

OPEN

Economy and Growth Committee

14th January 2025

Future of West Park Museum Collections

Report of: Peter Skates

Report Reference No: EG/07/24-25

Ward(s) Affected: All Macclesfield

For Decision or Scrutiny: Decision

Purpose of Report

- 1 The purpose of this report is to seek decisions on the future of West Park Museum collections.
- 2 The report summarises the current position and makes recommendations for:
- 3 Future care, conservation and retaining public access to the museum collections

Executive Summary

- 4 This report summarises the current position concerning West Park Museum and its associated collections. It provides the background, including previous decision route to arrive at the current position, noting the deterioration of the building and the impact on the collections it has housed. The report further explains the steps which have been taken to safeguard the collections to date, sets out options which have been considered and finally makes recommendations for their long-term care.

Recommendations

The Economy and Growth Committee is recommended to:

1. Endorse the recommendation to permanently relocate collections from West Park Museum to Macclesfield Silk Museum and Macclesfield Town Hall

Background

- 5 West Park Museum is located in West Park, Macclesfield. It was donated to the people of Macclesfield by Marianne Brocklehurst (1832-1898) and her brother Peter Pownall Brocklehurst (1821-1903). The object of the benefactors was: *to found a museum to be furnished with a collection of works of Art, Geological specimens Egyptian and other Oriental curios with the view of affording educational advantages and instructive recreation to the people of Macclesfield.*
- 6 Whilst the museum and the collection are owned by Cheshire East Council, the council does not operate a museum service. For this reason, the care, curatorial needs and public access is managed by Macclesfield Silk Heritage Trust as part of an annual Service Level Agreement.
- 7 Professional curatorial advice was received in 2015 stating that West Park Museum was no longer fit for purpose. This was particularly in relation to the Museum's environmental conditions, which were not suitable and had subjected the collections to damaging factors. There was also a lack of sanitary and educational facilities to accommodate school groups, volunteers and staff. The environment within West Park Museum had been gradually deteriorating for a number of years due to the physical condition of the building. The high level of humidity in the building and the age of the heating system, meant that the environment for the display of important collections was inadequate and would cause them to deteriorate in the future without action being taken.
- 8 Since being made aware of the deteriorating conditions in 2015, steps have been taken to protect the collections. This began with the most vulnerable items being relocated, predominantly the Egyptology collections and organic items. These were relocated to the Silk Museum. In 2017 Members requested further investigation into the status of the collections and also that an options appraisal be undertaken on the long-term future of the museum.
- 9 An options appraisal was conducted by independent specialist consultants (Purcell) in 2017 which made recommendations that

refurbishment of the building should be undertaken. A further feasibility study followed which provided costed options for refurbishment.

- 10 A report was taken to Cabinet in 2018 which presented options for refurbishment or relocation of the collections. At this time Cabinet requested temporary relocation of the collections whilst refurbishment of the museum was further explored, including generation of external funding. Members also requested that the potential to include refurbishment as part of a wider programme to upgrade West Park and the Cemetery was considered.
- 11 The refurbishment option taken forward at this time included installation of appropriate heating and environmental control systems, a small extension to provide for sanitary and cloakroom facilities and a more flexible space for education sessions. It also allowed for a redisplay of the collections and interpretation to tell the story of how they relate to Macclesfield.
- 12 Submission of an expression of interest to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a project to refurbish the museum on this basis, restore West Park and Macclesfield Cemetery was submitted in 2019 but was unsuccessful.
- 13 Since 2019 various factors have prevented the project from developing further, including COVID, significant increases to capital scheme and affordability of the Council's Capital Programme.
- 14 During this time, conditions at the museum have worsened and have caused further damage to collections including mould, rust and insect infestation. In 2022 a report on the status of the collections was received from Lancashire Conservation Studios recommending immediate removal of all remaining items from West Park and a programme of remedial conservation.
- 15 A High-Level Business Case was developed in 2022 for urgent conservation works, storage and redisplay. The following table shows the amounts included in the MTFs between 2022 and 2025.

2022/23 £	2023/24 £	2024/25 £
20,000	22,000	12,000

- 16 In line with recommendations, in 2022 all remaining items from the collection were removed and either sent away for conservation work or relocated to the Silk Museum. A small number of items were placed into storage with Lancashire Conservation Studios. The building has since remained empty.

- 17 The Silk Heritage Trust continue to manage the collection through the SLA, however their lease on the museum building was surrendered in September 2024, which has been accepted by CEC.
- 18 There is now a need to determine the long-term future of the collection in order to ensure its care, conservation requirements and continued access by the public.
- 19 If the recommendation is approved then the building will be surplus to requirements of the Cultural Economy Service. An options appraisal for the museum building will be dealt with in a future report to Assets Board.

Consultation and Engagement

- 20 Consultation with local stakeholders on refurbishment plans was undertaken in 2019, prior to submission of the Expression of Interest to the National Lottery Heritage Fund.
- 21 Plans did not proceed due to unavailability of funding and increased capital costs post COVID
- 22 The Silk Heritage Trust have advised on and have been fully involved and consulted on conservation and presentation requirements of the collection.

Reasons for Recommendations

- 23 The recommended option is to permanently relocate all collections from West Park Museum to Macclesfield Silk Museum and Macclesfield Town Hall.
- 24 The majority of the collections have already been successfully relocated, redisplayed and reinterpreted at the Silk Museum, in particular the Egyptology collection, and have been well received by visitors.
- 25 Space in Macclesfield Town Hall has been identified to redisplay 10 paintings from the collection. The remainder of the collection can be displayed and reinterpreted at the Silk Museum. This work can be completed by the end of March 2025
- 26 This option allows for continued curatorial care, conservation and public access to the collections in line with the annual Service Level Agreement with the Silk Heritage Trust and is affordable within current budgets.

Other Options Considered

- 27 Other options considered for the future of the collections:

Option considered	Reasons for Discounting
<p>Embark on a fully funded programme of refurbishment of West Park Museum to include installation of appropriate heating and environmental control systems, a small extension to provide for sanitary and cloakroom facilities and a more flexible space for education sessions. This would enable a redisplay of the collections and interpretation to tell the story of how they relate to Macclesfield. Minimum cost of £900,000 based on prices in 2019.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Unaffordability of CEC capital programme • Feasibility, options appraisals and cost assessments were last undertaken in 2019. Since then, costs of capital programmes have increased considerably. The estimate of £900,000 to undertake this work is now considered to be insubstantial. • The surrender of lease of West Park Museum by the Silk Heritage Trust. Any future arrangements would need to be renegotiated with the Trust which is not within their business plans at the current time.
<p>Seek external funding to offset capital costs to CEC for refurbishment programme</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Whilst a programme of refurbishment would fall within the remit of external funders such as National Lottery Heritage Fund, the likely success of such an application is thought to be very low at present due to other funding priorities in the Borough. • External funding would still require match funding from CEC.
<p>Undertake further feasibility / options appraisal work</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • There is currently no available budget to undertake further options appraisal
<p>Place collections into long term storage</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • This would prevent public access and enjoyment of the collections • This would come at a cost and is currently unbudgeted
<p>Do nothing</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The Council has a duty of care to the collections in its ownership. To do nothing would put the collections at risk of no curatorial care, increased risk of deterioration and no public access. This would present significant reputational damage to the Council and potentially increased future conservation costs.

Implications and Comments

Monitoring Officer/Legal

28 There are no legal implications for this report.

Section 151 Officer/Finance

29 There is currently £12,000 in the MTFs for 2024/25 to complete the conservation and redisplay work. Current estimates for the total cost to complete this work are £15,000. The remaining £3,000 can be met from existing Cultural Economy budgets. If the recommendation is endorsed no further expenditure would be required at this time.

30 Should the recommendation be unendorsed, further budget will be required for ongoing storage of some items until an alternative solution is identified either for refurbishment of the museum or long-term storage.

31 Costs of refurbishment of the museum were last provided in 2018. Refurbishment at this time to provide the necessary upgrades to the building were estimated at £900,000. Whilst this has not been formally updated, it is estimated that due to inflationary increases and rises in capital costs a more realistic figure today would be circa £1.5 million. This is not currently within the Council's Capital Programme.

Policy

32 The recommendation supports the Council's aims to be open and fair and to enable its priorities to be a thriving and sustainable place, to empower and care about people and to be an open and enabling organisation. The recommendation also supports Macclesfield Cultural Strategy and the Council's Cultural Priorities as set out in the Cultural Framework 2023 – 2027.

Equality, Diversity and Inclusion

33 An EIA is in progress.

Human Resources

34 There are no implications for Human Resources

Risk Management

35 This is a locally sensitive issue and could generate some public interest and press interest, particularly in relation to the fact that, if the recommendation is endorsed, the building will be surplus to requirements of the Cultural Economy Service, leading to a future options appraisal for

the museum building. A communications plan will therefore need to be put in place.

Rural Communities

36 There are no implications for Rural Communities

Children and Young People including Cared for Children, care leavers and Children with special educational needs and disabilities (SEND)

37 Endorsement of the recommendation will allow the collections to remain accessible to the public and benefit from being incorporated into the Silk Museum's education programmes.

Public Health

38 There are no Public Health implications.

Climate Change

39 There are no climate change implications of this report

Access to Information	
Contact Officer:	Carole Hyde Carole.hyde@cheshireeast.gov.uk
Appendices:	None
Background Papers:	Cabinet 10 April 2018 - West Park Museum; Future Accommodation of Collections