

**CANNOCK CHASE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

**CABINET**

**16 NOVEMBER 2006**

**REPORT OF CHIEF EXECUTIVE**

**PORTFOLIO LEADER – ACCESS TO SKILLS & ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT**

**CHASE HERITAGE TRAIL - TEMPORARY REDUCTION IN MUSEUM SERVICE**

**1. Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To seek approval to reduce the level of service at the Museum of Cannock Chase for the duration of the planned refurbishment as part of the Chase Heritage Trail project. The reduction would close the facility to all casual visitors from 29<sup>th</sup> January, 2007 – 4<sup>th</sup> May, 2007 and 4<sup>th</sup> September 2007 – 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007.

**2. Recommendation**

- 2.1 That Cabinet grant permission to close the Museum of Cannock Chase to casual visitors for the two periods of the refurbishment work as part of the Chase Heritage Trail project as detailed in 1.1.

**3. Key Issue – Museum Refurbishment**

- 3.1 As part of the Chase Heritage Trail project, (summary details are reproduced at Annex 1), a new extension at the front of the Museum will house a new reception, gift shop and tourist information point. The extension is planned to be built between 29<sup>th</sup> January and 4<sup>th</sup> May 2007. The fit out of the extension and the installation of the new Local History Gallery in the former shop area will take place between 4<sup>th</sup> September and 19<sup>th</sup> November 2007. As the work is to take place at the access point to the Museum, there will be no reception point for visitors or access to any of the downstairs facilities, including the toilets.

**4. Key Issue – Health & Safety Implications**

- 4.1 A site visit by the Health & Safety Officer in August 2006 resulted in his recommendation that the Museum be closed to casual visitors for these two periods of work, not only to ensure the health and safety of visitors, but to ensure that the contractors are not impeded in their work, hence resulting in faster completion of the works. It is recommended that the entire front of the Museum and car park are sealed off to create a building compound which will mean that the front of the building will be inaccessible to all except the contractors.

**5. Key Issue – Maintaining Other Elements of the Service**

- 5.1 Although it is proposed that the Museum will be closed to casual visitors during these two periods, the Museum will continue to offer as many services as possible. The education service will be largely unaffected, as most of the educational activities can take place in the Museum's outbuildings. Tourist Information enquiries will be dealt with by telephone and e-mail and research enquiries can continue by prior appointment. Local History publications and other shop items will be available by post. In addition, the refurbishment works have been scheduled to take place at the least busy times of year to reduce the disruption to the service as much as possible. The work will take place in two phases, during Spring and Autumn, to ensure that the Museum can open during its busy Summer season. It is proposed that during the Summer season, the completed but empty extension houses a display about the Chase Heritage Trail Project to inform the public of the future developments and attractions.

REPORT INDEX

Background	Section 1
Details of Matters to be Considered i.e. Options Considered, Outcome of Consultations etc.	Section 2
Contribution to CHASE	Section 3
Section 17 (Crime Prevention) Implications	Section 4
Human Rights Act Implications	Section 5
Data Protection Act Implications	Section 6
Risk Management Implications	Section 7
Legal Implications	Section 8
Financial Implications	Section 9
Resource Implications	Section 10
Conclusion	Section 11
List of Background Papers	Section 12
Annexes to the Report:	
Project Detail – Trail and Museum	Annex 1
Outline Project Timetable	Annex 2

Section 1

Background

Since the successful application to the Heritage Lottery Fund in 2003 for the Chase Heritage Trail, the Museum has been carefully planning how it will best deal with the disruption to its services during the refurbishment. These major works will have a significant impact on the operation of the Museum.

As the works are to take place at the main entrance to the Museum and in the Reception area, which is the hub of the building, it became immediately obvious that the public would not be able to use the downstairs of the Museum for the duration of the works. The most serious effect of this would be that there would be no toilets on site for visitors and no Reception point. The Museum would not be able to provide access for disabled visitors, and the security of the collections would be compromised by the use of any other access points which are not designated as public entrances.

The visit by the Health & Safety officer confirmed that all unsupervised visitors (ie. visitors not in organised groups) would be too difficult to control and should therefore be kept as far as possible away from the building works. Not only would this ensure their safety, but would mean that the contractors could work uninterrupted, resulting in faster completion of the work and ensure that the project plan is adhered to.

As the Museum is constantly open to the public, it has not been possible to carry out much needed remedial work in the galleries, such as decorating, replacement of the worn out flooring and redisplay of some of the galleries. This proposal would allow the Museum to work on the content and materials for the new gallery and shop and to prepare the rest of the building for the re-opening after the refurbishment.

One of the main considerations for staff was to maintain the Museum education service, which has a national reputation. Most schools embed a visit to the Museum into their yearly or two-yearly programme, and to disrupt this for a year would likely mean losing a great deal of schools business permanently. The planned schedule of works will mean the least disruption to the education service and will enable the education programme to continue uninterrupted.

Whilst closure to casual visitors will result in a short term drop in visitor numbers and shop income, this should be more than compensated for when the work is completed and the new facilities opened. The extensive publicity resulting from the Chase Heritage Trail opening should encourage many new visitors and their associated spend.

Section 2

Details of Matters to be Considered

The matter requiring consideration at this point is the application to close the museum to casual visitors for the duration of the building and fitting out works as part of the Chase Heritage Trail project.

Section 3

Contribution to CHASE

Whilst the reduction in service will have a temporary impact on the contribution of the Museum to the CHASE objectives, the proposal will ensure that the work to complete the new facilities will be completed more quickly and safely. These additional, extended and updated community facilities as part of the Chase Heritage Trail will support the aim of the Council to develop a healthier and more active community. Features to enhance the feeling of safety and inclusion have been incorporated into the project. The facilities will enable greater use by various age groups within the community.

Section 4

Section 17 Implications

There are no Section 17 implications.

Section 5

Human Rights Act Implications

There are no Human Rights Act implications.

Section 6

Data Protection Implications

There are no identified implications in respect of the Data Protection Act.

Section 7

Risk Management Implications

The main risk from this action would be the possible loss of visitor numbers and related income.

The loss of visitor numbers should be more than offset by the interest that will be generated through the Chase Heritage Trail project and the publicity that will accompany it. It is expected that the number of visitors coming to the Museum after the refurbishment will increase as a result, and their associated spend. The work has been programmed to take place in the quietest periods for casual visitors, so the busy Summer season won't be affected. It is not possible to estimate the amount of spend by casual visitors in the shop, as this is not recorded separately from that spent by schools. In any event, the Museum will offer the sale of its local history publications and other items by mail.

The work has been planned so that the schools programme will not be affected, so schools income will be generated as normal. Although there will be no gift shop for some time, the schools will be offered the opportunity to pre-order purchases, which many of them already do. It is therefore unlikely that this proposal will result in loss of income from the schools.

**Section 8**

**Legal Implications**

The Council has approved the requisite works to the Museum. Given the nature of the works have been assessed and in order for the works to be completed within the timescale required and carried out in accordance with necessary health and safety requirements, the museum should close to all casual visitors.

The Council owes a duty of care to all persons it allows into the Museum. The Council is on notice of the health and safety risks of the works and the advice given by the health and safety officer relating to those risks. There are also resource implications in that staff would be required to undertake greater duties to ensure visitors are safe and do not, inter alia, inadvertently wander into unsafe areas. Further training may therefore need to be provided to staff in identifying and dealing with potential health and safety issues that they observe or perceive.

Should the Council decide not to heed the advice of the health and safety officer and a visitor to the Museum is injured, the Council may be held liable for any injuries sustained. Should any incident result in serious injury or death, then it will be inevitable that there would be a thorough investigation by the Health and Safety Executive.

Whilst the Council may be able to seek an indemnity from the contractor in relation to any losses incurred following any incident, issues concerning liability could still nonetheless arise. Moreover, the Council should not ignore the potential adverse publicity that could follow.

It is also important to note that allowing the Museum to remain open could result in the completion of the works being delayed. The Council could in turn expose itself to additional costs for the works and possibly a breach of contract claim for frustrating the completion of the works. Conversely, any legitimate claim the Council may have for breach of contract relating to delays in the completion of the works could be undermined by counter arguments concerning the cause of the delay.

In summary, the Council should have regard to the advice received and give serious consideration to the implementation to the recommendations, as failure to do so could expose the Council to liability.

**Section 9**

**Financial Implications**

Income will be lost from visitors using the gift shop, catering facilities and room hire during this period. Net income of approximately £4,000 is received for each period of closure and although the amount generated by casual visitors cannot be determined every effort is being made to ensure that the schools element of such income is maintained. Museum staff consider that any loss of income will not be material and should be offset by increased income from increased visitor interest when the new facility opens. Entrance for visitors to the Museum is free.

**Section 10**

**Resource Implications**

Although the Museum will be closed to casual visitors, it will still continue to offer most of its usual services, such as the schools programme, tourist information, enquiries, research etc, so most employees will be working as normal.

Finance has been approved to engage the Museum Collections Officer for extra hours in order to work on the creation of the new gallery funded by Heritage Lottery, but in general, staff will absorb the tasks related to the refurbishment into their usual working hours. Closure to casual visitors will therefore mean that the Visitor Services Team will be able to devote time to researching, planning, ordering and purchasing items for the new shop and researching information for tourist information point and the proposed touch-screen information point. If the Museum was to remain open, it would be difficult for the staff to complete these tasks alongside their usual duties.

**Section 11**

**Conclusion**

That Cabinet consider all the information provided within the report, and determine if permission to temporarily reduce the museum service as described should be granted.

**Section 12**

**Background Papers**

None.

**Annexes**

Annex 1 – Project Detail – Trail and Museum

Annex 2 – Outline Project Timetable

Annex 1

Chase Heritage Trail (Heritage Lottery Fund Project Reference – HF-01-00431/2)

Summary

The Chase Heritage Trail is a proposed prestigious long distance cycle route / footpath, crossing the Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty linking the towns of Cannock, Hednesford and Rugeley, and passing near to sites of historical interest (nodes) along the way. One of the nodes is the Museum of Cannock Chase where it is intended to extend the gallery space. The construction of the trail and extension at the Museum offers the opportunity for tourist potential and associated income generation for the District.

The scheme has been developed in partnership with Staffordshire County Council and the Forestry Commission and is supported by funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund, Staffordshire Environmental Fund, Cannock Chase District Council and the partners. Contributions from Section 106 accounts have been identified as part of Cannock Chase Council's contribution.

The concept of the Chase Heritage Trail has been developed over a number of years, and the HLF grant was awarded in 2004.

The Trail

The Trail is a cycleway / footpath linking the major towns in the District. It is approximately 10 miles long, and presently comprises 65 separate sections:

- i. 38 sections traverse land owned by Staffordshire County Council;
- ii. 14 sections traverse land owned by Cannock Chase District Council;
- iii. 7 sections traverse land owned by the Forestry Commission; and,
- iv. 6 sections traverse land in private ownership.

Every opportunity has been taken to route the trail away from the highway.

Staffordshire County Council will have responsibility for trail construction and future maintenance of the trail on all sections of the trail traversing land in its ownership. Some of these sections are on the highway and the others are on SCC-Countryside and SCC-Education land. Similarly the Forestry Commission will have responsibility for trail construction and future maintenance of the trail on all sections of the trail traversing land in its ownership. Finally, Cannock Chase District Council will have responsibility for trail construction and future maintenance of the trail on all sections of the trail traversing land in its ownership and also on those sections of the trail on land in private ownership, other than public footpaths.



The health benefits of this project are well known, and the project provides a unique opportunity to undertake such exercise whilst at the same time giving access to an historical educational experience by pointing out the historical landmarks along the trail. There is also potential for those who are excluded from other forms of recreational activity to benefit from the free trail, as well as the tourist potential afforded by such a large HLF funded project. The trail will be built to effect physical access through walking, cycling and wheelchair access. It will offer the opportunity for walking and safe cycling with the promotion of healthy lifestyles. The trail offers the opportunity for gentle exercise, a benefit for all, in an area with a high incidence of cardiac disease.

There will be spurs from the trail to three main visitor centres:

- i. Birches Valley visitors centre
- ii. Marquis Drive visitors centre
- iii. Museum of Cannock Chase

It is intended that IT equipment and electronic educational material will be installed at each of the three main visitor centres.

Sites of historical interest (nodes) include Conduit Head, St Luke's Church, Our lady of Lourdes Church, the Museum of Cannock Chase, Brindley Pools, Slitting Mill Ironworks, Rugeley Clock Tower, St Augustine's Church and Rugeley Chancel Ruins.

The trail will be supported by various types of interpretational signage including single and double sided panels on posts, single sided panels on lecterns in rural and AONB areas, waymarkers and mileposts. In addition, there will be three main information boards, one at Cannock to mark the start and end point for the trail, one at Rugeley to mark the start and end point for the trail and one in the middle at Hednesford.

A package of route variations to enhance the trail is currently under consideration.

### **The Museum**

One of the key project objectives is to enhance the Museum of Cannock Chase which is at the centre of the trail, through the creation of a new local history gallery and an enlarged reception and information point. The project will revitalise and enhance the Museum, providing a focal point for the area's rich industrial heritage.

In addition to the collections currently on display, the Museum holds many items in storage. Due to the limitations in space it has not been possible to display these items to the public. A permanent local history gallery will be established in the space freed up by the building of a new reception area. The Museum has limited space and has thus far not been able to fully reflect the local history of the area. The provision of the gallery will enable the museum to further its mission of providing a sense of place and allow a greater percentage of the reserve collections to be available to visitors. Additional gallery space in the main body of the building will allow previously inaccessible artefacts to be displayed using a variety of modern and sophisticated interpretational techniques.

As part of the planned improvements to the Museum and its incorporation into the heritage trail, there will be new and upgraded interpretation to the level now expected by an increasingly sophisticated audience. This will include the use of new technology to provide information about the trail, conservation and the sustainability of the environment.

In addition, as part of this scheme, it is intended that the front of the Museum is extended to house a new reception and Tourist Information Point. The Museum element of the project is integral to the Chase Heritage Trail project, providing a base for the physical and intellectual exploration of the area's heritage. The improved reception and Tourist Information Point will provide orientation for visitors from outside the area, thus increasing accessibility to heritage sites in and beyond the District boundaries.

Planning Permission for the museum element of the scheme and associated landscaping was granted on 07/11/2003 and Building Regulation Approval was obtained on 28/07/2005.

Chase Heritage Trail – Outline Project TimetableTrail

	<u>Milestone</u>	<u>Date</u>
1.	Trail variations agreed, and revised definitive route agreed and costed by the Quantity Surveyor.	October 2006
2.	Definitive route signed of by Heritage Lottery Fund & Bucknall Austin	November 2006
3.	Commencement of Planning Permissions	January 2007
4.	Commencement of Cycleway Orders	January 2007
5.	Commencement of CCDC, SCC and FC Trail Construction works	April 2007
6.	Interpretation Signage Specification complete	June 2007
7.	Signage Development Contractor appointed	September 2007
8.	Completion of CCDC, SCC and FC Trail Construction works	December 2007
9.	Signage Development and Installation complete	March 2008
10.	Opening Ceremony	April 2008

Museum

	<u>Milestone</u>	<u>Date</u>
1.	Researcher Appointed	January 2007
2.	Extension Build Contractor Appointed	January 2007
3.	Extension Build Works Complete	Early May 2007
4.	Fitting Out Works Contractor Appointed	July 2007
5.	Gallery Design Complete	October 2007
6.	Commencement of Museum Fitting Out Works	October 2007
7.	Museum Fitting Out Works Complete	December 2007
8.	IT Installation Complete	December 2007
9.	Opening Ceremony (Mini – if required)	January 2008
10.	Opening Ceremony (together with Trail)	April 2008