

# Museums Scrutiny Task Group

## Final Report - October 2007



(Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum  
King's House, 65 The Close, Salisbury)



(Wiltshire Heritage Museum,  
41 Long Street, Devizes)

## **Chairman's Foreword**

Like any Wiltshire resident I recognise that the county has a global reputation for its archaeology, so I was delighted when asked to Chair the Museums Task Group.

Reviewing the two museums has illustrated the importance they play in preserving our heritage and the crucial role the County Council plays in supporting both sites. Our review discovered that the museums provide a valuable social service, offering a place of work for hundreds of volunteers whilst also benefiting the local economies at both locations.

The task group was asked to look at the income generation activities and partnership working opportunities between the two museums. We found that both had been proactive towards each area but could benefit further with the Council's support and a more strategic approach towards operating.

I would like to thank both museums for the open and honest way they approached the evidence gathering. I am also extremely grateful to the officers and members who supported the review.

Finally, I would like to commend this report to the committee for endorsement.

Brigadier RWS Hall

## PURPOSE

1. This report is a summary of the work undertaken by the Museums Task Group July – October 2007.

## MEMBERSHIP

2.

Brigadier Robert Hall (Chairman)	Conservative member for Bedwyn and Collingbourne
Mrs Mollie Groom	Conservative member for Wootton Bassett North
Mr Ross Henning	Liberal Democrat member for Chippenham Central
Mr Christopher Newbury ( <i>Resigned from membership of the task group</i> )	Independent member for Westbury Ham and Dilton
Mr Tony Trotman	Conservative member for Calne

## TERMS OF REFERENCE

3. During 2006-07 Wiltshire County Council faced a significant predicted budget deficit. The Corporate Recovery process in response called for the Wiltshire Executive to review the budgets for the Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum (S & SW) and the Wiltshire Heritage Museum (WHM) to identify potential savings. Cabinet considered the following two options:-
  - i) Not funding the WHM (Devizes)
  - ii) Halving the grant to each museum
4. Neither of these options was implemented, however at full Council on 13 February 2007, in determining the revenue budget, grant aid to the two museums was made conditional. A key condition of which included the museums agreeing to participate in a scrutiny review with the terms of reference below:
  - 1) To review and comment on the partnership working between the two Wiltshire Designated Museums including proposals to consider sharing curatorial expertise, outreach activity and the management of the two museums to secure efficiency savings.
  - 2) To review and comment on the income generating activities of the museums and to identify any additional opportunities for the museums to consider.

- 3) To aim to conclude the review within 3 months of the first meeting and report its findings and recommendations to the Overview and Scrutiny and Management Committee for endorsement.

5.

### **Programme of Meetings**

**July 16                      Scoping Meeting**

**July 27                      Interviews with Witnesses**

*Mrs Mary Douglas - Cabinet Member for Culture  
Mr Bill Moss and Mr Tony Deane – Council  
Representatives on the Salisbury and South  
Wiltshire Board  
Mr Tony Molland - Council Representatives on the  
Wiltshire Heritage Board  
Mr Tom Craig – Heritage Services Manager*

**September 18            Site Visit – Salisbury and South Wiltshire  
Museum**

*Mr Roderick Bullough –Chairman  
Mr Adrian Green – Curator/Director  
Mr Peter Saunders – Former Curator  
Mr Joe Studholme – Chairman Designate  
Ms Jane Ellis-Schön – Curator of Archaeology  
Mr Hector Pilkington – Board member*

**September 28            Site Visit – Wiltshire Heritage Museum**

*Mr Bill Perry - Chairman  
Mr Paul Robinson – Curator  
Mr Doug Roseaman - Vice Chairman  
Mrs Wendy Lansdown – Board member  
Ms Ali Siviter - Education Officer  
Dr Lorna Haycock - Librarian*

**October 5                      Ms Pippa Griffith (report) – MLA (Museums,  
Libraries, Archives) South West  
Mr Tom Craig – Heritage Services Manager**

**Agree Draft Recommendations**

**October 15                      Draft Report**

**October 18                      Final report**

## EVIDENCE GATHERING

6. Following interviews with Executive representatives and Council Board members, the task group and cabinet member visited both museums. At each location the task group was given a tour of the facilities followed by a presentation from the Museum Boards.

In advance of the visits the two museums had commissioned a consultant – Mr Adrian Babbidge to review the potential for the museums working closer together, or even merging. These results were used by the Museum Boards during their presentations and the task group was given a copy of this report to support the evidence gathering process.

## BACKGROUND

7. Wiltshire has 32 public museums, of which 18 have achieved the basic national standard of “Accreditation”. Nationally there are 1771 accredited museums.

S & SW Museum and the WHM have also attained the higher national standard of “Designation”, earned because of the worldwide importance of their archaeological exhibits related to Stonehenge and Avebury.



### Number of Designated collections in each English region:

East Midlands – 4  
East of England – 11  
London – 25  
North East – 8  
North West – 13  
South East – 23  
**South West – 13**  
West Midlands – 18  
Yorkshire – 12

8. Following local government reorganisation in 1974 the County Council resolved to not directly operate the museums but to support them through grants. An advisory service and conservation laboratory was established at this time to further assist the museums.
9. These arrangements are still current today. The WHM, run by the Wiltshire Archaeological Society, and the S & SW Museum, an independent charitable trust, focus on the front of house such as displays and galleries. The Wiltshire Heritage Service now based at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre, Chippenham support back of house operations, especially cataloguing, collection management and conservation.

10. At the time of scrutinising the County Council's current annual Museum spend was £276k (see below):

Conservation Service		£143,542
Museums Service: Advisory Service Team		£77,739
Museums Service: grants		
Wiltshire Heritage Museum	£25,000	
Salisbury & South Wiltshire Museum	£29,400	
		£54,440
<b>Total expenditure</b>		<b>£275,721</b>

By comparison Somerset County Council, who is responsible for operating their county's museums, currently spends £702k per annum.

## RESULTS

11. When considering the museums the terms of reference called for the task group to scrutinise two distinct areas:
- i) Partnership Working
  - ii) Income Generation

## PARTNERSHIP WORKING

12. This section of the report is divided into two parts. The first details the key partnership proposals highlighted by the museums. The second part outlines a collection of opportunities identified by the task group.

## MUSEUMS' CURRENT PRACTICE AND FUTURE PLANS

13. Partnership working was already in place, examples of which are listed below:
- a) Cross-representation on each others Boards
  - b) Reciprocal free admission for members of each museum
  - c) Shared resources:
    - The finds liaison officer – a joint resource based in Salisbury, responsible for identifying and recording archaeological finds for the county
    - The Education Officer based in Devizes temporarily supported the S & SW Museum following the departure of their equivalent officer

14. However, the focus for the museums during the task group visits was to demonstrate how partnership working could be further developed to deliver efficiencies. This was especially the case at Salisbury, where the message from their newly appointed Director pointed very much towards the future.
15. Key proposals:
  - a) Governance – Adrian Green - Director(S&SW) proposed that the two museums should agree a Memorandum of Understanding. This more formal alternative to a gentleman's agreement would outline the commitment of both museums to work together more closely.
  - b) Marketing – there was a commitment from both museums to develop a Joint Marketing Strategy. Ideas for joint marketing included a leaflet/passport that could be obtained at one venue that gave discounted entry at the other.
  - c) Temporary Exhibitions – S&SW Museum proposed that the museums could work together to undertake at least one temporary exhibition per year. This would realise efficiencies as the preparation for an exhibition at one location and its transfer to another venue would save time and effort for the borrowing institution.
  - d) Education – the museums disagreed with the Babbidge Report's recommendation that one Education Officer could cover the whole of the county. Both were committed to retaining a core full time officer. WHM felt there was little potential for cost savings in this area but S&SW suggested a joint education bulletin and some form of complementary working between the two Education Officers.
  - e) Website – the suggestion was to create a unified Wiltshire archaeology website that contained the archaeological collections of both museums. The WHM was much more advanced in digitising its collection to make its exhibits available online. It was hoped that the WHM could share its expertise in this area to support the S&SW digitisation process.
  - f) Co-location/merging - The Babbidge Report considered much more extreme changes including the co-location of the museums to one site. This, however, was reported as not being financially viable as it would cost more than £3million. This figure could not be justified by the predicted income and savings. When considering merging the two museums, the MLA South West (Museums, Libraries and Archives – government funded development agency) reported that this could be a “long and difficult process to undertake”. The museums were also concerned that they would lose the support of their membership if there was a merger.
  - g) Sharing Curatorial expertise - The museums were not in favour of the proposal to share curators on the basis of limited capacity. Salisbury was currently operating with a vacant curator's post and Devizes had recently moved from a staff of 3 full time curators and a full time librarian to 2 full time curators and a part time librarian.

## **TASK GROUP PROPOSALS**

16. The task group welcomed the proposals from the museums to improve future partnership working. However, when considering the evidence the members identified a number of further opportunities:-

## **EDUCATION**

17. The task group shared the museums commitment to retain two Education Officers, which was reinforced following discussions with Ms Ali Siviter - Education Officer for the WHM. Ms Siviter explained her role, highlighting that the museum catered for all ages and abilities. Ms Siviter also told the task group that she had covered the existing bookings for S & SW Museum, following the S & SW Education Officer's position becoming vacant.
18. Through the evidence it emerged that there were limitations in the Education Officers working independently. Ms Siviter was restricted to the number of pupils she could accommodate (22 approx), and whilst on annual leave the museum could not deliver the same service.
19. Building on the ideas of the S & SW Museum, the task group felt that the education service could be improved if the Education Officers worked jointly as a team resource for both museums. Governed through a memorandum of understanding this would allow each museum to operate a seamless service 12 months a year.
20. The task group also learnt that the museums applied for grants to secure funds to retain these posts. By operating the roles as a team, the application process could be streamlined to avoid the two museums duplicating this work.
21. When considering partnership working Ms Siviter explained that the schools which used her service tended to be the same ones annually. It was challenging to attract new schools, even though all the work complemented the National Curriculum. The task group felt that as the Local Education Authority, Wiltshire County Council could be more proactive towards encouraging schools to take advantage of the education service.

## **CURATORS**

22. The task group recognised that the museums were both operating with less staff than they had previously enjoyed. However, acknowledging the size of the two museums, and the need to encourage closer joint working, the task group felt that the museums should work towards a team of curators with complementary skill sets. This could avoid the situation where both museums for example had a Roman specialist, with neither having a Pre-history expert.
23. Additionally, the task group felt that the working relationships of the two museums would be further developed and efficiencies delivered by reshaping the management structure to create a Joint Director position. This post split equally between the two museums, would realise a financial saving; although some of this would need to be reinvested into funding more junior curator positions.
24. The task group did not reach this idea purely from a cost savings perspective. The evidence generated at the visits suggested that the Directors were



involved in all aspects of running the museum. By creating this post it would release the officer's time to adopt a strategic approach towards service delivery. Supported by a joint education team and a team of curators with complementary skill sets, the Director would benefit from a staff resource committed to the partnership.

25. Clearly, at this time both museums are in a period of change, S & SW Museum's Director has just started in post and the WHM is currently advertising for a new Director. The task group accepts that this would mean that a change of this magnitude would be difficult at present. However, when considering the evidence the members felt that the Joint Director post would be beneficial and will suggest further research is undertaken within the recommendations of this report.

## **INCOME GENERATION**

26. The second part of the review called for the task group to scrutinise the income generating activities of each museum and to identify any potential areas for improvement.

The two museums when submitting evidence adopted different approaches:

- a) WHM concentrated on what had been achieved
- b) S&SW Museum looked to the future

By absorbing this information the task group was not only exposed to potential plans for income generation but also saw how the Wiltshire County Council grant funding supported the museums.

27. Both the WHM and S & SW Museum faced the year on year problem of generating insufficient income to meet expenditure. For example in the financial year 2006/7 the Wiltshire Archaeological & Natural History Society, trustees for the WHM, reported the following year end figures:

### **Year End 31<sup>st</sup> March 2007**

Total Incoming resources £287,651  
Total resources expended £302,939

This was mirrored in Salisbury who predicted the following results for this financial year:

### **Year End 31<sup>st</sup> March 2008**

Total Incoming resources £270,519  
Total resources expended £285,414

28. The Babbidge Report highlighted that museum income historically had been generated from 3 areas:
- 1. Visitors
  - 2. Donations
  - 3. Subsidy from local grants (including local authorities)

29. Visitor income and subsidy did not meet expenditure, therefore to balance the budgets both museums had to rely heavily on attracting legacies and donations from its members. The museums acknowledged that this jeopardised the long term sustainability of both services.
30. The task group noted that these experiences were not uncommon nationally, with the Bath Spa Museum and York's Jorvik Museum cited as the only two profit making museums in the country.
31. To address these financial difficulties the WHM had undertaken a wide ranging review in 2006 to attempt to increase income. As a result admission charges were increased. The Museums had also appealed regularly for donations from membership; been proactive in applying for grants; and attempted to maximise the benefits for tax breaks for their charitable status.

### **Museums Admission Charges – 2007**

<b>WHM</b>	<b>S &amp; SW</b>
£ 4.00 adults	Adults £5.00
£ 3.00 concessions	Concessions and Groups £3.50
£ 1.00 Children (under 16)	Children £2.00 (under 5s free)
Admission free on Sundays	Family admission (2 adults/3 children) £11.00

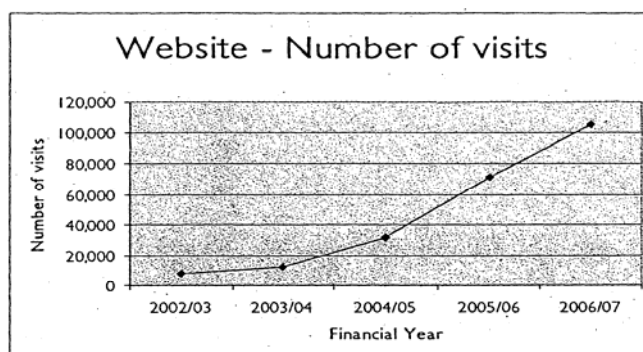
32. The key message from S & SW Museum's new Director was that they had a 5 year plan to increase visitor numbers. The location of the S & SW Museum provided a clear advantage over the WHM in terms of attracting people through the door. Salisbury Cathedral, adjacent to the museum, annually has 200,000 visitors, providing a huge potential market.

#### Key ideas:

- a) Redevelopment of the museum in stages using grant funding. This had proven to be successful in the past. When the Stonehenge Gallery opened in 2001/2 visitor numbers increased by 5000 in one year.
- b) Introduction of a lively programme of events and temporary exhibitions, appealing to a wider audience. Major exhibitions would be available for sponsorship.
- c) Develop a marketing action plan, including closer partnership working with the Cathedral and other attractions within the Close.
- d) Revitalising the Corporate membership, taking advantage of the location.
- e) Loaning of items to businesses for a charge and an approach to the Bridgeman Art Gallery to help sell copies of images to an international audience.
- f) Talks to adult groups and schools.

## TASK GROUP OBSERVATIONS TOWARDS INCOME GENERATION

33. The task group welcomed the income generating ideas presented by the museums. However, when considering the evidence the members identified further opportunities to increase income or reduce cost.
34. Reducing core costs – the budget information supplied by the museums demonstrated the significance of the core costs of lighting, heating and insurance. For example the S & SW Museum for the financial year 2007/08 estimated these costs to be as follows:
- |                   |         |
|-------------------|---------|
| Utilities (H/L/W) | £17,000 |
| Insurance         | £12,700 |
35. Each museum purchased their energy requirements and insurance independently. The task group felt that there could be a saving if the museums collectively procured. Also, the task group felt further investigation was warranted to see if the museums could take advantage of the council's insurance and energy contracts to gain even greater efficiencies.
36. Website – Data provided by the WHM illustrated that the real growth area for customers was through the web.



Each museum's website did have their shop's stock online but there was no facility to spend money.



37. If a customer wanted to buy an item they had to print off an order form and post it to the museum. The Heritage Services Manager advised the task group that it may be possible to secure funding from an external body to fund the development of the website to allow online purchases.
38. Sponsorship - The task group welcomed the proposal presented by S & SW Museum and felt this could be expanded further. Ideas suggested included a business sponsoring the museum name. Clearly this would necessitate a significant cultural change but could deliver an excellent revenue source and also encourage improved visitor numbers if the sponsor's staff were to visit or use the corporate facilities.
39. Entrance – the panel observed during their visit to Salisbury that the current entrance arrangements could be improved. The members found the closed solid wooden door unwelcoming. There was also little evidence of public information outside.

*When leaving the museum the Chairman of the task group was stopped by 2 ladies, who asked if the museum contained any paintings. When told there were 2 Turners, they promptly entered and paid their entrance fees.*

The WHM on the other hand had a glass fronted door, which invited the public to enter.



40. Outreach activity - both museums had lecture room facilities, see below:

### **S & SW Museum Lecture Room**



Although toilet facilities in both sites were limited and the buildings were not totally DDA compliant, the task group felt that outreach activity was a market that could be developed further.

41. Value for money – the task group agreed that the Wiltshire County Council grant provided excellent value for the Council. The challenge facing the museums was that nearly all available grant funding was for project work; the local authority funding helped to meet core operating costs. The museums also had a social value providing a place of work for volunteers (200 in the WHM), offering work experience to students and also supporting Shaw Trust placements. The task group questioned whether because of this work the museums were entitled to other funding? The museums also delivered wider economic benefits, attracting tourists to both towns and providing free storage for the county’s archaeology.
42. Centralising collections - The task group within this review has identified the importance of adopting a strategic view of delivering the service. The opportunity presented at the proposed Stonehenge Visitor Centre could further develop this area. The members believed that by centralising parts of the collections (especially those related to Stonehenge) here, it would make the exhibits accessible to more people and take advantage of the global reputation Wiltshire has from Stonehenge.
43. The Visitor Centre is to be run by English Heritage, which has already been in discussion with the two museums about exhibiting their collections. English Heritage at this stage has offered to compensate with a one off capital fee. Clearly, the museums would benefit from a more regular income stream. At the time of the review the negotiations with English Heritage had been undertaken independently by the museums. The task group felt that the museums should be supported more directly by the Council's Executive during this process.

## CONCLUSION

44. The review has clearly demonstrated the valuable contribution the two museums have within Wiltshire. Comparison with Somerset's budget illustrates the reality of the expenditure required for a local authority to support its county's museums. The members of the task group believed that Wiltshire as a local authority has a moral obligation to support its heritage, something for which is renowned throughout the world. By supporting both museums the council is meeting this responsibility and through the good work at both sites is reaping the rewards culturally, economically and socially.
45. When considering partnership working the task group welcomed the museums proposals. However, members felt this area could be improved by taking a strategic view of the services provided. By pooling staff resources at a number of levels the service provided would improve and the team would be strengthened.
46. In terms of generating income it was evident that Salisbury has an advantage in its location because of the number of tourists in the vicinity. The web is clearly a growth area for both museums and should be developed. There may also be potential for reducing core cost through working with the Heritage Services Team. Finally, the task group felt that the future improvements to Stonehenge offer a real opportunity to showcase the county's fine archaeology, whilst also supporting the local museums in Devizes and Salisbury.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

47.

1. **The Museums to retain their current grant funding subject to a 5 year review in 2013. This will coincide with the end of the S & SW Museum's 5 year development plan.**
2. **The Museums to commit towards examining in more detail the viability of creating a Joint Director post. The timescales for which to be determined by the Wiltshire Executive as part of the 2008/09 budget award.**
3. **The Wiltshire Heritage Museum and Salisbury and South Wiltshire Museum to agree a memorandum of understanding. Included within this agreement should be:**
  - A) **A commitment to use the Education Officers as a collective resource.**
  - B) **To ensure future curators have a complementary skill set to those already employed.**
4. **The Wiltshire Heritage Service to help the museums investigate the further development of their websites, considering shared digital catalogues and online shopping, with careful wording this may attract grant funding.**
5. **The museums to continue to develop sponsorship opportunities and consider naming rights.**
6. **The museums to continue to develop their outreach work, especially the use of facilities for educational purposes.**
7. **To ask the Heritage Services Manager to investigate with colleagues in the Department for Community Services whether the museums qualify for any other grants for the social services they provide.**
8. **To ask the Director of Children and Education to further encourage the use of the Educational Services available through both museums.**
9. **In relation to the Stonehenge Visitor Centre, to ask the Cabinet Member to work with the Chairmen of both museums in support of their negotiations with English Heritage.**
10. **To ask the Heritage Services Manager to explore the opportunities to reduce core costs with the museums and the County Council's procurement team.**

## **DECISION MAKING PROCESS**

48. This Task Group report will be submitted to the Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee on the 1<sup>st</sup> November 2007 for endorsement, following which it will be submitted to the Cabinet Member for Culture for consideration and decision.
49. The Overview and Scrutiny Management Committee will monitor implementation of the recommendations with a review to be undertaken in 12 months.

**Report Author – Ceri Williams Scrutiny Officer**