

Overview of Responses and Recommendations

Budget Proposals 16/17 Phase Two: West Berkshire Museum		Paul James – Culture Manager	24 March 2016 Version 2 (Executive/Council)
Proposal:	To reduce the net cost of the Museum by £40,000 a year, by reducing: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • schools and other educational work by 40% • capacity to recruit, train and manage volunteers by 20% (one day a week) • capacity to manage and allow public access to the museum’s collections by 20% (one day a week) 		
Total budget 15/16:	£183,000	Recommended officer saving 16/17:	£40,000 (22%)
Initial proposed saving 16/17:	£40,000 (22%)	Final recommendation to Executive/Council:	To proceed with this savings proposal
No. of responses:	In total, 46 responses were received, 38 of which included comments. Of those who responded: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 45 were individuals • One was a group/organisation <p>Seven responses were from non-users of the service.</p>		
Key issues raised:	Reduced access to heritage learning events and activities for schools and young people		
Equality issues:	The proposal will reduce access to heritage learning events and activities for schools and young people.		
Suggestions for reducing the impact on service users:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Admission charge (museum currently free)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The museum business already has targets for increasing income from the shop, cafe, venue hire and donations - currently £18k a year. • Charging entry has been considered and rejected as unlikely to produce a significant increase in income. At least 50% of visitors are casual visits, from people passing by, who may be put off by an entrance fee. Free admission encourages people to enter. Then they are more likely to buy something from the cafe, shop or make a donation. 	
	Increase charges in museum cafe	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We review cafe prices twice a year against other outlets in the town centre. Prices are competitive to attract visitors to return and spend more on repeat visits. For example, putting up cafe prices by 10% 	

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		<p>only helps the bottom line by 0.6%.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> The museum attracted 8,000 visitors in its last year of operation before the closure. In the first year of its opening after the refurbishment it attracted 28,000 visitors (3.5 times more). Visitor numbers are still growing and they are producing a growing amount of income for the museum. 	
	<p>More volunteers.</p> <p>Run the museum only with volunteers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Museum currently has 35 volunteers and is always seeking to recruit more. Volunteers tell us that they are comfortable playing a variety of supporting roles but do not want to run or “manage” the museum which would require them to take responsibility for finance, health and safety, operational management, repairs, cleaning and the care and curation of collections and exhibitions. Volunteers are under no obligation to volunteer at regular times or for long periods for example, many people prefer to volunteer occasionally when it suits them. Running the museum with volunteers only would make it difficult to commit to regular opening times and that would adversely affect visitor numbers creating a downward spiral of reduced heritage events and activities and income from venue hire, the shop and cafe. 	
	Seek commercial sponsorship as national museums do.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The museum will be seeking business support for some exhibitions in the future where those exhibitions are relevant to the sponsor (for example, a history of engineering and technology in the area). 	
Alternative options for applying the saving in this area:	Suggestion	Council response	
	Reduce opening hours (museum currently open 10am-4pm Wednesday to Sunday)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing opening hours will not make the required saving. Doing so restricts access to these important historical buildings which the Council, Heritage Lottery Fund, Greenham Common Trust and others have invested in for the enjoyment of local people and for the protection of the heritage. The museum attracted 8,000 visitors in its last year of operation 	

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		<p>before the closure. In the first year of its opening after the refurbishment it attracted 28,000 visitors (3.5 times more) and the numbers are still growing. Maintaining opening hours helps more people to get involved with their local museum.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Reducing opening hours would adversely affect visitor numbers creating a downward spiral of reduced heritage events and activities and income from venue hire, the shop and cafe. 	
	Form a charitable trust to run the museum	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The council will be undertaking an appraisal of the opportunities and challenges of forming a cultural trust during 2016. Whereas this can have advantages in terms of community involvement and access to grants, it is clear from case studies of other cultural trusts that this is unlikely to deliver significant savings, particularly in the short-term. 	
	Close the museum. House the museum at Shaw House.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The Heritage Lottery fund grant conditions will require repayment of their £1.2M grant if we fail to deliver the agreed outcomes/purposes of that investment. Council may also have to repay some or all of the £295,000 of other grants and contributions for the refurbishment. Council has invested £815,000 of its own capital restoring the building as a museum. The Friends of the Museum have raised about £5,000 to date to support the museum and purchase artefacts (for example, a Saxon gold hoard). The council is developing the range and quantity of heritage events and activities. Housing the museum at Shaw House would reduce the space available for events and activities, which are already producing an increasing amount of income and reducing the cost of Shaw House. 	
Suggestions for how others may help contribute:	One respondent has offered to volunteer at the museum.		

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Officer conclusion:	Feedback from the consultation process has not resulted in any issue being raised which would prevent the council from proceeding with the proposal. The feedback has also not generated any viable counter-proposal which would mitigate the proposal.
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