

Consultation responses received after the publication of Cabinet papers

Email

Comments: Three further e mail responses were received with regards to the potential closure of the Old Town Museum. The following points of concern were raised:

- Potential loss of the Old Town Museum as an educational resource deemed part of the unique atmosphere and character of the Old Town.
- Fear that the building may stand empty or become simply another club, café or shop.
- That HBC have manufactured the reduction in footfall to the Old Town Museum by taking away its tourist information role.
- That should such a closure result in staff redundancies that there will be a knock on affect in paying housing benefit and council tax relief.
- Maintenance costs of a 'listed' possibly empty building should a closure go ahead.
- Costs of moving collections and other museums activity should staff be made redundant or temporary staff employed to facilitate a potential closure.
- Desire for 'Tourism' in the draft corporate plan is at odds with (a) 'cutting the Marketing and Communications team to the bone so that it cannot do its job properly' and (b) situating the main offer for tourist information in Aquila House when visitors 'come to see the Old Town.'

Response: Comments noted.

Museums Association

Councillors Birch, Poole and the Head of Amenities, Resorts and Leisure met with members from the Museums committee after the publication of the draft corporate plan and budget papers. The following comments/questions were offered:

Comment: How are reserves used to support the budget setting process?

Response: The council earmarked the use of reserves for specific projects; a general reserve is also maintained to cover unforeseen circumstances but a Transition Reserve has been set up and monies will be taken from there to support the 2015/16 and the 2016/17 budgets as planned.

Comment: Regret expressed that the Old Town Museum will be potentially closed for the 950th cultural celebrations.

Response: It would be more effective to concentrate the efforts of the small team that manage the Museum service at the John's Place site. There would also be a financial cost associated with keeping the Old Town Hall Museum open in 2016.

Question: Could funds be reallocated from elsewhere in the council's regeneration budget to support the Old Town Hall Museum in 2016?

Response: The budget allocated by the council to support the celebrations to mark the 950th anniversary is intended to attract funding from grant providers and third parties. Positive discussions had taken place with the Heritage Lottery Fund regarding a potential bid to support a local history exhibition in 2016. Improvements to the John's Place Museum could also support the council's longer term ambition to develop the visitor experience at Hastings Castle.

Comment: Concern about how soon the local history display could be made available for public viewing should the Old Town Museum close.

Response: The Curator is provisionally considering suitable locations to display the exhibits at John's Place should the Old Town Museum close. Plans will not be firmed up until after the Budget Council on the 25th of February.

Comment: Concern over potential dispersal of the Old Town Museum collection.

Response: Currently there are no plans to disperse the collection. The Museums Committee would continue to have oversight of the management of the collection.

Comment: View was expressed that HBC retain the freehold for the Old Town Museum should the decision be made to close it.

Response: All options for the disposal of the building would be considered, and the availability of the building would be advertised at the appropriate time.

Comment: That the council consider maximising revenue for the Museums' service by developing income from educational provision.

Response: Suggestions noted.

Following this meeting representatives from the Museums Association submitted a full written response to Councillor Birch on the 9th February. The key points are set out verbatim below:

1. We would prefer the Old Town Hall Museum of Local History to remain open as an important resource of education and interest to inhabitants of the Borough and visitors. Surely £34,000 could be found from another budget to keep it open (regeneration perhaps). The Old Town Hall Museum is part of our cultural heritage and it's interaction with The Fisherman's Museum, Shipwreck Heritage and the Museum and Art Gallery at John's Place is part of the unique mix (not forgetting Burton St. Leonards) of historical interest that is the envy of other sea-side resorts such as Bexhill-on-Sea and Eastbourne.
2. If money cannot be found to keep this Museum of Early Local History open in the setting of what is now considered Hastings Old Town and where William waited to hear news of Harold's advance south and the motion to close it is agreed by the Full Council then ALL the artefacts MUST come back to the Museum and Art Gallery at John' Place for re-display and NO QUESTION of their dispersal. A photographic record has been taken of the collections and

the curatorial team has already given some thought to its incorporation within the present galleries.

3. We do not, under any circumstances, wish the Old Town Hall to be sold. We would suggest a Full Repairing Lease at current property valuation is offered for 15 years with the option of another 5 and the Freehold remaining with the Borough. This would produce revenue for the Borough and we would hope that a portion of it would be ring-fenced for the Museum Service.
4. We feel strongly that there is a total lack of publicity of the educational value and use of all our collections.

Seniors Forum

Councillor Birch met with representatives from the Seniors Forum on the 12th of February. The following comments/questions were raised:

Question: How much income do we expect to receive as a result of a 5 % increase in car parking charges?

Response: The proposed 5% increase if approved will mean there will be no further increase until 2017. We would be looking to collect in the region of 50k from our mainstream carparks and 50k for the Foreshore Trust. Generally our parking charges are still competitive compared to the surrounding areas and we are planning to increase opportunities to allow customers to pay by card and phone.

Question: How do we manage the coinage associated with parking income?

Response: HBC has commissioned a new cash collector through the East Sussex procurement hub as it is much cheaper and more efficient than doing this in house. Currently the majority of people continue to pay by cash.

Question: What is the position with regards to the HBC role that supports the Seniors and the Youth Council?

Response: The council will continue to support the Seniors and the Youth Council but this role will involve a wider remit supporting other community groups. On this basis community groups will need to become more self-sufficient and manage their own affairs where possible.

Question: What financial support can the council provide, particularly in terms of supporting the cost of the Senior's Forum office, shared with Hope G and the Pensioners Association?

Response: Given that there will be potential capacity reduction in terms of officer time given to the Seniors Forum, the council will look into supporting rental costs.

Comment: Concern with accessing council services online particularly if you don't have a computer or other accessible device.

Response: When Universal Credit is introduced from April it is expected that everyone will access this online. The council is keen to make more services online as it is cheaper for us to do so if people can self-serve and residents now expect to access services online, as they may do so to book a flight, pay for a TV licence etc.

Question: What if we can't use online methods, will the council help?

Response: If residents are struggling, they can get support at the Town Hall Customer Contact Centre where staff will be able to support and enable resident's access services online.

Question: What has been done in the way of testing online access and can Seniors be involved in testing new approaches?

Response: Work on better online access of council services is underway and the council would very much welcome the input of Seniors and other community groups when we are in a position to start beta testing new approaches.

Question: Why are there plans to close the Old Town Museum?

Response: It is planned to close the Old Town Museum given the broader financial challenges the council faces in terms of government grant reductions of over 50% since 2010. Should the decision be reached to close the Old Town Museum by council on the 25th of February, associated display artefacts will be retained with a view to locating these at St Johns Place.

Question: Will that potentially leave the Old Town Museum empty?

Response: The Museum Association has already suggested that it would like HBC to retain the freehold and potentially lease the building. We are confident the building will not be empty and we will have full discussions on the future use of the building subject to the decision taken by council on the 25th of February.

Question: How does the council support the White Rock Theatre (WRT)?

Response: The council is in a ten year contract with HQ theatres to run the WRT. The council will need to consider options for the Theatre shortly as the contract nears completion. The WRT is the wrong size and if it were to be built again, it would not be build the same way. It is felt that recently HQ Theatres have improved the quality of performances and this is reflected in recent attendance figures.

The future use of the WRT will be considered as part of the council's intentions to plan development for the White Rock surrounding area. The council has set aside monies to plan the further revival and determine the best use of the White Rock area.

Question: What is in store for Bottle Alley?

Response: The council had recently received a petition from residents to restore Bottle Alley. Given that a full restoration funded by the council is unrealistic given the

financial climate, the council have agreed to make repairs and improvements that will include decorative lighting. The council is also exploring using the space to store and launch Kayaks with interested parties, as part of considering the potential for business use here.

Question: Where is the Hastings embroidery?

Response: It is currently in storage. Given the size of the embroidery it is challenging finding an appropriate space where it can be displayed.

Question: Are there any updates on the town's shopping facilities?

Response: There are two new shops and a cafe due to open in Priory Meadow following a successful Christmas period. As HBC is the freeholder for Priory Meadow it is important that Priory Meadow keeps busy and attracts new business so that the council can maximise its share of rental income.

Question: Why is the Turner gallery in Margate free and the Jerwood isn't?

Response: The Turner gallery is publically funded by Kent County Council and the Arts Council. The Jerwood is a different entity and as a Trust is not publically funded. Hastings residents can access the Jerwood for free on the first Tuesday afternoon of every month and at a reduced rate for residents at any other time.