

Members Interest
N/A

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee 23 June 2020

Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Archive Service: Staffordshire History Centre Project Update

Recommendation(s)

1. That the committee notes the update on the Staffordshire History Centre project.

Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Housing and Community Services (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations

Summary

2. Work on the Staffordshire History Centre Project has continued to make progress since meeting Joint Archives Committee on 6 February 2020. A review of project work and the programme has been completed informed by the necessary changes resulting from the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic. All public services closed from 23 March and the Archives and Heritage staff have been working from home, however this has this was ensured that the project is able to continue.

3. Changes to the programme and the way work is completed have been discussed with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF). With their agreement the timetable for submission of the round two application has moved to 23 November assuming enough progress can be achieved.

Audience research

4. Two pieces of work have been commissioned to appoint consultants to deliver work for the project. The Audience Agency were appointed to carry out audience research and develop a marketing strategy for the Staffordshire History Centre project. Robin Johnson was appointed to review the learning aspects of the activity plan, with a focus on the work carried out with schools. These consultants started work at the end of February following approval from NLHF.

5. The Audience Agency have been affected by COVID-19 restrictions. They are currently operating a furlough system whereby staff are working in cohorts, three weeks on, three weeks off. This has understandably delayed progress, so the timetable has been extended to the end of July, with capacity to review work post mid-term review. The Audience Agency have completed an initial report using analysis of data from service membership and mailing lists, a total of 776 users.

6. Data has been used to produce mapping sets: pinpoint, drivetime and distance quartile, and drivetime & distance band. This data shows the median drive time is 37 minutes and drive distance 21 miles. 75% of users are within range of 69 minutes/51 miles

7. An Audience Spectrum Profile has been completed: highest percentages are 'Commuterland Culturebuffs', 'Dormitory Dependables', 'Home & Heritage' and 'Trips & Treats' A Mosaic Profile has been produced: highest percentages are 'Country Living', 'Senior Security', 'Prestige Positions' and 'Domestic Success'.

8. This data is now being analysed by the History Centre Core Project Team to feed into the Business Plan and Activity Plan. The Audience Agency will also use the data to inform the Marketing Strategy for the project which they are commissioned to produce.

9. An online survey produced by the Audience Agency was launched on 20 May and is being promoted through all our channels: website, newsletters, social media feeds. We are also using Staffordshire County Council's news feeds. The Audience Agency are sharing via their social media feeds and will be promoting via targeted paid Facebook advertising. By 5 June we had received 302 responses and we are confident we will reach a minimum of 400 respondents. The closing date is 21 June. The Service asks respondents if they are willing to take part in further consultation through focus groups either online or by telephone. Lockdown restrictions permitting, we are planning 'doorstep' in-person interviews to take place in June in Abbots Bromley. Again the data gathered will inform the Business, Activity and Interpretation Plans for the Project.

Learning

10. The contract timetable has been extended until the end of July due to COVID -19 and subsequent difficulties in undertaking and completing work with partners. We have looked at different ways of working with volunteers. A Facebook private group was trialled, but some refused to use it, so a new online Learning Blog was launched with new content several times a week: <https://shcvolunteers.wordpress.com/> . The blog is a way of keeping volunteers engaged and offering learning and development opportunities.

11. Our consultant, Robin Johnson, has made real progress in contacting schools. He has established a good relationship Entrust Education, Staffordshire who work in partnership with local schools, academy trusts and the County Council providing specialist expertise and advice. Entrust are supporting the bid wherever possible - especially in the area of identifying, targeting and contacting potential partner schools.

12. Since the end of March there has been a Staffordshire teacher survey to assess the needs and demands of local schools in order to influence the History Centre's learning programme going forward. The survey link was sent to a list of selected Staffordshire schools, targeting Stafford schools with an over 50% free school meal ratio, and Staffordshire schools with over 50% ESOL speakers on roll. The survey link was also sent out to selected Staffordshire schools by Entrust and a link was put

on the SHC webpage. Feedback has been universally positive from the schools that have so far responded (30 in total) and certain themes and attitudes are becoming clear, such as the need for the new SHC to be a place of 'awe and wonder' for children and the need to offer joined up object, archive and rare book based learning sessions. Full results of the survey will be in the learning plan however the response is encouraging and compliments the aims and objectives of the SHC. The NLHF mentors commented that this was the highest response rate they had seen from schools recently as they are a notoriously difficult audience to engage due to the time constraints for teachers.

13. Seven 'virtual' learning sessions have been written exclusively using images from the collections of Staffordshire Archives and Heritage on the following themes:

- Mystery Staffordshire Objects
- Staffordshire Timeline
- Staffordshire Portraits
- Victorian Stafford gaol
- Discover your local area
- Design your own manuscript
- Create your own coat of arms

In addition a children's evaluation exercise has been drafted for digital use *Just 3 words_Just 3 Things* which aims to elicit very simple feedback from students.

14. The aim of these pilot activities is to test out some basic concepts of audience engagement techniques with heritage collections and schools. Teachers have been asked to give honest feedback on the sessions so that we can use their opinions to inform the learning plan going forward. Schools have also been asked to confirm that they are happy to work with us on developing sessions further. Once the results of the pilot workshops have been analysed a draft learning plan will be written by the end of June, with time in July set aside for a final report.

Conservation Plan

15. A review of the Conservation Management Plan (CMP) for the buildings is complete with some minor revisions including:

- Updated section about suggestion to split listing of 18 & 19 Eastgate Street; this was investigated with Historic England and deemed too complex and potentially costly.
- Addition of more emphasis that the project is repair **and conservation and restoration of original features** of the listed building
- Use video and photos to document and record the exposure of the original fabric once bookcases are removed and use this to help interpret the building.
- Make reference to the Access Audit which was completed.
- Include assessing current ecology of garden and investigating potential positive environmental impact.

16. A revised CMP for collections has just been completed by the consultant and is being reviewed by the Core Project Team. Both plans should be completed by the end of June.

Design and Interpretation

17. The Project team have remained in contact with the architects, Pringle Richards Sharratt (PRS), who completed the original design work. They will be completing a review of the design work in line with any changes arising from the audience research, activity and interpretation plans. Some new work has been commissioned to look at the garden and landscape to create a habitat for pollinators and a wildlife corridor. Whilst small in scale it will have a positive effect on the environment and meet both NLHF and Staffordshire County Council environmental outcomes.

18. The project team have discussed a review of the Interpretation Plan with Imagemakers, who were the original designers. This will include consideration of the impact of COVID-19 to future proof spaces should restrictions still be in place or be resumed. It will include more analysis of the customer route through spaces and customer experience. It will include interpretation of the garden and restoration of the William Salt Library building. This work will commence once data from the audience research is finalised.

Business and Evaluation Plans

19. Initial work has begun on the Business Plan and the remaining sections depend on the audience research data, results of the surveys, and work on the Activity Plan. The consultant who worked on the original evaluation plan is on standby to review the plan once more work has been completed on the Activity Plan.

William Salt Library collection work

20. In January additional hours were confirmed for one of the archivists at Staffordshire Record Office to release the Assistant Librarian to focus on preparing the collection for relocation. The Assistant Librarian was cataloguing and relocating items to enable them to be moved as a series. This work was interrupted as public services were closed from 23 March. Some work has continued but not on physical collections. The volunteer preservation work has also ceased.

21. Plans are in place for some staff to return to offices in June subject to a risk assessment being signed off. This will enable some work to resume however the archivist is retiring on 6 July. Volunteers are unlikely to return before the end of the development phase. The team are now assessing whether another member of staff can be allocated additional hours to ensure the preservation work can continue.

Timescales

22. The review of the programme in light of COVID-19 means the new key dates are:

- Presentation of Audience Research to SHC Project Board by Audience Agency 22 July 2020
- Draft reports review by SHC Project Board August 2020
- Mid-stage review late September 2020

- Assuming sufficient progress is achieved submission of Round 2 application 23 November.

The project team continue to meet regularly with NLHF mentors to review progress and the above schedule is subject to change based on their advice.

Appendix 1

Equalities implications:

The National Archives, stakeholders, partners and staff have been involved in development of the project.

Legal implications:

Nominations to the development trust will be confirmed by legal teams in both authorities and taken through the appropriate corporate route.

Resource and Value for money implications:

The delivery of the Staffordshire History Centre will enable the Archive and Heritage Service to achieve a sustainable model for the future and deliver the MTFS saving of £468,000.

Risk implications:

There is a risk that funding will not be secured for any of the options. This will impact upon the accreditation status of the Archive and Heritage Service.

Climate Change implications:

The project balances online access and physical access to services and collections to offer options for remote use and not necessarily travel to multiple locations. Any new buildings will be compliant with modern standards for energy efficiency and minimise impacts on climate change. The project includes elements to improve the outcomes for wildlife and the environment.

Health Impact Assessment screening:

The project will offer opportunities for volunteers to get involved and add value to the service with support and accredited training programmes from staff. Volunteering provides many social benefits for individuals which can impact positively on health.

Report author:

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List of Background Papers

Papers

Contact/Directorate/ext number