

Report to the Cabinet

Meeting to be held on Thursday, 3 November 2022

Report of the (Acting) Director of Education, Culture and Skills

Part I

Electoral Division affected:
Burnley Rural; Rossendale
West;

Corporate Priorities:
Supporting economic growth;

The Future of Queen Street Mill Museum and Helmshore Textile Mills Museum

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Brief Summary

The Cabinet Working Group for Museums has considered three options for the future of the Queen Street Mill Museum and Helmshore Textile Mills Museum. The three options are set out in the report.

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to:

- (i) Approve Option '3' to enhance the in house offer at Queen Street Mills and Helmshore Textile Mills as set out in the report, including the development of a comprehensive business plan and robust key performance indicators to assess the council's progress against the plan.
- (ii) Thank the National Trust for its support and welcome future opportunities to work closely with them on Lancashire's cultural and heritage offer.

Detail

In 2016, both museums were closed to the public as part of a series of savings that the council made in 2015/16.



In 2018, following a review of the available options by the Cabinet Working Group for Museums, Cabinet agreed to re-open both museums to the public.

In 2019, the county council and the National Trust conducted a review of sustainable options for the future of the Mills and the Cabinet agreed to the recommendation that the museums be leased to the National Trust for 5-years.

In 2020, the National Trust withdrew that option due to the financial losses that it incurred as a result of COVID-19 lockdowns.

In 2021, Cabinet agreed to a proposal from the National Trust that it would conduct a review of what could be changed in each museum to improve the visitor offer and overall financial sustainability of both museums.

In July 2022, the National Trust presented its final report to the Cabinet Working Group for Museums. The Cabinet Working Group for Museums requested that officers compare the National Trust's proposal alongside maintaining the existing arrangements and an option to enhance the museums without a formal agreement with the National Trust.

On 5 October 2022, the Cabinet Working Group for Museums considered the three options as summarised below:

Option One: National Trust Proposal

The National Trust completed a thorough review of all aspects of both museums and identified a range of costed and uncosted actions that could be implemented by the council over the next 5 years. It proposed establishing a formal 5 year partnership agreement during which the council would pay for a specified level of National Trust staff to support the council's existing museum team and the National Trust would provide an equivalent amount of staff support at their cost.

Option Two: Maintain the status quo

This option would involve no additional revenue cost but would also leave both museums operating at a minimum level of 3 public opening days per week between each Easter and the end of October.

Option Three: Enhance the in-house offer

This option enables the county council to consider the full range of improvements included in the National Trust's proposal. There are a limited number of targeted changes that could be implemented in 2023/24, which would increase visitor numbers and income generated by both museums. A wider range of improvements could be considered in future years primarily supported by attracting external funding from the major heritage funders.

The Cabinet Working Group for Museums discussed the three options and concluded that, in the current financial climate, option 3 presented the greatest flexibility to the council to manage the development of the museums within a 4-year business plan and a set of Key Performance Indicators.



In addition, the Cabinet Working Group for Museums expressed a desire to maintain good relations with the National Trust for the future of the museums, even without a formal partnership agreement.

Consultations

The National Trust consulted a wide range of stakeholders ranging from members of communities living near to each museum, local councils, businesses and education providers as well as major national heritage bodies and funders.

Implications:

This item has the following implications, as indicated:

Risk management

The enhanced in-house offer allows the county council to manage risk by controlling what improvements can be made to how the museums are operated through the overview provided by the Cabinet Working Group for Museums and that each financial commitment would be considered within the overall finances of the county council and be balanced through a range of Key Performance Indicators to ensure value for money.

Financial

It is intended that the county council will move towards an enhanced offer from April 2024 with proposals and any additional costs of enhancing the in-house offer considered in light of the county councils future financial outlook and therefore as part of the 2024/25 budget.

Legal

Should the county council be minded to approve the recommendation of the enhanced in-house offer, the county council retains control of its operations and therefore there will be no immediate legal implications. In the event that the enhanced in-house recommendation results in third party arrangements, legal services would support the county council with any necessary agreements.

List of Background Papers

Paper	Date	Contact/Tel
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None

Reason for inclusion in Part II, if appropriate

N/A

