

## Gift of Heritage Quest Centre site to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd

Council, Item 11

<b>Committee:</b>	<b>Full Council</b>	<b>Agenda Item</b>
<b>Date:</b>	<b>22 July 2008</b>	<b>11</b>
<b>Title:</b>	<b>Gift of Heritage Quest Centre site, Thaxted Road to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd</b>	
<b>Author:</b>	<b>Catherine Nicholson and Carolyn Wingfield</b>	Item for decision?

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### Summary

Council is asked to approve the gift of land for the Heritage Quest Centre (HQC) off Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden, formerly made to the Heritage Quest Trust Ltd, to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd to facilitate construction of the Heritage Quest Centre. The Museum Service is preparing to start the Heritage Quest Centre Project, having secured a grant of £976,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund, but subject to completion of fund-raising and of legal processes relating to the creation of Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. The Heritage Quest Centre Project and its history are summarised below (Background, 1-11) to bring all members up to date with essential information on the Project, and the reasons for the recommendations are explained (Situation, 12 – 18).

### Recommendations

1. Council approve the gift of the land for the Heritage Quest Centre, Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd., as soon as the project is able to formally commence.
2. Use of the site to deposit road sweepings is to cease and sweepings deposited to be removed by the Council before ownership of the site is transferred to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd.

### Background Papers

Report *Formation of a Charitable Company limited by Guarantee for Museum's Heritage Quest Centre* and minutes of Council meeting 26 April 2006, item C118

Minutes of Resource Centre Project Team

Business Plan for Heritage Quest Centre Project

Minutes of Community Committee, 15 March 2007; Operations Committee, 22 March 2007; Council 17 April 2007.

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### Impact

Communication/Consultation	Extensive consultation with partners, funders and local community; audience development study 2005 funded by HLF.
Community Safety	Provision of pedestrian access to site included in project
Equalities	None
Finance	Fund-raising to be completed before HQC project commences.
Human Rights	None
Legal implications	None
Sustainability	Improves sustainability of Museum Service with new energy-efficient facility for reserve collections; allows more efficient use of more collections and develops audiences; permits future improvements to Museum
Ward-specific impacts	Improves access to collections and related information for all wards. Outreach programme will target wards on and south of A120, as well as running events in HQC
Workforce/Workplace	Museum Service staff and volunteers will work at HQC when required, but no significant change from current situation which requires working at off-site store.

### Background – summary of the Project's Development

1. The core aim of the Project is audience development through improved access to, and new uses of, the reserve collections of Saffron Walden Museum. The Heritage Quest Centre itself is a purpose-built resource centre to store the reserve collections of geology, archaeology, local and natural history, and to provide researchers and visitors with greater access to and enjoyment of Uttlesford's heritage. Digitisation of collections records will extend access to on-line users. An extended outreach and education programme will take the Museum Service into the community across Uttlesford, improving access to the service for hard-to-reach audiences.
2. The Heritage Quest Centre, on Thaxted Road, Saffron Walden, will replace the Museum's current off-site store at the Council's Newport Depot. The 1835

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Museum has long been inadequate for housing collections and a series of *ad hoc* stores (Town Hall attics, Audley End Stables) were used until they had to be vacated in the mid-1990s. At that time the storage unit at the Newport Depot was made available as a temporary solution, but has been condemned by successive external advisers for its inadequacies of space, access, security and poor environment, and has been prone to flooding from the nearby River Cam. A 1995 Feasibility Study of the Museum Service, commissioned by the Council from an independent consultant, identified the need to resolve facilities for collections as the key to improving the Service. This has been taken up in the Museum Service's successive Forward Plans for 2001-04 and 2006-(ongoing) as the project has developed.

3. The Museum Service Forward Plan 2006 sets out two stages of development for the Service, the Heritage Quest Centre Project being Stage I. Provision of the Centre, to resolve mounting problems with collections and inadequate facilities, is a necessary precursor to Stage II. Stage II involves improvements to the Museum itself (funded by the Museum Society) with the aim of increasing visitors to, and use of, the Museum and Castle site, thereby increasing opportunities to improve income generation.
4. The Heritage Quest Centre Project will address inadequacies and restrictions imposed by current poor facilities which are increasingly restricting the Museum Service. The Project will include rationalisation of older collections as well as allowing important new discoveries, such as archaeology from recent developments, to be preserved and made accessible to the public.
5. The project aims are:
  - 1) Opening up access to the Museum's collections for all ages and interests, and offering formal and informal learning opportunities appropriate for our audiences.
  - 2) Promoting public awareness, enjoyment and knowledge of the natural, historical and archaeological heritage of Uttlesford district.
  - 3) Fostering a wider sense of local community identity in our heritage, in established and new local communities.
6. The target audiences for the project are young people (aged 16-29), family groups and rural communities across Uttlesford, particularly parishes distant from Saffron Walden and new communities in rural areas along the new A120 corridor. Two other audiences also receive special consideration: special interest groups - individuals and societies with an interest in subjects covered by the collections - and schools. New school loan kits will enhance the Museum's small schools loan collection and new sessions based on handling collections will be developed at the Centre.
7. The Project comprises three programmes, running concurrently, and provides three project staff for three years to work alongside the Museum team. The capital programme (£1,277,290.00) is concerned with the construction and fitting out of Heritage Quest Centre, including returning site to chalk grassland (conservation) and use of energy-efficient sources. The collections programme (£106,825.00) will sort, pack and move over 100,000 objects and

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specimens into the HQC, cataloguing over 50,000 on computer. The outreach programme (£179,305.00) will run events and activities using collections, at the HQC and at other venues around Uttlesford, to develop audiences and increase public benefit of collections. The total project cost, including 10% contingency, is £1.7 million. The construction and fitting out of the Centre will be managed by former Council architect David Demery, working in liaison with the Curator, who will be the project manager.

8. The Project spans nearly three and a half years in total. It will start with a five-month preliminary phase (tenders for construction contracts and recruitment of project staff), followed by a three-year programme of work for the collections and outreach programme running concurrently with the building of the Centre, which should take about one year to complete and prepare for opening (current estimate late in 2009). The collections and outreach programmes will then operate from the Centre until the project ends in late 2011 / early 2012.
9. After the Project, the Museum and HQC will be run by the current Museum staff team, and the three extra project-funded posts will finish at the end of the project. The old off-site store at the Newport Depot will be vacated by the Museum for other Council uses. The Centre is designed to be energy-efficient and will come into operation around the end of 2009 / beginning of 2010, therefore its first full year will be 2010/11. Running costs will be largely offset by transfer of the budgets from the vacated Newport store supplemented by income generated from public tours and activities at the Centre. Thus total estimated operating costs for the Centre of around £10,250 would be reduced to around £2,250 net, but officers are investigating a further reduction, by involving voluntary groups in grounds maintenance. Against this small cost should be weighed the other long-term benefits of the project in audience development, more efficient use of collections, unlocking the Museum for Stage II improvements for visitors, and saving on the 'hidden costs' of the old Newport store (consequences of flood damage in wasted staff time and conservation costs, previous failure to qualify for grant schemes).
10. The Heritage Quest Centre will be owned by Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd and leased to the Council to operate as part of the Museum Service, just as the Museum buildings and collections are owned by the Society but leased to the Council to operate. The Heritage Quest Centre therefore fits into the existing management and governance arrangements for the Museum Service.
11. Before the project can start, funding needs to be in place and the Museum Society must complete legal transfer of its assets to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. Of the £1.7 million required, £1.5 million has already been secured (£976,500 from the Heritage Lottery Fund and just over £500,000 raised in cash and in kind from local, regional and national sources). Of the remaining £200,000 approx. to be found, applications are in hand to landfill operators for £100,000-worth of landfill tax grants and every effort is being made by officers to find the remaining £100,000 from other grants, donations or sponsorship. An exact start date therefore cannot be set at present but is anticipated in the autumn of 2008. The project can start only when the

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Council, Museum Society and HLF are all satisfied that adequate funds have been secured and have signed the 'Permission to Start' form.

### Situation

- 12 To facilitate fund-raising for the Heritage Quest Centre, in 2006 the Council agreed, with Saffron Walden Museum Society, to create a new charitable company limited by guarantee. This new company, the Heritage Quest Trust Ltd, was to raise money for the new Heritage Quest Centre which it would own, and the Council also agreed that the site off Thaxted Road would be gifted by the Council to the Heritage Quest Trust Ltd for the purpose of constructing the Heritage Quest Centre as soon as it has obtained charitable status and the necessary funds had been raised. The provision of the site for the Heritage Quest Centre formed part of the Council's contribution to the project in the application to the Heritage Lottery Fund and therefore counts as part of the matching funding for the HLF grant.
- 13 Subsequent difficulties in registering the new Heritage Quest Trust Ltd with the Charity Commission have led to an alternative course being taken, by which the Saffron Walden Museum Society has now become a company limited by guarantee and has successfully re-registered with the Charity Commission as Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd. This enables the Museum Society to take on ownership, and therefore raise funding for, the Heritage Quest Centre, and the Heritage Quest Trust Ltd becomes redundant. Management arrangements will be simplified as the Heritage Quest Centre once built will be leased back by the Museum Society to the Council to operate under the same agreement as currently applies to the existing Museum buildings, as explained in 10 above.
- 14 The Council is now asked to confirm gift of the land off Thaxted Road to Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd (company registration number 6469141, registered charity 1123209).
- 15 The Council has the power to dispose of land in any manner they wish and in this case the proposal is to dispose of it for no consideration. The only constraint is that any disposal must be for the best consideration reasonably obtainable, unless the Secretary of State consents to the sale. However, that consent is not required for a sale at less than best value if the purpose for which the land is to be disposed is likely to contribute to the achievement of the promotion or improvement of the economic, social or environmental well being of the local authority's area or part of it, and the difference in value is less than £2 million.
- 16 The land was valued by the District Valuer on 24 July 2007 at £300,000, and it is unlikely the value will have risen much since then, and certainly not above the £2 million threshold. The Heritage Quest Centre becomes part of the Museum Service and will enhance the public service it can provide. It will also turn a brownfield site which is currently used for the depositing street sweepings into a public amenity. The land is being disposed of for the

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purpose of enabling the development to the Heritage Quest Centre and would seem to be contributing to the promotion and improvement of the social and environmental wellbeing of the area.

- 17 The transfer of the land would include a restriction limiting its use to that of the Heritage Quest Centre.
- 18 At present the site off Thaxted Road continues to be used by the Council for depositing road sweepings. Before ownership of the site is transferred to Saffron Walden Museum Society, it is necessary for the deposition of road sweepings to cease and for deposited material to be removed. This cannot be dealt with either as part of the Lottery-funded project or separately by the Museum Society, which as a charity cannot legally undertake clearance of local authority's waste.

### Risk Analysis

<b>Risk</b>	<b>Likelihood</b>	<b>Impact</b>	<b>Mitigating actions</b>
Failure to complete matching funding for project	Low	High	Transfer of site to Museum Society will be made only when all funding has been secured and Permission to Start project has been signed by Council, Society and HLF
Delay to start and implementation of project arising from status and current state of site	Medium	Medium	Recommendations in this report take necessary steps to confirm transfer of site to Museum Society and to ensure recent road sweepings have been cleared before site ownership is transferred