical access to display cases and other elements will be provided at different heights and in different ways to allow independent exploration. Activities and interactive elements will be provided in different formats, whether it be digital, use of reproduction or handling objects or games and opportunities to play or dress up. This will allow for different activities to cater for different needs. Handling objects are important for sharing weight and texture and for visitors with a range of sight impairments whereas an attractive and interesting visual presentation may help a child to understand something if they don't read or have high language skills. The range of formats and activities makes all the difference in finding something that everyone can enjoy.

- 2.21 Where we use film in the gallery, we will ensure that the sound is clear, that subtitles are added and a British Sign Language Interpretation is included.
- 2.22 Our already popular backpacks, designed for families with members who are neurodiverse, will also be updated to include the new gallery on the Visitor Planning Boards. This allows families to decide what they are going to visit while at the museum by attaching individual icons on their plan.

Fundraising

- 2.23 £389,000 was committed for the project by MBC and the Maidstone Museums' Foundation (MMF) undertook to raise £100,000 to match an offer from the William and Edith Oldham Charitable Trust. Kent Archaeology Society have offered £50,000 towards the project and will lend their collections for display.
- 2.24 £100,000 has now been raised by MMF; being a combination of individual donations from MMF members, KCC Member Grant from Councillor Dan Daley, £5000 from MMF reserves, £40,000 Cobtree Charitable Trust and £50,000 from the Gallagher Family.

Access to the gallery

- 2.25 During initial discussions, it has become clear that the location of the gallery at the bottom of a short flight of steps is likely to be a barrier to visitors with mobility issues and so the staircase will be replaced with a platform lift. This work is not covered in the original scope of the project and therefore not budgeted for but MMF have generously agreed to attempt to raise an additional £30,000 to allow for the purchase, installation and required permissions for this item which will be a benefit to the gallery and the museum more widely. Discussions with the Council's Conservation Officer have taken place and he will be involved with any proposed works both to the stairs and the fabric of the new gallery.

3. AVAILABLE OPTIONS

- 3.1 That members note the report.

4. RISK

This report is presented for information only and has no risk management implications.

5. NEXT STEPS: COMMUNICATION AND IMPLEMENTATION OF THE DECISION

- 5.1 The project will continue to the design stage and members will be appraised of progress throughout.
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6. REPORT APPENDICES

- 6.1 None.
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7. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 7.1 None.