

Report to	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of meeting	22nd October 2020
Lead Member / Officer	Councillor Tony Thomas - Cabinet Lead Member for Housing and Communities
Report author	Craig Berry - Business Information Team Manager
Title	North East Wales Archives (NEWA) & Ruthin Gaol

1. What is the report about?

- 1.1. To provide an update on North East Wales Archives (NEWA) and the future of Ruthin Gaol.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

- 2.1. This follows a report presented to Communities Scrutiny Committee during October 2019, where the plans were outlined for NEWA and the possible move to Mold in 2025 (subject to National Lottery Heritage Funding). During this meeting, the Committee requested an update during 2020 on the utilisation of the potential vacated space at Ruthin Gaol.

3. What are the Recommendations?

- 3.1. That the Committee comments on the progress made and supports the proposals for the future use of Ruthin Gaol.

4. Report details

North East Wales Archives (NEWA)

- 4.1. Denbighshire County Council and Flintshire County Council merged archive services in order to create a stronger, more resilient and sustainable archive service for the region. The combined service - NEWA, came into operation during April 2020, initially across their existing two offices – Ruthin and Hawarden. The long-term plan for the joint service is to move into a new purpose built, environmentally friendly building in Mold, adjacent to Clwyd Theatr Cymru. It is hoped that the new building will be paid for from the National Lottery Heritage Horizon Fund (NLHF) with contributions from both Flintshire and Denbighshire County Councils. Should the funding be secured, then the new archive centre in Mold will open during 2025.
- 4.2. Although the long-term plans are for NEWA to be based in Mold, the intention is to utilise destinations such as libraries and other community hubs in order to bring the archive service out to communities. The joint service will very much be based on a ‘hub and spoke’ delivery model, thus ensuring local communities do not feel removed from their rich cultural documentary heritage.
- 4.3. NEWA’s application to the NLHF is progressing well and the bid has been shortlisted from over 200 applications down to the final 12. The next stage of our application is being prepared and is due for submission during February 2021. We are expected to hear whether we have been successful in receiving the £11.5 million grant from the NLHF during spring 2021.

Ruthin Gaol

- 4.4. A working group was established earlier this year to develop plans for the long-term use of Ruthin Gaol. The working group consisted of Local Members, selected key officers and a representative from Ruthin Town Council. The Working Group has developed exciting and innovative plans

for expanding the heritage attraction at the Gaol, so that the vacated space is used to develop the following:

- Development of immersive Cell Experiences;
- An outdoor 'Escaped Prisoner' trail;
- A Play Area;
- Creation of a large multi-function room;
- The removal of the glass security screen (currently separating the archive and heritage attraction);
- Bring together Denbighshire's Heritage Collections into one location at the Gaol and have them on display; and
- A dedicated area for Archives/Family History activity.

4.5 The aforementioned plans are detailed further in appendix 1 but the intention is to create an exciting and expanded heritage destination for visitors, which will increase visitor numbers and further support the local economy.

4.6. An important element of the expanded heritage attraction at Ruthin Gaol is the continued archive presence. An Archivist will be on site to provide support to visitors with their local history or family research activities.

4.7 To complement the exciting plans that have been outlined, the Heritage Service are also working on plans to incorporate the front block at 46 Clwyd Street into their attraction. A range of external funding sources are being explored to help fund this.

5. How does the decision contribute to the Corporate Priorities?

The project contributes to the following priorities:

“The Council works with people and communities to build independence and resilience” and “Offer young people the opportunity to develop skills for life and work through volunteering opportunities and meaningful work experience.”

“The environment is attractive and protected, supporting well-being and economic prosperity” and “Climate and Ecological Emergency”

“The Wellbeing of Future Generations (Wales) Act 2015”

6. What will it cost and how will it affect other services?

6.1. The expanded heritage features will cost approximately £65k. The Business Improvement & Modernisation Service has agreed to build a reserve specifically for this, so that the necessary funds will be available for 2025.

7. What are the main conclusions of the Well-being Impact Assessment?

7.1. As this is an update report to Communities Scrutiny Committee, it is suggested that the previous well-being impact assessment is still valid and should be referred to. A summary of the results were as follows:

A prosperous Denbighshire and Flintshire - Positive

A resilient Denbighshire and Flintshire - Neutral

A healthier Denbighshire and Flintshire – Positive

A more equal Denbighshire and Flintshire- Positive

A Denbighshire and Flintshire of cohesive communities- Positive

A Denbighshire and Flintshire of vibrant culture and thriving Welsh Language- Positive

A globally responsible Denbighshire and Flintshire – Neutral

8. What consultations have been carried out with Scrutiny and others?

- 8.1. A Ruthin Gaol Working Group was established in order to discuss and develop plans for Ruthin Gaol. The group consisted of key officers, local members and a representative from Ruthin Town Council.
- 8.2. The heritage expansion plans have been presented to Ruthin Town Council. The Town Council expressed its sadness at the archive service potentially leaving the town but stated it welcomed the heritage plans provided. It noted that the expanded heritage attraction is likely to attract a far greater number of visitors by extending the season and length of visit by including new facilities inside and outside the gaol site, including the 46 Clwyd Street building, which would complement what would be on offer at the Old Courthouse. This extra footfall would support the local economy and enhance Ruthin's reputation as a heritage and tourism destination.

9. Chief Finance Officer Statement

- 9.1 The Cabinet Meeting in September approved the setting up of a specific reserve to facilitate the BIM service to build up the required funds. It should be noted that the larger Archives project will still be subject to the internal capital approval process (Strategic Investment Group (SIG), Cabinet) even if the grant application is successful.

10. What risks are there and is there anything we can do to reduce them?

- 10.1. The main risk associated with delivering the expanded heritage attraction at Ruthin Gaol is the ability of the Business Improvement & Modernisation Service to generate the £65k reserve in light of continued budget pressures.

11. Power to make the decision

- 11.1. Scrutiny's powers in relation to this matter are outlined in Section 7.2.3