

Hastings Old Town Museum

Draft Framework for Operational Review – November 2010

Introduction

These are draft proposals for a review of current service provision at the Old Town Hall Museum. The review was originally proposed to assess the success of Tourist Information Centre facilities after the first summer season of operation at the OTM.

In recognition of the future budget reductions the review has been widened to consider different delivery options for the OTM and takes account of current trends and refocusing of priorities within the Museum sector.

Aim

To assess the impact of the Tourist Information Centre service provision and consider wider options for the delivery of services at the Old Town Museum.

Objectives

The review is specifically concerned with services offered at the Old Town Museum although wider considerations may also indirectly affect the main Hastings Museum & Art Gallery including:-

- Assess the success and benefits of the relocated Old Town Tourist Information Centre
- Establish current services offered (Museum displays, interactive exhibits, archive film footage, shop with souvenirs etc.) and identify opportunities for different service delivery options (relocation, co-location, technology, local history trails, volunteers and partnership arrangements etc.)
- Consider options to respond to funding cuts (refocusing priorities, income generation etc.)
- Establish community value and needs (culture, education, economy etc.)
- Establish the operating costs and explore benefits and potential of alternate uses for the building.

Background

The Old Town Hall, built in 1823 as the Town Hall for Hastings, has housed local history collections since 1949. For the first ten years it was a joint operation with the Library: when closure was suggested in 1959, the building was reprieved as a result of intervention by the newly-formed Old Hastings Preservation Society, and it became a Museum on both floors. The most recent improvements to the displays took place in 1998-9 as a result of funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund. The Museum was redisplayed to focus on the history of the Old Town, which is presented as a walk back in time. In November 2009 the Old Town Tourist Information Office was relocated on the ground floor of the Museum due to the Stade improvements. This led also to the loss of the area used for temporary local history displays.

Scope and Current Situation

Function - The Old Town Hall operates as a branch of Hastings Museum and Art Gallery, to display the local history collections. It has full Accreditation, achieved in 2007, reflecting high standards of governance, collections care and access. It also operates a limited Tourist Information service, with some services for residents.

Service Provision - The Old Town Hall Museum is open 363 days a year. The opening hours are April to September Mon – Sat 10am to 5pm, Sunday 11am to 5pm: October to March Mon-Fri 10am to 4pm, Sat-Sun 11am to 4pm. Admission is free.

Service Users - Visitor figures have historically been around 15,000 per year. These have increased since the introduction of the TIC, and in the 12 months since November 2009 have reached 24,374 suggesting the increase of c. 9,000 is due to the presence of the TIC. Pupils in organised school visits have totalled 318 and Foreign Language school students have

totalled 3,488. There is no space to host school groups and this limits the offer we can make to them. Since the removal of the temporary exhibition space, there has also been no scope for changing exhibitions.

Financial – Income sources include shop, donations, Tourist Information Centre activities etc. Identify separate costs where possible of operation of the OTH and Johns Place. Consider the wider economic benefits of having the facility in Old Town.

Staff - As part of the Museums service, curatorial staff are shared with Hastings Museum and Art Gallery. The building is staffed by the equivalent of one Museum Assistant, with a member of HIC staff assisting from May to September.

Stakeholders & consultation -

Museum Staff

Councillors

HBC Marketing and Communications

HBC Estates and Surveyors

Old Hastings Preservation Society

Hastings and St Leonards Museum Association,

Sussex Museums Group

Surrey, East and West Sussex Museums Development Officer

Other local history societies

Fishermen's Museum

Shipwreck Museum

Schools

It is anticipated that this will take the form of questionnaires and meetings.

Constraints

- Review needs to report back to Museums Committee in December 2010
- Recommendations need to take into account emerging financial pressures.
- Building's Grade II listed status will and high profile location will influence any proposals for future use
- There will be a need to relocate Local History displays, possibly to the Ceramics gallery at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery. This may also provide an opportunity for more temporary local history displays.
- Need to try and retain the current value for schools visits that form part of a wider 'Old Town' trail.

Timescale and reporting

Review will be conducted by the Museum Curator (supported by Resort Services Manager). To report back to the Museums Committee on 6 December 2010.