

Committee: Cabinet

Date: Monday, 18
December 2023

Title: Saffron Walden Museum Interim Forward Plan

Portfolio Holder: Cllr Maggie Sutton
Portfolio Holder for Communities and Local
Partnerships

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Key decision: No

Summary

1. This report presents the Interim Forward Plan 2023-25 for Saffron Walden Museum. The plan has been prepared as part of the museum's Accreditation submission to Arts Council England and requires formal Cabinet approval.
2. The Museum Management Working Group has considered the Interim Forward Plan and recommends Cabinet approves it.

Recommendations

3. That Cabinet approves the Interim Forward Plan.

Financial Implications

4. None

Background Papers

5. None

Impact

- 6.

Communication/Consultation	The Interim Forward Plan has been considered by the Museum Management Working Group prior to its submission to Cabinet
Community Safety	None
Equalities	None
Health and Safety	None

Human Rights/Legal Implications	None
Sustainability	None
Ward-specific impacts	None
Workforce/Workplace	The Interim Forward Plan sets out key objectives for the museum's staff

Situation

7. Saffron Walden Museum is one of the earliest purpose-built museums in the country. It was built by Lord Braybrooke for the Saffron Walden Natural History Society, of which Saffron Walden Museum Society is the successor organisation. The museum opened in 1835.
8. The building and its collections are owned by the Society and Uttlesford District Council runs the service under a Museum Management Agreement and associated leases between the Society and the Council. The Council meets day-to-day running costs, the Society funds acquisitions for the collections and collections-related projects.
9. The collections are generally recognised as outstanding for a district museum, due to their breadth and quality. The focus is on the history and natural environment of north-west Essex, but there are important historic collections, especially world cultures and some worldwide natural history. There are an estimated 175,000 objects and specimens in the collection.
10. The museum, like many others, is accredited by Arts Council England. Periodically all museums and galleries in the scheme must reapply and Arts Council England has contacted Saffron Walden Museum to request it now does so, with an application deadline of 12 January 2024.
11. The Museum Accreditation scheme is the UK industry standard for museums and galleries. It tells everyone involved with a museum that they're doing the right things to help people to engage with collections and protect them for the future. The Museum Accreditation scheme does this by making sure museums are governed appropriately.
12. The scheme exists to encourage all museums and galleries to meet an agreed standard in:
 - How they are run
 - How they manage their collections
 - How they engage with their users
13. It builds people's confidence in how museums manage collections in trust for society, how they manage public resources and reinforces a shared, ethical way of doing things for everyone involved in running a museum.

14. Accreditation covers all types and sizes of museums and galleries and there are currently more than 1,700 museums participating in the scheme across the UK.
15. Saffron Walden Museum is overdue an accreditation assessment, with the current accreditation being awarded back in 2015. Nationally, the accreditation process was severely delayed due to the Covid pandemic. The museum has now however been contacted by Arts Council England and must submit a suite of documents by 12 January 2024.
16. One of the key documents against which the Museum Service will be assessed is the Forward Plan. This sets out the museum's core aims and objectives and must have formal approval - in the case of Saffron Walden Museum by Cabinet.
17. The Interim Forward Plan appended to this report reflects the current position with regard to the museum; acknowledging the difficult financial position Uttlesford District Council faces over the next few years. The previous Forward Plan promoted a large-scale development project which would have required Lottery funding. For the time being this has been paused in recognition of the need instead to try to find a long-term sustainable future for the service.
18. The Interim Forward Plan, prepared by the Interim Curator, sets out the service's aims and values along with an action plan detailing the actions the museum team will carry out in order to meet those aims.
19. Cabinet Members should note that the likely outcome of this accreditation process is a Provisional Award rather than full Accreditation. This is due to the current uncertainty with regard to future arrangements for the museum.
20. Should a Provisional Award prove to be the outcome, Arts Council England would give a deadline, usually in 12 months' time, to provide clarity on the museum's future funding and governance and resubmit a longer-range forward plan.

Risk Analysis

21.

Risk	Likelihood	Impact	Mitigating actions
The application for Accreditation is not successful	2	3	The Interim Forward Plan clearly sets out the direction of travel to 2025, though its short-term nature may result in a provisional, rather than full, award

1 = Little or no risk or impact

2 = Some risk or impact – action may be necessary.

3 = Significant risk or impact – action required

4 = Near certainty of risk occurring, catastrophic effect or failure of project.