

CABINET ITEM COVERING SHEET PROFORMA

AGENDA ITEM

REPORT TO CABINET

3 DECEMBER 2015

**REPORT OF CORPORATE
MANAGEMENT TEAM**

CABINET DECISION

PRESTON PARK MUSEUM AND GROUNDS UPDATE

Arts, Leisure & Culture – Lead Cabinet Member – Councillor Norma Wilburn

SUMMARY

This report provides an update on the development and delivery of Preston Park Museum and Grounds following the completion of the main refurbishment project. It will also present opportunities for future development of both the museum and the wider park as a visitor attraction through potential improvements in infrastructure and the restoration of the heritage landscape.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. To receive and note the continued development of Preston Hall following the refurbishment project.
2. To support further exploration of potential improvements to Preston Park through an updated Master Plan and the delivery of the museum through continued development of the visitor offer.
3. To support further exploration of the potential for a bid to the Heritage Lottery “Parks for People” Fund, giving consideration to the potential need for match funding.

4. Reasons for the Recommendations/Decision(s)

To ensure the continued development of the Park and Hall is coherent and to maximise funding opportunities and partnerships with commercial and voluntary sector organisations.

5. Members’ Interests

Members (including co-opted Members) should consider whether they have a personal interest in any item, as defined in **paragraphs 9 and 11** of the Council’s code of conduct and, if so, declare the existence and nature of that interest in accordance with and/or taking account of **paragraphs 12 - 17** of the code.

Where a Member regards him/herself as having a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 16** of the code, in any business of the Council he/she must then, in

accordance with paragraph 18 of the code, consider whether that interest is one which a member of the public, with knowledge of the relevant facts, would reasonably regard as so significant that it is likely to prejudice the Member's judgement of the public interest and the business:-

- affects the members financial position or the financial position of a person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code, or
- relates to the determining of any approval, consent, licence, permission or registration in relation to the member or any person or body described in **paragraph 17** of the code.

A Member with a personal interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, may attend the meeting but must not take part in the consideration and voting upon the relevant item of business. However, a member with such an interest may make representations, answer questions or give evidence relating to that business before the business is considered or voted on, provided the public are also allowed to attend the meeting for the same purpose whether under a statutory right or otherwise (**paragraph 19** of the code)

Members may participate in any discussion and vote on a matter in which they have an interest, as described in **paragraph 18** of the code, where that interest relates to functions of the Council detailed in **paragraph 20** of the code.

Disclosable Pecuniary Interests

It is a criminal offence for a member to participate in any discussion or vote on a matter in which he/she has a disclosable pecuniary interest (and where an appropriate dispensation has not been granted) **paragraph 21** of the code.

Members are required to comply with any procedural rule adopted by the Council which requires a member to leave the meeting room whilst the meeting is discussing a matter in which that member has a disclosable pecuniary interest (**paragraph 22** of the code)

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DETAIL

Introduction

4. In the four years since re-opening, Preston Hall has become a popular and well supported visitor attraction drawing in customers from well beyond the boundaries of the Borough. The completion of the Carriage Sheds in 2015 will see the final part of the project to refurbish and re-engineer the Museum, providing new displays, improved access and improvements to the Victorian Street. There are still challenges to face and the continued success of the site depends on maintaining customer numbers as well as achieving income targets.
5. It is important for both the Museum and the Park to continue to develop and to offer an integrated, complementary experience. Resilience is a challenge and new funding strategies and the potential to enhance the physical landscape and the facilities within it are important considerations for the future.

Operational Staffing

6. A review of operational staffing capacity took place earlier this year to address health and safety requirements and the duty management cover at the Museum.
7. During the very successful period since reopening in 2012, it has become apparent that a lack of capacity had existed in delivering evening events and overseeing the fire and emergency procedures adequately. As a result, a review of the number of duty managers and the conditions on which the team operate took place. Posts were re-designated to allow for the fire and emergency procedures to be sufficiently covered during extended opening hours (the original plan to provide some of this cover through volunteer staff had been found to be difficult to manage consistently).
8. The changes to the operational structure have now taken place and appointments to a number of new roles have been made over recent months. These new roles include commercial development support, linked to earned income targets, and a part time Publicity and Marketing role following the transfer of responsibility from the Corporate Communications and Marketing team. These posts are providing much needed support to the development of the Museum and Park as a single visitor attraction.

Arts Council Resilience Funding

9. An application was made to the Arts Council during 2014 to the Resilience Fund for a two year project to support the development of a Membership Scheme, and explore the establishment of a semi-independent body (with SBC Elected Member representation) to attract sponsorship and philanthropy specifically for use by the Museum. Such a body would have charitable status to allow access to funds and donations for which the Council is not eligible. It would also be able to pursue sponsorship and patronage.
10. The Resilience Fund bid also included money for staff training and limited physical improvements to the Victorian Street.
11. The bid was approved and a sum of around £76,000 was allocated by the Arts Council for year one of this project. There is the possibility of year two funding being available. The Arts Council were unable to confirm this to applicants due to their own internal challenges at the time, but we are hopeful that we will be able to continue for a successive year of this project.
12. Part of the funding has been used to appoint a Development Officer, on a fixed term contract, to work alongside the Museum Development Manager, John Beeley, and to take a major role in developing plans for the charitable 'Development Board'. Work has already been undertaken to examine the feasibility of this approach, with input from a local consultancy company who specialise in this field.
13. Conclusions of this work will be brought to Cabinet in due course, including the suggested terms and objectives of the new charity, centred on improving the Park and Hall and increasing access to local heritage for the benefit of the public. The Council would not transfer any assets to the new body or cede any control of the Park or Hall and would be able to dictate terms under which it received funding via the charity, provided terms were consistent with the Charity's purposes.

Walled Kitchen Garden Scheme.

14. The final payment from the Heritage Lottery Fund has been received for the Walled Kitchen Garden scheme and this is now fully integrated into the structure of the Museum and Park.
15. Following the departure of the project funded Senior Gardener in April, two new posts have replaced the old post, providing extra cover and the ability to split roles across the week to provide more support to volunteers. This now allows for a much greater presence at the most important times of the year through the Spring and Summer period as hours are weighted towards this period.
16. New Herbaceous borders were designed and planted in the Spring and the results in the garden of the new staffing structure and planting schedules have been dramatic. The garden has looked much more established and the crops of vegetables and fruit have provided a welcome source of income for the Grocery Shop which has been refurbished and opened up on the Victorian Street as a volunteer staffed sales point.
17. A "Walled Garden Festival" event took place on the first Sunday in October to provide a fitting demonstration of the work which has taken place this year.
18. The changes to the management of the garden will provide a much more efficient delivery mechanism. This will allow us, within our existing resources and with the support of the volunteer workforce, to develop the orchard area further. This is partially planted, but not yet accessible to the public, and it is intended to transform this area over time into a vibrant family friendly public space with a white planting theme.
19. As part of the work to develop the Park Master Plan and to assist in the continued development of the Museum as an attraction, the redevelopment of the Bandstand Garden will be considered. This could provide a welcome new floral attraction which would link together the Walled Kitchen Garden and the Orchard area.

Acquisitions to the collection

20. There have been two notable additions to the Museum's collections this year.
21. A set of scales has been acquired from the Noakes family, living relatives of John Walker, the inventor of the friction match. These were formally on a long loan to the Science Museum, London and have provided us with a much needed physical reminder of one of our most important local figures. They will be included in the Museum's displays as the changes to the current case displays take place.
22. Two medieval gold rings, found locally by residents and registered as treasure finds have been acquired through the DCMS Treasure Scheme. The items were found in the south of the Borough. One is an intricate gold wire ring twisted into a decorative item and probably deposited onto the fields at Castlelevington as part of the rubbish removed from Yarm market place which was used as fertiliser. The other is a devotional ring for St Catherine recovered in the Newsham area. Both are unusual and fill an important gap in our knowledge of the wealth of the area in medieval times.
23. A partial grant from the Victoria and Albert Museum provided half of the funding for the acquisition of the rings and the remainder of the funding was provided through the Spence Bequest Trust.

Victorian Street Developments

24. Over the Summer period, the Victorian Street has provided two new attractions. The Grocer's has been "opened up" from its former glassed in museum exhibit approach to become a working shop. Volunteers now provide a costumed interpretation of a period shop which sells specialist tea and produce from the Kitchen Garden. The new retail space has proved very popular with visitors and although the amount of produce which is available each day from the garden is variable, it has been very attractive to our visitors.
25. The Victorian Police Station is also proving to be a really excellent addition to the street. Visitors are now able to engage with costumed policemen in a redesigned, more authentic setting. The facility features a wide ranging collection of objects, some of which can be handled and many of these have been donated by the local police forces to the Museum. An official opening for this feature took place on October 21st and was attended by the Police Commissioner and senior Officers from the force alongside the Mayor of Stockton, the Leader and a number of Cabinet and senior Members.
26. Further developments to the street will be planned as part of the Arts Council funded Resilience Project and the vacant Tinsmith's shop will be considered for a further retail venture. This funding will also be used to refurbish and update the Toyshop with a view to re-opening to the public. The current shop has had to be closed for a period due to the ill health of the current toy maker.
27. The final element of the developments to the Museum as part of the major refurbishment project has now been completed. The Carriage Sheds, which will house a number of the Museum's larger wheeled vehicles, are now in place and will be used during the Christmas period to accommodate elements of the programme of activities. The permanent displays for this area will be in place in the New Year. The completion of this element will release final payment from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the main refurbishment project.

Enterprising Museums and Audience Development

28. Alongside the Arts Council Resilience funded project, Preston Hall has also been taking part in the regional 'Enterprising Museums' programme, funded by the Regional Museums Development Officer at Tyne and Wear Archives and Museums (TWAM), and working on a three year audience development programme with the Audience Agency.
29. With support from the Audience Agency, officers have been collaborating with a number of other small and medium sized museums to examine our audiences. A post-code survey has been taking place for visitors to Preston Hall and the partner museums to generate a wider and more detailed picture of our customer base. A workshop for those who are participating is planned for early November at Preston Hall to discuss the initial findings of the survey.
30. Enterprising Museums is focused on identifying new commercial opportunities and helping museums to evaluate their current commercial practices. This project, also supported by the Regional Development Officer at TWAM, and involves independent specialist input.
31. Initial feedback has been very positive and the approach to retail and commerce at Preston Park is strong and well-focused, commanding a significant income in comparison with other museums taking part in the scheme. Areas for potential improvements are being identified and will be presented in a final report of the regional project.

Performance and Income

Visits

32. Preston Hall Museum received 102,893 visits between April and September 2015. This represents 57% of the year-end target of 175,000 but it is less than the same period last year (130,328). There is anecdotal visitor feedback to suggest car park congestion has deterred some visits, with the popularity of the Park and events competing with the Museum.
33. There has also been a slight reduction in marketing and promotion activity for the Museum during the transfer of the function from the corporate team and the recruitment of the relevant staff at the Museum. However, attendance at recent events and interest in the Christmas programme suggests we have addressed this temporary dip.
34. The number of Schools visits to the museum has increased by 33% between April and September 2015 to 3,624 compared with this time last year when 2,714 visits were reported.

Income

35. Preston Hall's income to date is £98,796 and if the current full year projection is met this will mean an increase in income of £21,063 on last year. These projections show that income is not dictated by visitor numbers alone, but can be driven by the visitors' ancillary spend.
36. As already referred to, our work with the Audience Agency and TWAM will inform the further development of income generating activity and targeted marketing to ensure the continued upward trend of earned income.
37. A small grant bid has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for support in interpreting and publicising the watercolour collections of Colonel Spence, which depict his experiences during the First World War. The bid will require a limited amount of match funding but will enable the museum to bring into the public view a collection which at present is housed in the safe store at the site. This will provide a centrepiece for the commemoration of the region's contribution to the Battles of the Somme in 1916.
38. A bid for £9000 has been submitted to the Regional Museums' development fund for extra cases for the temporary gallery at Preston Hall. At present, there are no facilities to store objects as part of any temporary exhibition without the costly loan of equipment from elsewhere and the two units which would be funded from this bid would allow for objects to be stored safely and securely whilst they are on display.

Events

39. Following the changes to staffing and the adoption of the new structure at Preston Hall, a new system of developing and managing events has been introduced. This reflects the need to improve event delivery and to increase the range and number of events delivered to the public in a more cost effective way. The new approach has been in operation since August and the first activities for the public under this system were introduced in October.
40. The Walled Garden Feast at the beginning of October was a celebration of the end of the growing season and this replaced the Harvest Home event of the previous three years. This was delivered in partnership with the local vegetarian restaurant, "The Waiting Room", who

provided their services free of charge. Delivering the event in this way reduced the cost of the event and strengthened our ability to attract visitors through joint marketing. It is hoped that further events can be delivered on this basis

41. The new structure and greater staff resources both in terms of numbers and flexibility of working patterns has meant that over October half term holiday 2015 the museum delivered 10 days of activities above the core offer. In previous years it has only been possible to offer two days of family activities. Half term events commenced on Friday 23 October with Tees Tracks a two day festival celebrating the 190th anniversary of the opening of the Stockton & Darlington Railway.
42. Following on from the "Halloween Spooky Walk" which includes an input from Preston Hall, the next major events will be the Christmas offer in the run up to the holiday period. The main focus will be a family Christmas Fayre over the 5/6 December and on the following two weekends, the museum will also host festive themed family activities centred around a visit to Santa's Grotto.
43. A full program of events for 2016 is currently being developed

Improvements to Park access

44. Work to improve access to the Park and increase the capacity for car parking took place through the Winter and Spring period of 2014/2015. A new track has been constructed on the Yarm Road side of the park which provides access to the North Field and Paddock areas close to Preston Lane. This can be used for overflow parking on occasions when traffic flow is difficult in the area around the main gates and when the other car parking spaces are full.
45. The South Field Car Park has also been improved through the marking of spaces and the surfacing of new areas. This has now increased capacity dramatically and this has been invaluable throughout the summer.
46. Due volume of traffic coming to the park, stewarding to control parking has had to be employed at very busy times, over and above the already budgeted for stewarding on event days. The days on which stewarding has been utilised have been minimised to save as much as possible rather than a blanket coverage over the Summer period. The additional stewarding is currently presenting a budget pressure for the service.
47. In the longer term, there is a need to consider a more permanent solution which will not only address any car parking issues, but will also accommodate the increased use of the park and over-spill into residential areas, this will be the subject to further review.
48. Due to the popularity of the attractions in the park and now that the wheeled sports facility is increasing in usage, there has been a marked increase in customer queries, health and safety issues and general management challenges. The existing staffing in the café and the Museum are not able to deal with these day to day operational issues and there is a need for a staff presence in the Park to address these. This would also help us deliver a consistent approach to the management of the park as a single visitor attraction.
49. During peak periods, visitors tend to park in nearby residential streets, generating complaints. We can and do sign the streets to discourage it but restrictions are not enforceable.

Park Masterplan Update work

50. The Groundwork Trust has been facilitating work to update the Park Master Plan in order to provide options for general improvement and to prepare for a potential Parks for People bid for funding. This work is examining infrastructure, current facilities and the need, where feasible, to restore the park's heritage landscape. A brief has been prepared and focuses on
- Short-term pressures, for developments which can be delivered within 12 months
 - Developments which could be funded through a HLF Parks for People application.
 - Longer term and / or more radical developments.
51. A working group representing the various interests in the Park, including Direct Services, Technical Services, Preston Hall Museum, and Care for your Area, has met to consider the elements which need to be improved. This work is being supported by Groundwork Trust who have produced illustrative layouts and annotated maps which were presented to the working group in November.
52. The layouts and suggested possible works have been shared with the Preston Park Management Group. They focus on the following;
- Further improvements to the parking, circulation and central area facilities are identified, as well as improvements to the landscape, shelters, fencing and the walkways in the park. A number of areas of replanting are suggested to restore the landscape and in some cases cutting back areas to reveal views. The Bandstand Garden is identified as a potential extra visitor attraction linked to the Museum offer as a new flower garden. Better directional signage and interpretation is suggested for the park.
 - The potential for a Parks for the People bid, focusing on the historic features of the site looks mainly at the interpretation and integration of the Stockton and Darlington Railway trackbed along the western edge. There are also suggestions for improvements and interpretation in Quarry Wood, the restoration of estate fencing along the carriage drive, and a number of areas of tree planting which have been lost. The restoration of the potting shed as an addition to the Victorian Kitchen Garden is included in these proposals. A Parks for People bid scheme would need to address the inadequacy of current visitor toilet and café facilities.
 - Long term aspirations which have been identified include an option of a new visitor reception building incorporating café and toilet block, the re-utilisation of the aviary (or the aviary site), further work to improve the park as an events space, and the new pedestrian bridge across the river to the south of the site which is already subject to technical feasibility work. A new boathouse on the river could provide a base for the Rivershack boat hire operation.

FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

53. A bid has been submitted to the Heritage Lottery Fund for the interpretation of watercolour images of World War One from the Spence Collection. There will be a small amount of around £2000 match funding required for this project if the bid is successful, which can be accommodated within existing service budgets.
54. HLF have highlighted their Parks for People (PfP) fund as one to which current volumes of applications in the North East are relatively low and we are advised that the timing is favourable for a bid.
55. The potential developments identified by Groundworks in their assessment of the future Preston Park Masterplan could form the basis of a PfP application, but would require an element of match funding.
56. Parks for People grants are normally up to £5 million and would normally require a match of 10% for the development phase and 10% for the delivery phase where grants are in excess of £1 million. Assuming a stage 1 application in 2016 and an 18-24 month delivery phase, capital expenditure would not be incurred until 2018. However, the commitment in principle to provide the matching investment would be required during the bidding process.
57. Some of the improvements envisaged as part of a Parks for People bid, such as work on the toilets, café and traffic systems would be likely to become a priority in the coming few years and it would be prudent to attempt to anticipate such spend and attempt to use it as match funding in a HLF bid, where that is eligible.

LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

58. The work to explore the potential for an independent 'Development Board' to seek funding and sponsorship for Preston Park Museum & Grounds is currently underway. This work may have legal implications if it is taken forward.

RISK ASSESSMENT

59. Risk Assessments on all major possible changes will be developed as part of the Master plan detail work.

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITY STRATEGY IMPLICATIONS

60. The approach advocated within this report has been guided by the strategic priorities/outcome identified within both the Corporate Strategy and the Sustainable Community Strategy. The outcome it will contribute to are many and include:
 - Increase in positive activities for young people
 - Reduce health inequalities
 - Greater Equality of Opportunity
 - Increased opportunities for young children/young people in case (SCS)
 - Reductions in anti-social behaviour / criminal damage
 -

EQUALITIES IMPACT ASSESSMENT

61. Developments at Preston Park surrounding parking and visitor facilities will be subject to the framework for assessing community needs to ensure that all issues and requirements are taken into account.

CORPORATE PARENTING

62. Not applicable

CONSULTATION INCLUDING WARD/COUNCILLORS

63. Preston Park Management Group (including Cllrs Houghton, Tunney and Dennis), Cllr Norma Wilburn

Corporate Director of Development and Neighbourhood Services

Contact Officer **Reuben Kench**

Tel: **01642 527039**

Email Reuben.Kench@stockton.gov.uk

Background Papers

Ward(s) and Ward Councillors

None

Property

None