

WEST DUNBARTONSHIRE COUNCIL

Report by the Executive Director Educational Services

Corporate Cultural Sub-Committee: 30th November 2009

Subject: OPTIONS PAPER - MUSEUMS OUTREACH

1. Purpose:

- 1.1 To advise the Corporate Cultural Sub Committee of a number of options for consideration relating to the provision of museum outreach services across West Dunbartonshire.

2. Background:

- 2.1 At the Corporate Cultural Committee meeting 9th December 2008 it was agreed that an Officer Working Group would explore options relating to identification of a convenient and appropriate alternative location for Clydebank Museum as well as possible additional locations for outreach exhibitions in the Dumbarton and Vale of Leven areas.
- 2.2 Clydebank Museum is based within Clydebank Town Hall. It is one of only two Nationally Accredited museums in West Dunbartonshire, the other being Denny Tank Museum in Dumbarton, run by the Scottish Maritime Museum with financial support from West Dunbartonshire Council. Clydebank Museum was established in 1980 through the support of the community group Friends of Clydebank Museum and Clydebank District Council.
- 2.3 Since 2002 Clydebank Museum has been managed by the WDC Culture Section within Educational Services. During this time visitor figures have more than trebled, and the museum has been upgraded by Visit Scotland to a 4 star visitor attraction. Both its Learning and Volunteer Programmes have been identified as Best Practise at a national level.
- 2.4 In the last four years Clydebank Museum and museum services has attracted well over £300K in external funding to the service. This has enabled amongst others: the documentation and research of the collections, development of a learning programme, curation of local heritage exhibitions and establishment of an award winning volunteer development programme.
- 2.5 The museum service promotes a learning programme for schools which attracts over 1000 participants and includes the provision of cross curricular resources for teachers and workshops linked to the museum collections and local heritage.

- 2.6** Clydebank Museum promotes four exhibitions per annum featuring artefacts and works from the museum collections, and celebrating the rich local heritage of Clydebank and West Dunbartonshire. These attract average annual visitor figures of over 6000, and also involve outreach programmes and events. The museum service also provides a substantial amount of information relating to the Council's collections on line, promoting extensive access to the collections including downloads, resources, images and fact-sheets.
- 2.7** Qualitative and quantitative data collated from museum visitors have shown that 33% of museum visitors are from outside West Dunbartonshire, and 100% would visit again or recommend the museum to a friend. However location and signage have been highlighted as an issue, as well as the lack of space for a permanent exhibition on the history of Clydebank.
- 2.8** Visitor figures also show that the museum requires to host a changing programme of exhibitions to attract and maintain visitor figure levels. Lack of space within the existing location does not allow for both temporary and permanent exhibitions on the history of Clydebank.
- 2.9** The current location of Clydebank Museum raises a number of issues. It is not centrally located close to transport routes and movement of the public. As a result it attracts little passing trade. It also has poor directional signage for visitors. Town centre based outreach exhibitions e.g. Clydebank Rebuilt at Clydebank Shopping Centre, and others elsewhere have shown that by locating in a centrally based venue with increased footfall not only promotes public access but increases visitor figures.
- 2.10** Clydebank Museum is West Dunbartonshire Council's only museum. The current lack of alternative museum venues severely limits the scope and range of exhibitions, and public access to the councils wide ranging museum collections. With these issues in mind a number of options have been identified for consideration which would raise the profile of the museum collections and expand public access to the museum service at a local level.

3. Main Issues

- 3.1** In identifying options for museum outreach across West Dunbartonshire a number of key issues have been explored. These include: public accessibility, potential footfall, transportation links, signage, and financial and staffing implications.
- 3.2** Although visitors figures at Clydebank Museum over recent years have increased significantly, visitor feedback and pilots elsewhere (e.g. Clydebank Rebuilt) have shown that location (i.e. public accessibility) is a prime influence over visitor access. An outreach museum provision within West Dunbartonshire offers the best method of promoting public access to museum and heritage collections and exhibitions. Therefore the options

proposed within this paper reflect a town centre location and/or high levels of footfall/passing trade. They also promote disabled access in line with the Disability Discrimination Act (DDA). Locating outreach museums/services within town centre locations also provides improved transportation links thereby increasing potential visitors.

3.3 In exploring options officers have been mindful of financial constraints, sustainability, and the potential for drawing down external monies to enhance WDC investment and promote Best Value. It should be noted that none of these options may be provided within existing budgets.

3.4 This paper proposes a number of options for consideration involving various degrees of financial investment by the council. Most are proposed on a temporary basis, and all allow for assessment and evaluation of future service provision.

3.5 Option 1 – Temporary rental of retail/commercial unit in a town centre location

3.5.1 This represents one of the more expensive options. However, it may offer the highest profile for the council's museum service.

3.5.2 The Council's Estates service has estimated the rental of a retail/commercial unit within a town centre location will cost between £6 – £12K over a 6 month period. The ideal option would be a location in Clydebank, Dumbarton or Balloch during April – September to include the tourist season. It should be noted that at the time of this paper being written no specific premises have been identified.

3.5.3 Staffing costs related to this proposal are estimated to be 23K. For reasons of personal safety and health and safety at work a venue of this sort could not be staffed only by volunteers. As in other museums in similar locations (e.g. Denny Tank Museum) two staff would be required to be employed as lone working offers a significant risk to employees. These staff would be supported by a volunteer workforce drawn from the surrounding area.

3.5.4 Within the museum service we currently have a team of approx 27 volunteers working both front of house and with the collections. The vast majority of these come from the Clydebank area, and a volunteer recruitment drive would have to take place to attract new volunteers to the new outreach venue. This is not insurmountable but would require time to allow recruitment of volunteers prior to a new temporary venue being opened to the public.

3.5.5 In addition to rental and staffing costs an outreach museum would require an element of fit-out costs, e.g. painting, electrics, lighting, cases etc., in addition to provision of any environmental controls required for display of museum artefacts. Full cost estimates for Option 1 are attached to this paper as Appendix 1.

3.6 Option 2 – Provision of a local history exhibition along Dumbarton High Street

3.6.1 There currently exists a number of disused and vacant premises along Dumbarton High Street significantly detracting from the attractiveness of this historic location. This option proposes that a series of large scale images of 'Old Dumbarton' are exhibited in the windows of any vacant premises on Dumbarton High Street. These images would effectively fill the window of vacant premises. This would create a large scale local history exhibition in the middle of town, with significant public access and with the potential to improve the image of the town centre. However this option does not allow for any interaction with the public.

3.6.2 It is proposed that this type of exhibition could be shown during May – Oct. Alternatively it could be extended to 12 months depending on uptake and impact. Any exhibition would be subject to the timescales involved in ensuring the support of the owners of the retail units involved and access to the units to hang the exhibition. Given that there is no Town Centre Initiative in existence access to the owners of vacant premises would have to be gained with the support of WDC's Economic Development & Regeneration Section. It should be noted that gaining permission for access to premises may be time-consuming.

3.6.3 It is also of significance that, as vacant properties do not currently spread evenly along the High Street, the current groupings of vacant shops frontages could result in a lack of continuity in the exhibition. The option also relies upon the support of the commercial sector and will only have impact if there is full support from the owners of the premises involved.

3.6.4 No staffing costs are incurred in this option. Costs involved in producing this exhibition would primarily be costs relating to the printing of display panels (large scale photographic images/panoramas) and exhibition materials e.g. tools and publicity. Printing costs are likely to be in the region of £250 per panel. Full estimates are shown in Appendix 1.

3.7 Option 3 – Employment of Museum Outreach Officer

3.7.1 This option proposes the employment of an Outreach Officer for 12 months. The remit of this officer would be to link with community organisations, and local businesses with the aim of promoting 3-4 museum related exhibitions within town centre / accessible community locations. A working budget would be required for this post. However, it is expected that additional external funding may also be drawn down to augment the budgets and offer Best Value.

3.7.2 This option would enable an Outreach Officer to work with communities, and actively involve community organisations and community venues in the development of accessible exhibitions which reflect local history and the museum collections.

3.7.3 Costs for this option are shown in Appendix A and relate to salary costs for 12 months of approx £24K plus a working budget. It is thought that this option offers options for attracting external monies.

3.8 Option 4 – Provision of a permanent Outreach Museum/Heritage Facility at Dumbarton Library

3.8.1 This option provides the most long-term and sustainable initiative providing a lasting legacy which may be managed within existing budgets after initial investment.

3.8.2 Dumbarton Library has a central location and is well used by the community. Experience of locating exhibition space within libraries e.g. The Backdoor Gallery at Dalmuir Library has shown that substantial visitor figures can be achieved, alongside increased usage of the library facility.

3.8.3 This option suggests the redevelopment of Dumbarton Library to include a local museum/heritage facility. It would: enhance local studies, provide the only venue for the display of council museum collections outside of Clydebank Museum, and provide space for temporary and permanent exhibitions. Costs relating to this option are shown in Appendix 1 and would involve redevelopment and fitting out costs relating to lighting, and provision of display space. No staffing costs would be required as staff are already on the premises; however, potential exists to augment this with volunteer support.

3.9 Option 5 – Mobile Museum and Learning Resource

3.9.1 Option 5 would provide a ‘travelling’ museum and learning resource for West Dunbartonshire taking heritage exhibitions and learning facilities into the communities of the authority. Utilising the existing mobile vehicle within Libraries the vehicle would be refitted to enable temporary exhibitions and provide learning equipment maximising use of the vehicle throughout the year, and promoting accessible services to the public.

3.9.2 The vehicle would tour community centres, town centres, schools and colleges across the authority housing local heritage exhibitions (2-4 per annum). Similar services exist elsewhere in Scotland e.g. Edinburgh, and Clackmannanshire. By providing a mobile service it is possible to ensure a service accessible to all members of the community.

3.9.3 The vehicle would be augmented with learning equipment enabling community and pupil learning linked to heritage and the curriculum for excellence. When no touring exhibitions are running the vehicle will tour as a learning facility providing community based courses run by the Library service. This project is a 12 month proposal to be evaluated on completion. Costs including £18,000 staffing (driver) and initial fit out of vehicle are shown in Appendix 1. All maintenance and running costs can be provided within existing budgets.

3.9.4 Discussions have already taken place between the Culture Section and the Libraries Section and both believe that Option 5 could work to the mutual benefit of both sections.

4. Personnel Issues

4.1 Options 1 & 3 involve employment of temporary staff; costs related to these are shown in Appendix 1.

5. Financial Implications

5.1 The options outlined within this paper are detailed in Appendix 1. None of the options could be implemented within existing budgets. The recommendation is that the Sub-Committee consider funding the preferred option from the Sub-Committee's own budget for 2010/11. To do so the Sub-Committee will have to be satisfied that there is sufficient budget available to fund this expenditure. If the Sub-Committee is not satisfied as to these matters or wishes the preferred option to be funded elsewhere, it will have to form a separate growth-item bid as part of the Council's normal budget setting exercise

6. Risk Assessment

6.1 There is a risk that should none of these outreach options be taken forward that the council could be criticised for locating the majority of their Museum/Cultural activity within the Clydebank area at the expense of the wider West Dunbartonshire Community.

6.2 There is a risk to the council of lost income should Council owned premises be identified for outreach facilities (Option 1) at either full or a reduced rental for a 6 month period if a longer term commercial tenant is unable to obtain a lease for the premises.

6.3 There is a general risk associated with short term pilot programmes such as those proposed within the report.
In particular, where services are delivered on a pilot basis and expectations raised within the wider community there is the potential for negative publicity when the pilot period concludes.

6.4 There is a potential financial risk to the council if, following a successful evaluation of any pilot programme(s), there is a desire to continue the provision with a requirement for an ongoing revenue budget to be identified.

7. Conclusions and Officers' Recommendations

7.1 This paper informs the Sub-committee of the options identified following an appraisal of the provision of museums outreach facilities within West Dunbartonshire.

7.2 The options within this paper reflect the following strategic aims of the WDC Cultural Strategy:

- a. To increase funding and investment in culture.
- b. To promote West Dunbartonshire's cultural identity locally, nationally and internationally
- c. To increase access and participation in cultural activity for all citizens.
- d. To conserve, interpret and celebrate our culture and heritage.
- e. To raise the quality and range of cultural activity and achievement.
- f. To support the local economy and the development of sustainable cultural industries and tourism.

7.3 The Corporate Cultural Sub Committee is invited to:

- a. **Note the content of this paper and the options for Museum Outreach identified within it.**
- b. **To consider the options identified within this paper and outlined in Appendix A, and give consideration to allocating monies from the Culture Sub-Committee budget for 2010/11 for use in implementing any of these Options.**

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Appendix A. Outreach Options

Wards Affected: All Council Wards are affected

Background Papers: **West Dunbartonshire Council Cultural Strategy 2005**