

## Chertsey Museum, the Runnymede Borough Museum and Accreditation Renewal (Community Services, Emma Warren)

### Synopsis of report:

To give a full overview of Chertsey Museum and its future development, and to present the current policy documents for approval.

### Recommendation(s) that:

Members are asked to approve the Chertsey Museum Arts Council England Accreditation which requires the following policies, plans and documents to be approved:

- Appendix 1 – The Forward Plan.
- Appendix 2 – The Collections Development Plan.
- Appendix 3 – The Access Policy.
- Appendix 4 – The Documentation Plan.
- Appendix 5 – The Conservation and Collection Care Policy and Plan.

## 1. Context and background of report

- 1.1 Chertsey Museum is the Borough Museum for Runnymede and is run by Runnymede Borough Council with support from the Olive Matthews Trust (OMT).
- 1.2 The museum first opened to the public in 1965, and currently cares for approximately 25,000 objects. There are two main elements to its collections: local history items relating to the history of the Borough, and a nationally important costume collection owned by the OMT.
- 1.3 Local history items of note include a collection of archaeological items from the Thames Valley which are of national significance, such as a Viking sword by the German maker Ulfberht and a Bronze Age socketed axe complete with wooden handle, the only one of its kind in Europe; medieval tiles and stonework from Chertsey Abbey; and a horology collection of regional significance with local makers such as James Douglass and Henry Wale Cartwright.
- 1.4 This report provides members with a background to the museum, an overview of the services provided and a summary of its aspirations for the future

## 2. Report

### Background to the partnership with Olive Matthews Trust

- 2.1 The OMT was founded in 1969 to care for a nationally significant costume collection created by Runnymede resident, the late Olive Matthews of Virginia Water. The costume collection consists of high-quality fashionable English clothing from the 18<sup>th</sup> century to the present, with one important item from the 17<sup>th</sup> century, an embroidered gentleman's cap dating from between 1600 and 1610. Much of the material was acquired by Miss Matthews from the Old

Caledonian Market in North London before 1939 and more rarely at auction sales. OMT's remit allows it to seek significant additions to supplement the existing collection.

- 2.2 In recent years, important additions have been made both through donations and purchases. These additions fill gaps and bring the collection up to date. Pieces include a 1897 ball gown by the House of Worth, donated in 2017, and a gold lamé cocktail dress by the ground-breaking couturier Paul Poiret, purchased at auction in 2018. The most modern item is an Alexander McQueen suit from his Spring/Summer 2009 collection, also purchased at auction.
- 2.3 In 1970 OMT entered into a partnership with then Runnymede District Council to run the museum, and the OMT bought the building the museum is now housed in. The agreement between RBC and OMT sets out how the museum is to be run, including staffing requirements, opening hours, and rent on the main museum building and one of the collection stores.
- 2.4 RBC is responsible for the maintenance of the buildings and the day-to-day running of the museum, and the OMT gives an annual grant of £80,000 towards the running costs. On top of this sum the Trust pays for the salary of the Costume Assistant, additional hours for the Keeper of Costume, an annual exhibition, costume related events, and other items relating to the fashion collection.
- 2.5 The OM Collection was described in 1968 by the Victoria and Albert Museum as "of such a high quality that much of it is of national importance". This quality is to be found in the rarity and range of garments, many of them in excellent condition, as well as the number of examples of fine hand workmanship.
- 2.6 This level of excellence has been sustained and extended with further recent acquisitions, and many garments are showcased in regularly changing high-quality exhibitions. The collection holds items that easily rival the importance of equivalent examples in national collections such as the V&A or Bath Fashion Museum. Consequently, enquirers and researchers from across the world regularly access it; discovering the collection through our marketing campaigns and events, publications, online content and word of mouth.
- 2.7 The collection prides itself on its accessibility and is popular with costumiers from film and television as well as academic researchers, whilst groups of students from prestigious London fashion courses often travel to access the collection to support their learning. In addition, the collection also regularly loans key pieces to other institutions to supplement exhibitions. In recent years items have been lent to the V&A, Historic Royal Palaces and the Walker Art Gallery, Liverpool. Further collaborations and opportunities to spread the word about the collection are constantly being sought as we devise new ways to engage our audience with this unique fashion collection.

### **Accreditation Status**

- 2.8 The Museum Accreditation Scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries. It tells everyone involved with a museum that they're doing the right things to help people to engage with collections and protect them for the future. The Museum Accreditation Scheme does this by making sure

museums manage their collections properly, engage with visitors, and are governed appropriately. The scheme works for museums of all sizes: from the smallest volunteer-run museums to national museums. The aim of the scheme is to:

- Help authorities show that their museums meet their visitors' and users' needs
- Shows museums are being managed and governed properly
- Boost museums' reputations, win funding and give confidence to donors and other supporters
- Help museums manage their collections fairly, ethically and legally
- Give museums a set of minimum requirements they have to meet, which include accountability and performance management/monitoring progress
- Open up opportunities for museums, including funding opportunities and new partnerships
- Help museums audit their collections, and assess risks to them

2.9 As part of the accreditation scheme managed by the Arts Council England (ACE), Chertsey Museum is submitting its tri-annual return. The museum is required to produce several management documents, some of which need to be approved by Members at Committee. These documents are in the Appendices and are:

- Appendix 1 – The Forward Plan details how the Museum service is to be managed and links in with the Council's overarching strategies.
- Appendix 2 – The Collections Development Plan details the current collection and how acquisitions and disposals are managed.
- Appendix 3 – The Access Policy shows how the Museum ensures all people and sectors of the community have a fundamental right to engage with, use and enjoy the collections and services it provides.
- Appendix 4 – The Documentation Plan details how the Museum manages object entry, accessioning and cataloguing, location and movement control, object exit and loans in and out.
- Appendix 5 – The Conservation and Collection Care Policy and Plan has been developed to ensure the preservation of the collections and buildings in the care of the museum, preventative and remedial conservation of the collections and the safe use of and access to collections, within the limits of the museum's resources.

### **Staff Resources**

2.10 The Museum currently has 1 F/T curator and 3.1 FTE staff members consisting of the Education Officer, Education Assistant, 3 Museum Assistants, the Keeper of Costume and the Costume Assistant. There is currently a vacancy for a cleaner and a term-time education post. There are a number of vacancies, however it has recently been approved that the museum can recruit a Museum & Galleries Technician apprentice in the near future to support the work of the Curator in researching and creating exhibitions.

### **Services Offered**

- 2.11 Since the OMT funded refurbishment of the museum in 2003, it has significantly expanded its services to the community. We now create at least 5 new exhibitions each year, run the local branch of the Young Archaeologists' Club, offer activities for pre-school children as well as a hugely successful school's programme. The OMT supports a monthly adult sewing group which take inspiration from the costume collection, as well as c. 5 evening craft events each year. During school holidays we run craft activities for 5- to 12-year-olds, and we work with the elderly in the community with free monthly tea & talk events, and in partnership with the Friends of Chertsey Museum run a successful events programme each month. The museum assists researchers, both home and abroad, with family and local history information.
- 2.12 Chertsey Museum runs a hugely successful [education service for primary schools](#) within the Borough and further afield. Schools are able to borrow original artefacts for use in the classroom, book talks and workshops at the museum or in school or borrow a loan box linked to a curriculum area for the duration of their topic. 18 out of 21 mainstream Borough schools have used our services within the last academic year. In addition, private Borough schools have also engaged with the museum services. The museum has a wide reach across the Borough, extending its services to within a 20-mile radius. There are 76 schools signed up to the loan box membership scheme.
- 2.13 This academic year, more schools are opting for the education staff to visit the school rather than the pupils visit the museum itself. They report that this is due to increased cost of living pressures on parents/carers and school budgets. Schools report that travel (cost of coach hire) is the main barrier to visiting.

### **The Impact of the Pandemic**

- 2.14 The pandemic has had a significant impact on Chertsey Museum. During the 2020/21 financial year the museum was only open for a total of 60 days. When the museum was permitted to open it had altered visiting hours to enable staff to work in two teams, thus minimising contact with each other, and giving time to deep clean the museum each week. To this end, with the permission of the OMT and the agreement of the staff, the museum opened all day Thursday to Sunday instead of the usual Tuesday to Friday afternoon and Saturday. Sunday opening proved popular, but is not practical with current staffing and financial considerations. During the various lockdowns the museum continued to provide a service to the community with online talks, exhibitions, Young Archaeologists' Club events and crafts activities. The curator also created a series of audio guides for use around the Borough. From November 2020 through to May 2021 the education officer delivered online sessions for schools. The pandemic and subsequent reticence of many to visit indoor venues, led to a 50% drop in visitors. This is now beginning to increase but has yet to reach pre-pandemic levels. Unfortunately, several museum volunteers decided not to return once the museum was fully re-opened post pandemic, and their roles have been taken up by existing staff where a new recruit has not been found.

### **Current Performance**

- 2.15 Museum user figures – pre pandemic compared with last financial year:

	CUMULATIVE TOTAL FOR YEAR		cumulative % incr./decr
	2021/2022	2019/2020	
Adult visitors	2,136	2,942	-37.7%
Child visitors	591	902	-52.6%
Child events	273	789	-189.0%
Education visits in Museum	884	2,119	-139.7%
Education visits to Schools	6,134	7,490	-22.1%
Adult groups in museum	797	940	-17.9%
Adult groups outside Museum	432	714	-65.3%
Events/Groups	167	770	-361.1%
<b>TOTAL USERS</b>	<b>11,414</b>	<b>16,666</b>	<b>-46.0%</b>

- 2.16 The museum was closed due to the pandemic 19/3/20 to 24/7/20 & 5/11/20 to 19/5/21, although many groups and schools in particular began cancelling visits from February 2020.

### **Future Plans**

- 2.17 The museum's Forward Plan sets out our aims and ambitions for the next three years. As well as maintaining the current service the museum is looking to support the community in new ways.
- 2.18 Funding will be sought to provide additional staff hours to enable the education team to be more proactive in the services it offers outside of the formal school system. Work would include, for example, establishing links with St. Peter's Hospital to support children in long term hospital care, and offer object handling sessions to patients in stroke wards to aid their physical rehabilitation. Our reminiscence service for the elderly will also be revamped following a grant from the Chertsey Combined Charities. Currently we have a series of themed boxes that can be borrowed by care homes in the area containing original objects for their clients to handle, evoking memories, and promoting shared experiences. We are currently upgrading the boxes and recording podcasts for each one to help group organisers feel confident delivering their own reminiscence sessions.
- 2.19 The museum also aspires to expand its work further across the Borough in raising the profile of heritage sites and making historical links for our communities.

### **3. Policy framework implications**

- 3.1 The aforementioned projects support objective 2 of RBC's Health and Wellbeing Strategy by engaging with a wide demographic across the Borough, from young children to elderly residents. In addition, the museum has a significant role as a historical community building.

#### **4. Resource implications/Value for Money (where applicable)**

4.1 There are no resource implications at this stage.

#### **5. Legal implications**

5.1 There are no legal implications.

#### **6. Equality implications**

6.1 The Museum's work has a positive impact on people with protected characteristics, particularly age, with the range of activities offered for people of all ages, and plans to expand into new projects as described in the report will also include disability (work in stroke wards for example) and training for staff on visually impaired visitors and the creation of audio guides. The regular offer of work placements to students is another positive impact on age.

6.2 The Museum has level access throughout and an attractive garden which is accessible for disabled people and wheelchair users. It has a platform lift, installed when the building was refurbished in 2002, which does however need repairs more frequently being now 20 years old and may soon need to be replaced. The building has an adapted toilet with facilities for the disabled and for baby changing, thus another positive impact for the protected characteristic of pregnancy and maternity.

6.3 Seeking renewal of the Accreditation of the museum does not require an Equalities Impact Screening Assessment to be undertaken. Appendix 3 the Museum Access Policy deals with particular equalities issues in more detail which demonstrate the Council's commitment to fulfil its public sector equality duty.

#### **7. Environmental/Sustainability/Biodiversity implications**

7.1 There are no environmental/sustainability/biodiversity implications.

#### **8. Other implications (where applicable)**

8.1 The adoption of these policies and plans are a condition of the Arts Council England Accreditation Scheme. Should they not be adopted, Chertsey Museum would be ineligible for certain grants, and would be unable to borrow objects from national institutions (which currently happens).

#### **9. Timetable for Implementation**

9.1 Accreditation status is likely to be granted and confirmed by February 2023.

#### **10. Conclusions**

10.1 Members are asked to approve the Chertsey Museum Arts Council England Accreditation which requires the following policies, plans and documents to be approved:

- Appendix 1 – The Forward Plan

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**(To resolve)**

**Background papers**

None stated.