

Chichester District Council

OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

9 MARCH 2021

The Novium Museum Task and Finish Group

1. Contacts

Report Author

Sarah Peyman – Divisional Manager Culture & Sport

Telephone: 01243 534791 E-mail: speyman@chichester.gov.uk

2. Recommendation

2.1 To note the actions of the Novium Museum Task and Finish Group and feedback any comments to the group.

3. Background

3.1 In July 2018, Cabinet agreed that following limited interest received from the soft market testing, the procurement process for the operational management of the museum and tourist information service should not be pursued further. It was agreed that a Task and Finish group be established to oversee the review the Novium Museum and Tourist Information Centre (TIC) Business Plan, to identify potential opportunities for generating additional income and/or reducing expenditure.

3.2 The business plan for the Novium Museum and Tourist Information Services was approved by February 2019 Cabinet. The report noted the Initial Project Proposal Document (IPPD) that was approved at January 2019 Cabinet to support additional feasibility works to investigate options of reconfiguration of the front of house area, glazing over the Roman Baths, an improved café provision within the Novium building and improvements to exhibition infrastructure. All of these actions were contained in the short term business plan actions and it was agreed that the business plan and budget would be reviewed once the information from this work was completed and ascertained if technically feasible. The Task and Finish Group continued to meet to support the development of these options.

4 Outcomes to be Achieved

4.1 Robinson Low Francis were appointed to undertake a further appraisal to look at options to improve the visitor experience, to provide a greater impact as part of the Chichester's visitor economy and to achieve a greater proportion of self-generated income resulting in a reduction of service costs.

4.2 Further investigation work has been carried out on the reconfiguration of the front of house area to improve the visitor experience and provide a larger retail space, glazing over part of the Roman Baths, improvements to the café provision and improvements to exhibition infrastructure. All of these improvements could potentially increase visitor numbers and generate additional income.

5 Proposal

- 5.1 The capital costs for all of the consultants suggested improvements were £1.7m with a payback period of 18 years. A reduced option was also suggested which excluded any improvements to the exhibition spaces on the first and second floors, costing £776,000 with a payback period of 13 years.
- 5.2 Due to the large costs of the proposals and the long payback periods, it was agreed by the task and finish group that officers should look at a few smaller projects which could have a positive impact on visitor numbers and experience. These included external advertising banners, provision of an external biomass hopper, removal of the large reception desk to provide increased retail space and improvements to the audio visuals for the roman baths. The options below will be presented back to the Novium Museum Task and Finish group on 26 February and a verbal update will be provided to OSC at the 9 March meeting, any options that the Task and Finish Group agree to take forward will be presented back to Cabinet.
- 5.3 Lack of wayfinding signage for the museum (and the City) has been raised as an issue and Chichester BID are leading on a wayfinding project for the City as part of the Chichester Vision. New directional signage which is being funded by the City Council and the District Council is to be installed in the next few months. The installation of an external banner sign to make the building more visible from West Street has also been explored and an advertising consent application has been submitted. Estimated cost £10,000
- 5.4 Work on the provision of an external hopper for the biomass has started and quotations for this work are being explored. The Council's Climate Change Officer is also looking at any options to source wood pellets from a local supplier. If an external hopper can be provided this will reduce the number but increased volume of deliveries and also provide additional storage space which could allow for the integration of the current retail storage area into the public retail space.
- 5.5 The removal of the existing reception desk and the provision of two smaller sales points would free up space in the entrance area and shop to provide additional retail space. Estimated cost £15,000-£20,000.
- 5.6 The café has been removed from the Novium since Covid-19 to allow for social distancing. It is proposed that the café is not reinstated in its original form as it obscures the view of the bathhouse, creates a pinch point at the entrance to the museum and requires additional staffing to manage during peak periods. A self-serve café option is being investigated.
- 5.7 Officers were asked by the task and finish group to look at audio visual options, in particular holograms for the roman bath area. There are a number of different ways this could be achieved and would require the commissioning of an interpretation strategy. Estimated cost £10,000 opportunities for grant funding for this are currently being explored.
- 5.8 A tourist information touchscreen point in the front window was also investigated but unfortunately due to the thickness of the glass this was not possible. A standalone information point was then considered for the external area under the entrance canopy but feedback from the planning department suggested this would not be the

preferred option and a more suitable location for this may be the train/bus station.

- 5.9 As part of the recent Service Efficiency Savings, £52,000 annual savings have been identified from 2021/22 for the Novium Museum and TIC budgets. This saving has been found from a small staffing restructure, utilities, supplies and services.
- 5.10 An additional £83,900 annual saving has also been identified which relates to a current business rates appeal for museums.

6 Resource and Legal Implications

- 6.1 The Covid pandemic has forced the museum service to close 3 times as a result of national lockdowns and when allowed to open, operate reduced services or had further closures as a result of tier 3 & 4 restrictions.
- 6.2 During closures, museum staff have been supporting other service areas of the council including Public Relations, Revenues and Benefits and Health Protection. In the first national lockdown some of the staff also assisted Stonepillow with the preparation and delivery of food for the homeless.
- 6.3 The service has also been able to take limited advantage of the flexible furlough scheme when staff have not been needed for redeployment for all of their contracted hours.
- 6.4 Over the last year, staff have continued to share Chichester's history and have made more of the exhibitions and collections available online. They have also been successful in 6 grant applications during this period totalling nearly £40,000 of funding to respond during the pandemic by creating new online services and physical measures to protect staff and museum visitors.
- 6.5 The Covid pandemic has also had a negative impact on the ability of contractors to visit site and provide costings for the proposed projects, which has impacted on the work for the Task and Finish group.

7 Consultation

- 7.1 The Novium Task and Finish Group have continued to meet over the past year however a number of meetings were cancelled or delayed due to staff redeployment or not being able to complete planned physical visits to The Mary Rose Museum, Portsmouth and Fishbourne Discovery Store.
- 7.2 The latest Task and Finish Group was held on Friday 26th February and the Chairman, Councillor Roy Briscoe will provide a verbal update from the meeting at the Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

8 Community Impact and Corporate Risks

- 9.1 The positive impact museums can have on the community is widely published. Museums can increase sense of wellbeing, help people feel proud of where they have come from, can inspire, challenge and stimulate, and make people feel healthier.

9.2 With society facing issues such as poverty, inequality, intolerance and discrimination, museums can help people understand, debate, and challenge these concerns. They can also enhance everyone's life chances by breaking down barriers to access and inclusion. Museums do this through active public participation, engaging with diverse communities, and sharing collections and knowledge in ways that are transforming lives.

9 Other Implications

| | Yes | No |
|--|-----|----|
| Crime and Disorder | | X |
| Biodiversity and Climate Change Mitigation | | X |
| Human Rights and Equality Impact | | X |
| Safeguarding and Early Help | | X |
| General Data Protection Regulations (GDPR) | | X |
| Health and Wellbeing | | X |

10 Appendices

10.1 None

11 Background Papers

11.1 None