

## **ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT COMMITTEE**

**27 MARCH 2019**

### **NATIONAL CIVIL WAR CENTRE – NEWARK MUSEUM UPDATE REPORT**

#### **1.0 Purpose of Report**

- 1.1 To provide Members with an overview of the performance and development of the National Civil War Centre, set within the context of its integration with the Palace Theatre and Visitor Information Services.

#### **2.0 Background Information**

- 2.1 The NCWC and Palace Theatre became a fully integrated offer in March 2016, additionally incorporating the Tourist Information Centre service. The purpose of the integration was to improve sustainability through staff and operational efficiencies, to work more holistically to provide a coherent heritage and cultural service offer (and in doing so improving customer satisfaction and footfall), and to establish a launch pad for a visitor dispersal strategy via a Destination Management Plan.
- 2.4 The Council has now adopted a Destination Management Plan for Newark, which identified the potential of the site to support the wider visitor economy and recommended that Newark Castle should be incorporated into the Business Unit. This change takes effect for the 2019/20 financial year.
- 2.4 In November 2017, following much work with the Arts Council, the NCWC was awarded nationally-styled accreditation at the first attempt. The accreditation ensures the continued branding as a national centre, solidifies the centre's reputation and increases the profile and importantly assists in building partnerships with loaning institutions, national museums and academics.
- 2.5 Following two years of operation, which includes the integration works and the departure of the previous Business Manager an external heritage expert was commissioned to undertake a review of the NCWC in 2017. Members may recall that this expert was a former Deputy Director of the Science Museum in London. The report endorsed the business plan, activities programme and improvements being developed by the then interim Business Manager and provided benchmarking comparative data which demonstrated that the current levels of achievement in visitor numbers and visitor experience were in line with their expectations.
- 2.6 In 2017/18 the integrated business unit of Heritage, Culture and Visitors (across the Palace and NCWC) met its budgetary requirements. The impact of the site in that year can be summarised as:
- Visitor Footfall of over **85,000**
  - Number of children and young people engaging with heritage and cultural activity **15,099**
  - Number of hours of volunteer activity **9,277**
  - Income generation of **£1.1million**

### 3.0 Overview

- 3.1 This review will assess the visitor experience, visitor numbers and service delivery outcomes for the NCWC, and will also assess the wider impact of the combined Heritage, Culture and Visitors business unit and the anticipated financial position for 2018-19.

#### Visitor Experience

- 3.2 The NCWC is positively received in both social media and through visitor specific surveys and evaluation, as referenced below:

Trip Advisor: 4 star rating (out of 5), based on 391 reviews  
77% rate the NCWC as 'excellent' or 'very good'

Facebook: 5,270 current likes, the most popular demographic groups are women aged 35-44 (14.5%) and men are 45-54 (13.7%)  
Posts have reached over 220,000 people in the past 6 months  
Rated 4.5 out of 5, based on 134 reviews

- 3.3 Data gathered through 'Visitor Verdict' provides the NCWC with both visitor feedback and benchmarking to better understand our position as a paid-entry visitor attraction.
- 3.4 **Appendix A** provides a snapshot some insights from social media and Visitor Verdict, evidencing the overall excellent standards and demonstrating areas for improvement. On this latter point recurring themes include continuing to expand our remit to cover the 'National' brief, and developing an experience that 'touches the emotions' and creates a bond with customers.

#### Collections and Exhibitions

- 3.5 National Accreditation has enabled the collections and exhibitions team to better convene academic panels to support the development of new projects and exhibitions. Accreditation also supports and facilitates access to major museums and institutions for object loans and research.
- 3.6 Our partnership with the University of Leicester continues to enhance and maintain NCWC's academic standing. This has included the appointment of Professor Andrew Hopper as Academic Director. The Civil War Petitions Research Project, in collaboration with the universities of Leicester, Nottingham, Southampton and Cardiff, is an example of the commitment to undertake research and develop understanding of the impact of the Civil Wars (<https://www.civilwarpetitions.ac.uk/>).

#### Learning and Participation

- 3.7 The Learning and Participation Team (LPT) recently received the Sandford Award for Education (<http://sandfordaward.org/>) and the team is forecast to have delivered sessions to approximately 3,000 school children in 2018/19 – 150% of the initial target. This year, the team has piloted an outreach programme, taking their schools programme into the District to those who do not access our education programme through a visit. The LPT is launching free assemblies for schools in Newark and Sherwood this Spring, seeking to engage a wider number of school children whilst also promoting the benefit of learning through our Centre.

- 3.8 Our learning and participation team's education programme has a national reach (Appendix B), with schools visiting from Cumbria, London and Cheshire, as well as significant levels of local engagement. Alongside the well-established primary and secondary school programme, the team have this year developed and piloted a bespoke A-level programme and is hosting the Cromwell Association's A-level conference for year 12 students in June of this year.
- 3.9 Since the NCWC launched, the learning and participation team has developed a wide range of activities for children during the school holidays. From scripted, costumed performances to craft, trails and tours, the emphasis on developing a family-friendly, inclusive museum seeks to establish the NCWC as the go-to place for local families. Further work on the NCWC 'mini-museum' project, funded through the Sandford Cascade, will encourage local families with pre-school age children to visit and experience the museum in a relaxed and creative environment, accessible to all.

#### Commercial Activity

- 3.10 Just into its third year of operation, the Nineteen20 café bar in the Palace Theatre has expanded the menu from the original 'grab and go' offer, including more hot options and daily specials. The café is also used informally for groups such as Newark Cancer Support and Healthwatch Nottingham and Nottinghamshire.
- 3.11 Corporate events, room hire and weddings are all areas identified for further development. The Tudor Hall is being styled as a destination specifically for the weddings market, with its own branding and marketing plan, and the site will soon be applying for a wedding license.
- 3.12 The NCWC is proud to have been selected to host the 2019 Association of Independent Museums Conference (<https://www.aim-museums.co.uk/booking-is-now-open-for-aim-national-conference-2019/>). This year's theme of 'How to be a Great Destination' resonates with NSDC's aims to revitalise the town district for tourism, and up to 300 heritage professionals will visit the area across three days. Based in local hotels and B&Bs and attending a 2 day conference at the NCWC, delegates will also have the opportunity to visit the wider district, with a dinner at Thoresby Courtyard, an evening social at Newark Castle and study trips to Newark Air Museum, The National Holocaust Centre and Museum and Creswell Crags.

#### Visitor Numbers

- 3.13 The years following the high-profile launch of the NCWC have seen a decrease in visitor numbers commensurate with the expectations of the 2017 consultant's report. 2018-19 has been an extremely challenging year for businesses in the town centre due to the Severn Trent works and associated major traffic disruption, and between April and June the impact was seen in a decrease of 1,500 visitors compared to the previous year. In September – January visitor numbers are comparable to previous year, again suggesting that the decline in the early part of the year was attributable to the road works.
- 3.14 Overall visitor numbers for the NCWC in 2017/18 were 21,114. Numbers for 2018/19 are forecast to be in the region of 20,000.

## Budget and Performance

- 3.15 Budget and performance has been closely monitored across the year, with monthly year end forecasts being undertaken by the business manager and accountant. Early observations around the impact of the Severn Trent work ensured that a pro-active approach could be taken to managing spend and mitigating any shortfall in income. Through the integration of the NCWC and the Palace Theatre's budgets, the site has an increased capacity to contain costs, manage risk and improve sustainability. In particular, staffing resource is better utilised across the whole site, with individual members of staff covering a broader remit and delivering multiple tasks, particularly those in front line roles and with operational responsibilities.
- 3.16 After integration, the combined theatre and NCWC site was re-assessed for business rates. This process was unresolved between 2016 and 2018, during which time the Valuation Office Agency also undertook their 5 yearly re-evaluation. In early 2018, confirmation was received that the rates would double from previous figures to £52K per annum. Whilst this is incorporated into the budget for 2019/20 the level of increase was unforeseen for the current 2018/19 financial year. Budget forecasts would suggest that there is an overspend on the NCWC/Palace Theatre base budget of £25,000, the approximate level of this rates rise.
- 3.17 As of end of Feb the year end forecast shows that any income shortfall in year will be contained, with the likely exception of the £25K overspend due to increased business rates.

## **4.0 Proposals**

- 4.1 There are three strands to the Business Unit objectives for 2019-20:
- 1) To continue improving the 'offer' through a programme of exhibitions, talks and conferences that provide a 'national' focus, and through installation of new permanent galleries on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor to increase Civil War content.
  - 2) To increase events and awareness aimed at an introduction to the 'offer' in order to encourage repeat visits for specific activities. This will include family events (eg school holiday activities, mini-museums) and community engagement (eg 'knit a battlefield') throughout the year. It will also include a range of events outside of the museum pay perimeter at a low entry price, aimed at familiarising and enticing visitors.
  - 3) To develop projects which promote community participation using school outreach and volunteer development across the District (and using links with schools already established via the economic skills agenda).
- 4.2 Specific projects include, in addition to the normal promotion and marketing of the NCWC and Palace Theatre:
- New permanent galleries on the 1<sup>st</sup> floor for 'The World Turn'd Upside Down – Conflict Chaos and Creativity' looking at the devastating effect of the war on the people and landscape, and exploring the ideas and innovation that followed. Key loans have been agreed with Chequers, the Parliamentary Archives, the Cromwell Museum and the Victoria and Albert Museum.

- New temporary exhibition on the top floor 'Fake News' exploring the similarities between the propaganda of the 17<sup>th</sup> century and its modern day equivalent.
- A Theatre 2020 (working title) project launch in advance of the 100 year anniversary of the Palace. This celebratory programme is still to be finalised, but key events in development include a gala festival weekend showcasing local talent and community groups, a youth production of a major musical and an exhibition of the theatre's history and its connection to the town, researched and co-curated by volunteers. (Funding/Sponsorship being sought)
- A Civil War project in collaboration with Newcastle University: working with 2 secondary schools (1 from Newark, 1 from Newcastle) to create a civil war themed play. Both schools will perform their plays on the Palace stage. (Funded by Newcastle University, NCWC providing in-kind support)
- The launch of a new Audio Described guide. These new devices are for use by people who are blind or partially sighted, and provide a description and commentary of the ground floor of the Centre and its key objects. A second phase development with the remaining funds will shortly be confirmed; current proposals include 3D replica objects to provide a sensory, tactile experience (Funded by UPS through funding raised by the Friends of NCWC)
- LIS Mayflower400 project: engaging local family groups, including families from Nottinghamshire's refugee community, looking at themes of migration, movement and tolerance and working with an Arts Council approved artist to deliver a series of workshops during 2020 to create ceramic artworks to both put on display within the NCWC linking to our new exhibitions and to tour across Nottinghamshire from 2021 – 24. (Subject to successful funding application to the Notts County Council Local Improvement Scheme. Match funded through the existing exhibitions budget)
- Visitor Research project in collaboration with Museum Development East Midlands to better understand visitor profile and barriers to entry and to act as a case study and form 'best practice' for learning across the East Midlands. (Subject to funding from MDEM, match funding from existing professional services budget)
- Increased opportunities and training for volunteers, including development of a youth scheme to upskill and inspire young people in a heritage and cultural environment.

## **5.0 Equalities Implications**

- 5.1 Projects are designed with accessibility and inclusivity in mind. Specific activity, including the development of audio described guides, a recently piloted autism-friendly quiet hour, provision of autism packs and the relaxed performance of the pantomime is incorporated within the culture of the business.
- 5.2 The visitor research project will explore the current visitor profile and provide recommendations to reach a more diverse audience.

## **6.0 Financial Implications FIN18-19/3851**

- 6.1 All activity can be undertaken within the approved budget set for 2019-20, through pre-agreed capital funds or by external funding as articulated above.

## **7.0 Comments of Director - Growth & Regeneration**

- 7.1 The Business Unit has worked hard achieve the forecast budget for 2018-19, despite challenges for all town centre offers with the ongoing Severn Trent Water scheme. The likely shortfall in budgetary terms would not occur without the unexpected business rates increase, which remains subject to challenge. In terms of 2019-20 there are exciting plans in place for new exhibitions and offers, including the centenary celebrations for the Palace Theatre.

## **8.0 RECOMMENDATION**

**That the Committee notes the contents of the report and the wider programme of activities planned for the coming financial year.**

### **Reason for Recommendations**

**To allow the continued development of the NCWC and the Heritage, Culture and Visitors business unit in support of the Community Plan objectives and the Destination Management Plan.**

### **Background Papers**

Nil

For further information please contact Carys Coulton-Jones, Business Manager – Heritage, Culture and Visitors.

**Matt Lamb**  
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