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Staffordshire and Stoke on Trent Joint Archive Committee

– Thursday 03 March 2022

Staffordshire History Centre Update

Recommendation(s)

That the Committee:

- a. Notes the progress update and the amended timeline for the project.
- b. Approves the public access model during the temporary closure of Staffordshire Record Office.
- c. Delegates amendments to the public access model to the Cabinet Member for Communities.

Report of Deputy Chief Executive and Director for Families and Communities (Staffordshire County Council) and Director of Strategy and Resources (Stoke on Trent City Council)

Reasons for Recommendations:

1. The National Lottery Heritage Fund (Heritage Fund) granted permission to start the Staffordshire History Centre project on 8 November 2021. At the meeting of the Joint Archives Committee on 11 November the timeline for the project and temporary closure of Staffordshire Record Office was approved. This report brings an update on progress, amended timeline, and public access model for the access to collections during the temporary closure.

Progress update

2. The first stage tender for the construction contractor was advertised from December 2021-January 2022. Only one viable tender was received and after discussion with the Heritage Fund it was agreed to terminate this tender and readvertise. Feedback indicated that the timing of the advert and lack of awareness of the project had resulted in fewer bids.

3. The construction tender has been readvertised and will include a bidders' day on 7 March to invite potential contractors to learn more about the project. Proactive promotion of the project to potential contractors has been undertaken and there is now greater interest in the tender.
4. RIBA stage 4 design work on the new strongrooms, redesign of Staffordshire Record Office, Covered Courtyard link, and restoration and conversion of the William Salt Library is approximately 85% complete. Tender information is due to be issued to the Quantity Surveyor in mid-March. Stage 4 work on the green pedestrian walkway from North Walls to Eastgate Street is 70% complete.
5. 'Pre Construct Archaeology' completed archaeological site investigations at the end of January 2022. Evidence of 20th century, Victorian and some medieval activity was found. The interim report is due to be submitted to the design team and a You Tube video has been produced about the excavations. A building recording level two scheme has been agreed for the William Salt Library listed building.
6. The William Salt Library collection is being cleaned, packed and moved to temporary storage. This work is supported by staff and volunteers working together. Two volunteers are also working on cataloguing the collection. Nine volunteers and four staff have been trained in conservation cleaning.
7. The Case for the Ordinary Exhibition on Staffordshire Asylums was launched on 12 January 2022 at the Museum of Cannock Chase. Thirty-three people attended the first face to face launch of an exhibition by the service since the COVID-19 pandemic. The exhibition will tour the county and return to the History Centre with extended content once the centre is open.
8. Two hundred Enclosure Award Maps are due to be digitised in March and one volunteer has started digitising the McCann photograph collection.
9. Key stakeholders have been contacted to establish the Staffordshire History Network. The network and project will be launched at the Staffordshire History Day on 7 May. This will be an online event due to venue numbers still being restricted at the time of booking. The event will be supplemented by behind the scenes tours of collection stores. Two museum store tours have already been delivered.
10. One university work placement has commenced. A collaborative PhD student has started work on creative writing inspired by collections

relating to black history. The academic partnership with Keele University is being established for delivery of adult learners short courses.

11. The first progress report and grant claim will be submitted to the Heritage Fund at the end of March. Current spend is £55,180.00 with further commitments before 31 March. Total spend for the first claim will be reported at the next committee meeting in June.

Amended timeline

12. There is currently just over three months' delay to the programme and timeline due to restarting the construction tender. The tender has been readvertised as quickly as possible. Staffing changes within Staffordshire Archive and Heritage Service have also delayed procurement of digital, evaluation and marketing work. The recent recruitment to the Engagement and Access Manager role will enable the service to catch up on procurement work.
13. Recruitment of project staff has been delayed ensuring posts are filled in line with the construction programme and schedule for opening of the History Centre. An updated key decisions timeline is at appendix one to this report.
14. Work continues to review the use of the branding for the Staffordshire History Centre. Options for use of branding by both authorities will be brought to the June committee.

Public access model during temporary closure

15. At the November meeting of the Joint Archive Committee approval was given to temporarily close Staffordshire Record Office with the date to be agreed. The Record Office will close from 11 March 2022. This is to enable preparatory surveys to take place prior to the construction of the Staffordshire History Centre. The access model is attached at appendix two to this report.
16. Staff and volunteers will move to temporary premises during the closure and from late spring we plan to provide physical access for statutory legal requirements and certain time-limited projects, where needs cannot be met through copying. Staff will have some limited access to the strongrooms at different stages during the project and will be offering a copying service where possible. The access model will be reviewed on a regular basis and updates will be published on our website and social media channels. The service will continue to respond to enquiries by email.

Legal Implications

The public access model has been developed in consultation with The National Archives to comply with access for statutory records. Advice has been received from Staffordshire County Council legal services concerning access to records supporting rights of ways enquiries.

Resource and Value for Money Implications

Procurement of goods and services for the project complies with Staffordshire County Council's procurement framework.

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. Opportunities to attract additional funding to increase energy efficiency will be pursued. The project includes elements to improve the outcomes for wildlife and the environment.

List of Background Documents/Appendices:

Appendix 1 Timeline of key decisions

Appendix 2 Access during temporary closure of Staffordshire Record Office

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