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# **Culture and Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission**

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**Museum Service  
Vision & Strategic Priorities**

3<sup>rd</sup> April 2025

Lead director/officer: Mike Dalzell

## Useful information

- Ward(s) affected: All.
- Report author: Joanna Jones
- Author contact details: [Joanna.jones@leicester.gov.uk](mailto:Joanna.jones@leicester.gov.uk)
- Report version number: 1

### 1. Summary

The new Museums Service Vision & Strategic Priorities 2025-29 is to be implemented on 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025. A printed version of this is currently being developed.

The vision is a high-quality cost-effective museum service with fewer, but much improved buildings and collection displays resulting from very significant capital investment.

Including contributions from external funders more than £20m has been invested over the last decade, with a further £8.8m of investment underway and planned.

Investment of £411k has been secured from The National Lottery Heritage Fund for a development stage grant at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery.

Taken together this represents a total of £29.2m capital investment in the museum service.

The service has secured Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) investment every year since 2018 with funding in place until 2026. Investment between 2018-23 was £2m in total and for 2023-26 is £1.2m, giving a total investment figure of £3.2m. This funding is being used to develop and deliver a range of inclusive and accessible activities and programmes, including exhibitions, co production programmes, income generation, collections access, offsite museums activity and volunteer development.

The museum service will also continue to operate a mixed portfolio of free access and charged for sites that will be financially self-sustaining. We are concentrating significant capital investment at both the free flagship museum, Leicester Museum & Art Gallery and at museums which will be financially self-reliant (Jewry Wall and KRIII Visitor Centre). This ambition and investment will significantly improve the visitor experience at these museums and will increase access to collections. At the meeting there will be a slide deck presentation on progress with both the LMAG and Jewry Wall schemes.

There will be improved access to Leicester's social history collection through the creation of new Story of Leicester galleries at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery. A development stage National Lottery Heritage Fund grant has recently been secured for this project. New art galleries that will be fun, informative and interactive are currently being created at the site.

The museum service has been working to increase the level of activity it undertakes across the city beyond our museum sites. Through a hub and spoke model, museum services are being delivered outside of museum buildings and developing our non-traditional audiences, a core objective of our strategy. The museum service has already established a successful programme taking the museum and collections out into

communities outside of the city centre to reach non-traditional museum visitors and to make museums more accessible, for example, to Neighbourhood Centres, Libraries, shopping centres and festivals. There has been a 28% increase in offsite engagement from 61,609 in 2018/19 to 79,017 in 2023/24. These numbers are higher than at the sites where there will be operational changes. All activities are free to participate in and examples include the Doorstep Museums initiative in 2024 at The Brite Centre has engaged with 1,800 visitors and at St Barnabas Library with 500 people.

## **Arts & Museums Service Vision 2025-29**

- Connecting people & communities with the *Story of Leicester*, unearthing 2,000 years of the city's rich history & heritage.
- Inclusive museums & collections which reflect and share the lived experiences of our diverse local communities.
- Taking museums into communities to increase access and widen audiences.
- Creating exceptional visitor experiences through capital investment at Leicester Museum and Art Gallery & Jewry Wall.
- Using Leicester's global collections to play our part in addressing the climate crisis.
- Supporting the development of the city's future generations, sparking children & young people's imagination and curiosity, developing their skills & tackling the inequalities which many of them face.
- Developing the financial sustainability of both paid for and free museums.

## **Operational Changes**

Within the new vision we recognise the need to change how we deliver our service so we can continue to provide a high-quality museum function. Leicester Museums & Galleries currently runs 8 buildings and for a city of our size, this is a comparatively large number. Some are costly to maintain, have low usage and displays are relatively outdated, which impacts upon the visitor experience. The Service's long-term strategy is to realign resources to use them more efficient and develop the museum service, making it more relevant to Leicester people and better showcasing our history, community stories and world class collections.

**From 1<sup>st</sup> May 2025** the key changes will be:

- **Focusing delivery on key museum sites** (Leicester Museum & Art Gallery, Jewry Wall, King Richard III Visitor Centre and Leicester Guildhall).
- **Continued engagement outside of museum buildings**, making collections more accessible across the city.
- **Operational changes at 3 museum sites:**

**Abbey Pumping Station** – Reduction of opening days to peak visitor times. In 2023 32.5% (13,259) of visitors attended on event days which is the busiest period for this site.

Future opening days per year will be:

4 steam days, 16 railway days, 3 bookable Steam with the Team days and 13 Mondays during Leicester school holidays (excluding Christmas). This is a total of 36 days.

School visits will continue to be provided at a total 12 days per year in line with current provision. On average 426 school pupils visit per year.

**The total number of days of public access will be: 48 (Site: 36 days & school visits: 12 days).**

Access will be provided for the Leicester Museum Technology Association volunteers to continue their work programme on Mondays to ensure the volunteering programme continues and the working collections and beam engines are maintained.

**The total number of volunteer-only access days will be 37 per year** (On Monday school holiday days access will be provided to the volunteers. These days are not included in this figure because the site will be open to the public).

There is also the potential for other activities to be transferred from Belgrave Hall, e.g., the food fair and for other events to be developed. This would increase the number of public access days to the site.

- Visitor figures are forecast to be reduced from 41,000 to c13,400
- Number of school visits forecast to continue: 426
- **Total public access forecast: 13,426**

There is a revenue saving of £112k which will arise as a consequence of these changes.

**Newarke Houses Museum** – Reduction of opening days to Saturdays from May to August, providing access on the busiest day of the week during the summer school holiday period.

School visits will continue to be provided in line with current provision at 66 days per year. On average 1,757 school pupils visit per year.

**The total number of days of public access will be: 84 (Site: 18 days & school visits 66 days).**

- Visitor figures are forecast to be reduced from 41,000 to c3,000
- Number of school visits forecast to continue: 1,757
- **Total public access forecast: 4,757**

The revenue saving is £134k

Currently Newarke Houses offers access to important social history collections though some displays are now outdated. A key part of the rationale for investment at Leicester Museum & Art Gallery is to update and improve the interpretation and display of our social history

collections and make them available to more people via new Story of Leicester Galleries. The city's flagship museum, Leicester Museum & Art Gallery has 249,000 visitors per year compared to 41,000 at Newarke Houses Museum and following investment this is forecast to grow to 300,000.

**Belgrave Hall** – Suspension of the site as a heritage venue which is currently open c32 days per year. Colleagues in Estates and Building Services are exploring potential alternative uses for the site, and it is hoped that one can be found that would allow public access to continue in some way. This is the site with the lowest visitor figures at c9,000 per year. Popular events such as the food fair could be transferred to Abbey Pumping Station.

The revenue saving is £42k

**The total saving for all 3 sites is £288k. This contributes to the savings targets that are required of the Tourism, Culture and Inward Investment division to deliver the council's financial strategy.**

The rearrangement of the service is not an overall reduction of the museum service. Across all sites and for offsite activities our visitor figures in 2023/24 were 515,241 and once we have completed the capital improvement works at key sites, we anticipate this figure will increase to around 560,000. This includes an adjustment reflecting the changes at the above sites.

In order to implement the changes, we will be undertaking a staffing review of the Operations Team. It is expected that, with the number of vacancies we are carrying at present and the staffing requirement at Jewry Wall, we will be able to minimise the impact and find posts for all current staff.

## **2. Recommended actions/decision**

2.1 To note and comment on this report.

## **3. Scrutiny / stakeholder engagement**

Stakeholders have been informed of the operational changes.

## **5. Timescale**

19<sup>th</sup> February – Budget approved by Full Council.

3<sup>rd</sup> March – Meetings with funders – Arts Council England (ACE) & National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF).

13<sup>th</sup> March – Arts & Museums Service Staff Briefing.

13<sup>th</sup> & 14<sup>th</sup> March – Stakeholders notified of operational changes.

3<sup>rd</sup> April – Present new Museums Vision & Strategic Priorities to Culture & Neighbourhoods Scrutiny Commission.

April – Commence Organisational Review.

1<sup>st</sup> May – Implement operational changes - new opening hours.

## 6. Financial, legal, equalities, climate emergency and other implications

### 6.1 Financial implications

The budget for 2025/26 set a target saving of £2.3m for Tourism, Culture & Inward Investment, to be achieved by 2027/28. The report proposes actions to make savings of £288k in a full year, which will contribute to this target. The breakdown, and the profile of the saving, is provided in the table below:

	2025/26	2026/27	2027/28	Full Year
Net Saving	£168k	£288k	£288k	£288k

Stuart McAvoy – Head of Finance  
14<sup>th</sup> March 2025

### 6.2 Legal implications

The commissioning or loans of works of art to the Museums and other visitor venues including expenditure on transportation, storage and insurance costs will need to be undertaken on a competitive and value for money basis wherever possible taking into consideration protection of intellectual property and ownership rights and social value issues and in compliance with the Council's own internal Contract Procedure Rules.

Signed: *Steven Lowry-Smith*

Steven Lowry-Smith - Contracts & Procurement Solicitor  
(Commercial) Ext. 37 1395

Dated: 18 March 2025

(Legal Commercial).

### 6.3 Equalities implications

Under the Equality Act 2010, public authorities have a Public Sector Equality Duty (PSED) which means that, in carrying out their functions, they have a duty to pay due regard to the need to eliminate unlawful discrimination, harassment and victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't and to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. · Protected Characteristics under the Equality Act 2010 are age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage and civil partnership, pregnancy and maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

This paper provides an overview of the Museums Service Vision & Strategic Priorities 2025-29. Initiatives that aim to create experiences that involve and inspire residents and visitors, sharing the city's significant collections, that celebrate the stories of Leicester's diverse communities and the unique places, art and heritage which shape the city's identity and showcasing these to the world should lead to positive impacts for people from across all protected characteristics. Involvement in art, heritage and culture has the potential to enrich people's lives, having accessible experiences should help to foster good relations between people who share a protected characteristic and those who don't. To ensure that equalities considerations have been taken into account in regards to the changes at the sites mentioned in the paper, equalities impacts have been undertaken. It is important that as the changes outlined will also affect staffing, we work in conjunction with HR in line with the Organisational Review Policy and Procedure.

Equalities Officer, Surinder Singh Ext 37 4148

#### 6.4 Climate Emergency implications

The operation of the council's portfolio of museums and art galleries, and the wider outreach work to take the service out into communities, generates carbon emissions through the use of gas, district heating and electricity to heat and power the buildings, and the use of diesel and petrol for transport.

In 2023/24 the emissions from operating the museum buildings - excluding Jewry Wall, which was closed for refurbishment and the Euston Street Store, are estimated to have been 347 tonnes of carbon dioxide equivalent (CO<sub>2</sub>e). Of that figure, Abbey Pumping Station, Newarke Houses Museum and Belgrave Hall accounted for 223 tonnes. The closure of Belgrave Hall and the reduction in opening hours of Abbey Pumping Station and Newarke Houses Museum will therefore reduce the council's carbon footprint and energy costs. The exact level of reduction will depend on the baseline level of energy use needed to maintain appropriate temperatures and systems on the non-opening days. The Arts & Museums Service should work with Estates & Building Services to ensure that heating and other controls are adjusted when the new operating hours are introduced, to optimise the energy and carbon savings while maintaining the buildings and collections. Periodic checks should also be made to ensure that these adjustments are achieving the expected results.

Duncan Bell, Change Manager (Climate Emergency). Ext. 37 2249.  
20<sup>th</sup> March 2025.

6.5 Other implications (You will need to have considered other implications in preparing this report. Please indicate which ones apply?)

None

**8. Is this a private report (If so, please indicate the reasons and state why it is not in the public interest to be dealt with publicly)?**

No

**10. Is this a “key decision”? If so, why?**

No