

Report to:	Communities Scrutiny Committee
Date of Meeting:	6 December 2012
Lead Member:	Lead Member for Tourism Leisure and Youth
Report Author:	Head of Environmental Services
Title:	Review of Heritage and Arts Assets

1. What is the report about?

To consider the progress to date in realising efficiencies with respect to the County's Heritage and Arts assets and the strategies developed with a view to ensuring their future viability. The aim was to develop a service that would deliver the maximum benefits for local residents, communities, tourists and the Council.

2. What is the reason for making this report?

In November 2010 Tom Booty produced a comprehensive report for the Corporate Executive Team (CET) titled "Review of Heritage Assets and associated arms-length companies". The report analysed the options available to the council, and concluded that there was no easy option for disposal or outsourcing of the assets.

The council therefore decided (instead) to try to get the service into a more sustainable long term position, and the service was transferred to Environmental Services on 1 April 2011, with this outcome in mind. Significant changes have taken place since that time, and even more changes are planned for the future. Now is therefore a good time for members to evaluate the direction of travel.

3. What are the Recommendations?

That the Committee

- 3.1 discuss and endorses the operational measures that the Service has put in place, and the direction of travel that is now being followed; and
- 3.2 scrutinises the financial position of the Service in approximately one year's time, when the results from the 2013 season are known.

4. Report details

The heritage assets that are operated by the Council are; Ruthin Gaol, Nant Clwyd y Dre (Ruthin), Plas Newydd (Llangollen), and Rhyl Museum. The heritage portfolio also covers the Council's relationship with the Bodelwyddan Castle Trust.

The collection of artefacts that the Service is responsible for managing totals some 30,000 items. This figure was growing year on year. Previously, any Denbighshire-related item that was of historical interest had been accepted into the collection. From now on the Council is only accepting items that are of outstanding value or outstanding interest.

The Denbighshire collection had not been catalogued properly, and a lot of work is required if we are to secure ongoing museum accreditation (due in April 2013). We will be seeking museum status for the facilities at Plas Newydd and Ruthin Gaol. It is not intended to seek museum status for the display area in Rhyl Library.

The focus going forward is to make sure that the events at our facilities are better attended, and that they generate more revenue than they have in the past. Previously there was very little evaluation or cost benefit analysis of what had been happening.

The other major theme is closer working relationships with local communities and volunteer groups. In the past, the Service had operated largely in isolation.

The appendices to this report set out some of the detailed actions that have now been taken to make the service more viable, whilst achieving the desired outcomes. The results to date include increased visitor numbers and increased revenue levels. The general principles being followed (that were not necessarily being followed previously), include:

- a) Managing the Service through an effective forward plan and reviewing service provision using proper data on visitor numbers, income generation, and consultation outcomes (i.e. improved customer focus).
- b) Building close working arrangements with Bodelwyddan Castle Trust
- c) The increased use of Volunteer Groups in all aspects of service delivery
- d) Improving the management of the Denbighshire collection and developing a meaningful exhibition programme with the collection as its focus.
- e) Wider community engagement; including meetings with Member Area Groups (MAGs), Town Councils and Community Groups.
- f) a shift in emphasis away from a curatorial role, and more towards “running and promoting our visitor attractions”. e.g. we now have a Commercial Manager in post, rather than a museum curator.
- g) The Service still supports important cultural initiatives, e.g. the Edward Pugh Festival and World War 1 (WW1) commemorations etc. The Service also welcomes opportunities to work with the Llangollen International Eisteddfod, and Denbighshire Tourism to develop our contribution to National Eisteddfod 2013
- h) We will continue to develop appropriate education programmes, i.e. after proper consultation with schools and the Council’s Education Department
- i) The Service is now a significant player within Tourism Partnership North Wales and the Destination Denbighshire project. The Service has developed a very close working relationship with Council’s Countryside Department.

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

The new emphasis on visitor attraction fits in very well with the Council’s priority to develop the local economy, i.e. the tourism economy in particular. The Service features in the council’s destination management plan.

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

The aim is to stay within existing budget levels, and to increase income levels, so that money can be reinvested in order to make our sites even more attractive. A summary of the current financial position is included at Appendix 2. We expect the position to improve next year as a result of the initiatives that have now been put in place.

There are no significant legal, equality or ICT impacts. The work being undertaken at our sites will aid biodiversity, e.g. woodland management at Plas Newydd. Friends of the Earth are attempting a project that might result in energy generation from the stream at Plas Newydd

7. What consultations have been carried out?

The new arrangements were developed after extensive consultation with heritage staff, and other departments of the Council. We have an ongoing dialogue with CYMAL, the Heritage Lottery Fund, and the Bodelwyddan Castle Trust. We have also consulted with MAGs on the work that is being done

8. Chief Finance Officer Statement

N/A

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

The main risk is that the expected increases in income levels cannot be delivered. However, all of the measures described in this report are designed to prevent that from happening.

The forward plan includes:

- Implementation of our Volunteer Policy
- A target for increased income of 10% in the 2013 season
- Securing museum accreditation for two of our sites – March 2013
- To have a viable Events Strategy in place by – April 2013
- To develop an improved marketing strategy by – April 2013
- To catalogue the collection properly, and use it as a primary resource for a programme of exhibitions, including exhibits to support the National and International Eisteddfodau etc.

10. Power to make the Decision

Article 6.3.4 of the Council's Constitution

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