

'CONGLETON TOWN COUNCIL

COMMITTEE REPORTS AND UPDATES

COMMITTEE:	Council		
MEETING DATE AND TIME	14 th June 2018	LOCATION	Congleton Town Hall
REPORT FROM	Chief Officer / Councillor A Morrison		
AGENDA ITEM REPORT TITLE	Museum relocation - ITEM 10		
Background	<p>Congleton Museum is a tenant of the Town Council at the Town Hall and has had aspirations to find a suitable building to enable its growth and sustainability. Whilst other museums have struggled to survive the trustees of the museum have ensured that there has been continual improvements to its offer.</p> <p>There have been many meetings with Cheshire East Council with regards to a potential relocation to Bradshaw House and more recently the museum was invited with other community groups to put forward its proposals to relocate its operation to the building.</p> <p>In terms of a relocation project It is quite complex due to the condition of the building ,it being Grade 2 listed, the acquisition of it and the funding of the refurbishment. There are 3 key stakeholders currently involved this project -</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ➤ Cheshire East Council - the owners of Bradshaw House ➤ The Museum – who have provided a proposal to Cheshire East Council to relocate to Bradshaw House ➤ Heritage Lottery Fund (grant) – who are seen as the key funders of this project in terms of the refurbishment (there are smaller funders / grant providers) <p>The Museum was one of a few community led applicants who presented proposals to relocate their operations to Bradshaw House, in early May they were advised that their application had been rejected. The Museum requested a meeting with Cheshire East Council to discuss the reasons for their failed bid, the meeting between the Council and representatives of the Museum took place on the 25th of May 2018. The Museum were very unhappy with the outcome of this meeting and felt compelled to generate a statement outlining their issues surrounding the meeting which included a supporting statement from Fiona Bruce MP (Appendix 1)</p> <p>The Museum later received a letter from Cheshire East Council outlining the reasons for the rejection of their proposal and stating that, in effect, the door was now closed. (Appendix 2)The museum felt that these reasons were unjustified and wrote a letter directly to the Leader of the Council Rachel Bailey (Appendix 3) with a copy of the earlier statement (Appendix 1)</p>		
Updates	<p>The Museum are currently in communication with the Heritage Lottery Fund to discuss options and to try and gain some form of commitment for their proposal and to understand what is required from the Museums perspective to achieve their support. It is important to also state the position of the Town Council and to formally record its support for the expansion of the Museum.</p> <p>Cheshire East Council have agreed to suspend activity related to the disposal of the asset for a short period whilst these discussions take place</p>		
Decision Requested	For the Town Council to support the museum in its expansion plans and relocation to Bradshaw House		



Bradshaw House

statement from the trustees of Congleton Museum

Congleton Museum trustees met Andy Kehoe and Lee Beckett of Cheshire East Council to find out why the application for Bradshaw House had been unsuccessful.

Mr. Kehoe said that CEC was very concerned about the future of Bradshaw House because the council is responsible for its care as a listed building.

The reasons he gave for Congleton Museum's rejection were, in summary:

1. The museum had failed to get Heritage Lottery Fund grants for the project in the past, therefore the council considered it was unlikely to be successful again.
2. If it were to be successful, it would take too long to acquire the grant and get authorisation for work to start on the building.
3. The projections in the museum's bid showing expected growth in visitor numbers were considered to be over ambitious. The council officers were unable to justify that opinion.
4. The museum is currently a small business and rapid expansion is risky. The council does not want Congleton Museum to "break".

Trustees expressed their disappointment at the decision and challenged the reasons given. They considered none of these points valid and pointed out:

1. When the museum first asked HLF for support in 2014 the council was insisting it buy the building at a cost of £350,000. HLF turned the application down, partly because the scheme at that time was considered too large, and partly because it was unwilling to pay a commercial price for a building to a council which was offering negligible support to the ongoing project.

The situation now is quite different. The property is offered on a lease, the overall project is much smaller and informal discussions between the museum and HLF have been positive.

2. The building was offered for community use. Any community organisation taking on a listed building which has stood empty for some years will need grant funding to restore it. This is sure to

take time. CEC has always known the museum would need to deal with HLF and was fully aware of the timescale involved.

The museum has been trying for five years to find a way to take over Bradshaw House. In that time the building has not been maintained and has remained empty. It does not appear that time has been of the essence until now.

3. The figures in the business plan were based on visitor numbers elsewhere, supplied by Museums Development North West, and on a similar case study. They are conservative and considered achievable by experts.
4. The museum is currently a small business; it is forced to be, since expansion of any kind within the current premises is impossible. It is usual for museums to provide a cafe, both as an income stream and an attractive facility for visitors. This is not possible in Congleton without new premises.

CEC shows minimal support for the museum. It provides a small grant of just over £5000 a year - a fraction of the support received by the other museums in the area.

The museum was set up from scratch by a team of volunteers and has been run successfully as a charitable trust for 16 years. The trustees have varied backgrounds and areas of expertise and understand the risks involved. They have a realistic view of what can be achieved and have no intention of allowing the museum to "break". The amount of risk the board is willing to accept is up to its members.

The benefits of allowing Congleton Museum to occupy Bradshaw House remain high, both for the museum and for Congleton, its people and its councils:

- a) The move would enable the museum to be more sustainable in the long term.
- b) A museum is a highly appropriate tenant for a listed historical building.
- c) CEC says it has no current plan for the future of Bradshaw House. If the museum were to take it over, it would be fully restored and cared for the full term of the thirty year lease.
- d) The museum's education offering could be increased, with space available for a larger numbers of children, making a visit more cost-effective for schools.
- e) Bradshaw House is much more visible and more attractive than the museum's current premises.
- f) The museum would be able to handle a much larger number of visitors.
- g) Improved facilities would encourage more visitors to the town, so benefitting the economy:
 - There would be plenty of exhibition space, storage, education & research facilities and accommodation for staff and volunteers, as well as room for a cafe and a larger gift shop.
 - The museum would be able to accept more artefacts and display more of the collection it already has. This would allow the increasing number of local archaeological finds to remain in the area.
 - The museum already works in partnership with national museums, such as the V&A and the British Museum, and would be able to host touring exhibitions.

- There is a garden for outdoor activities and it would be possible to hold conferences and other events.
- h) It would provide a central venue for the people of Congleton. The town is expanding rapidly and the museum would promote a sense of place and community.
- i) The museum would be a catalyst to invigorate the Lawton Street Conservation Area .
- j) The project meets Cheshire East Council's long term objectives as stated in its corporate plan:

Our local communities are strong and supportive

Cheshire East has a strong and resilient economy

People have the life skills and education they need in order to thrive

Cheshire East is a green and sustainable place

People live well and for longer

The trustees will be asking Cheshire East Council to reconsider its decision and asking the people of Congleton to support an expanded museum.

The trustees are grateful for the support of Congleton's MP, Fiona Bruce, who made the following statement:

“The development of Congleton Museum moving to Bradshaw House has the potential to provide a much enhanced cultural destination over and above the museum’s current location for the local population and visitors to enjoy. This move would also enhance the opportunities for other visitor attractions in the town to increase their footfall. For these reasons I fully support the museum’s proposal.

Congleton Museum has a really interesting story to tell about the town’s history and Bradshaw House would provide the museum with the location to present not only this but also exhibits from the whole of Cheshire and from national collections.

It would be a wonderful and much needed location for educational visits, family groups and for residents who feel proud of this town, as I do, in an appropriate setting for showcasing the town of Congleton.

I will be writing to the Leader of Cheshire East to look again at the business case presented to them by the museum and also, on behalf of Congleton, asking Cheshire East to support the museum’s bid for Heritage Lottery Funding for the development of Bradshaw House.”

Fiona Bruce MP

Congleton Museum Trustees:

Ian Doughty (chair), Dawn Allen , Anne Gubbins, Linda Hulse, Mike Laurence, Anna Morrison, Diane Ritherdon, Ron Renshaw, David Topping, Mike Warke.

CEE CORRESPONDENCE 1 OF 1
APPENDIX 2



Congleton Museum
Market Square,
Congleton,
Cheshire
CW12 1ET

Asset Management
Delamere House EC
Delamere Street
Crewe
Cheshire
CW1 2JZ

Date: 01/06/2018

Our Ref:

Your Ref:

Dear Mr Doughty,

Bradshaw House, Congleton

Thank you for attending a recent meeting with the Council to receive feedback on your offer for the above property. As agreed, I am writing to confirm the key points from our meeting.

While the offer put forward by the museum would continue to make a valuable contribution to the Council's cultural objectives and would benefit the museum in terms of its higher profile location in Congleton along with more space, as discussed the Council has a statutory responsibility towards listed buildings and, as custodian of their future has a duty to ensure their long term sustainable use. Bradshaw House is a listed building and therefore this is a significant consideration for the Council.

In this context, the Museum's reliance on Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) was a key concern and significant risk for the Council in evaluating your offer. The Council is aware that there is a high level of competition for HLF support, with every bidding round over-subscribed. The Council is also aware that HLF funds are reducing over the coming years such that competition for funds of any size, but larger ones in particular, will be subject to even greater competition. It is understood that the Museum has previously made a bid for HLF funding which did not proceed beyond the initial stage.

Moreover, a successful HLF bid is lengthy, potentially around three years from initial bid to award of funding and requires a significant input of resource over that period. The building could therefore be vacant for a long period of time without any certainty the Museum would eventually occupy it. This would continue to expose the Grade II listed building to the risks associated with remaining vacant and unconditioned.

The Museum's offer referenced other museums and associated data. The growth projections for visitor numbers and income are in our opinion speculative. The reliance of growth in the visitor numbers could also be a factor in terms of the strength of any HLF bid thus presenting a further risk to the project overall.



In summary, the Museum's proposal presents a number of challenges. Funding bid, design, planning permission, refurbishment and development of Bradshaw House, relocation, establishment of new income streams and business lines and driving up visitor numbers. The scale of the development of the building is significantly beyond the current operational turnover of the business. This places a significant risk on the Museum, but also the Council in terms of its listed building.

I can confirm that the Council is currently considering its options around Bradshaw House and is looking to bring forward a Commercial use of the building to protect this listed building in the long term. It is clear that the museum wishes to expand and it was discussed that Museum works closely with other community organisations within Congleton. The Council would wish to continue to explore this with you, perhaps engaging with other parties to explore the development of a cultural hub for Congleton. However Bradshaw House cannot be part of such a process.

I hope this response is helpful in clarifying our discussion and the Council's position on Bradshaw House.

Yours faithfully

LETTER TO R. BAILEY 1 OF 1
APPENDIX 3.

Councillor Rachel Bailey
Leader of Cheshire East Council
Westfields
Middlewich Road
Sandbach
Cheshire
CW11 1HZ

6th June 2018

Dear Councillor Bailey,

Please find enclosed Congleton Museum's statement in response to the rejection of its bid, for community use, of Bradshaw House, Lawton Street, Congleton.

We are raising this matter with you as we asking for our bid to be re-considered for the points we have outlined below.

The Museum's response follows the meeting of five of our trustees with your officers, Andy Kehoe, Head of Asset Management and Regeneration, and Lee Beckett, Estates Surveyor, on the 25th of May.

The Museum's Trustees are dissatisfied with the reasons your officers gave in this meeting and, indeed, challenged them on every point, during this, regarding their assessment of our bid. Our bid is realistic and has been positively received by not only Heritage Lottery Funding, but also, from national, regional and local organisations too.

As you will read in the enclosed statement, we will not accept point one and two as valid. Points three and four were left unsubstantiated by your officers.

There is a groundswell of support for Bradshaw House to remain and given a new lease of life, as an asset for the town, albeit the years of neglect from Cheshire East. We are of the opinion that, as Trustees of Congleton Museum, we are in the position to secure Bradshaw House in its restoration, and in its future, for a cultural centre for the residents of this town and for Congleton's visitor economy.

Yours sincerely,