

CHESHIRE EAST COUNCIL

Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing

Date of Meeting: 10 July 2009
Report of: Head of Health and Wellbeing
Subject/Title: The future of the Silk Heritage Trust

1.0 Report Summary

- 1.1 The Silk Heritage Trust operate a number of museum and heritage sites in Macclesfield. They receive funding from the Council as well as from other income sources. The Trust's existing business model is not financially viable. Options are given for the future of the Trust for consideration by Members.

2.0 Recommendations

- 2.1 That the Cabinet Member for Health and Wellbeing approves that
- (1) the proposal to develop a business case to facilitate the aspiration to establish the National Silk Centre be supported; and
 - (2) Officers from Health and Wellbeing and Regeneration work with the Trust to develop the business case.

3.0 Reasons for Recommendations

- 3.1 The proposal to build a business case to establish the National Silk Centre provides an opportunity to develop a viable long term future for the Trust and its collections. It has the potential to become a nationally significant centre of excellence in relation to the silk industry and textile design, a successful visitor attraction contributing to the visitor economy, a locally significant attraction that provides local people with a better understanding of Macclesfield, enhancing their sense of Place and a valuable educational and learning resource.
- 3.2 The alternative is to downscale the Trust's operations to a largely volunteer-run organisation, with very limited impact upon cross-cutting corporate priorities. It may be that if the business case cannot be proven for the National Silk Centre, that this does become the only option for the organisation.

4.0 Wards Affected

- 4.1 The Trust's buildings are in Macclesfield Town Ward but visitors and schools from across Cheshire East (and beyond) visit the museums.

5.0 Local Ward Members

5.1 Councillors Stephen Broadhurst, David Neilson and Christine Tomlinson

6.0 Policy Implications including - Climate change - Health

6.1 The Trust's activities already contribute to the learning of the children and young people of Cheshire East and to the visitor economy of Macclesfield in particular. There is significant potential to increase the impacts if the national Silk Centre could be established. There are no specific implications regarding climate change although successful external funding applications would allow for capital investment to increase the efficiency of the Trust's buildings from an environmental perspective. The wellbeing of visitors to the museums is enhanced through their informal learning about the history and science of silk making; enjoyment of the collections and the stories told by the Museums of Macclesfield's past. There is a prospect of increasing employment in Macclesfield with consequent impact on the wellbeing of local people. Again this could be significantly increased if the proposal were successful.

7.0 Financial Implications for Transition Costs (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

7.1 N/A

8.0 Financial Implications 2009/10 and beyond (Authorised by the Borough Treasurer)

8.1 The Authority's grant to the Trust in 2009-2010 is £146,000 made up of the former grants from Macclesfield and the County Council. There is no proposal to increase this revenue support and it will be reviewed as part of the budget setting for 2010-2011.

8.2 As part of the initial thinking regarding the proposed National Silk Centre, the option of transferring the current Macclesfield Registry Office to the Trust as a capital contribution has been outlined. This would need detailed consideration as part of the business case and in conjunction with Democratic Services and Property Services.

9.0 Legal Implications (Authorised by the Borough Solicitor)

9.1 There are no legal implications regarding the development of the business case.

10.0 Risk Management

10.1 There are no significant risks associated with developing a business case for the National Silk Centre. The process of drafting the business case will include a comprehensive risk analysis.

11.0 Background and Options

- 11.1 The Appendix summarises the current situation of the Trust and the two options that the Trust's Board considers it has to consider. The 'as is' model is not financially viable with the Trust not generating enough income to cover its costs. There is the potential to get one more year out of the Trust in its current form, but during that year the future model would need to be developed and planned for - either downsizing, or achieving National Silk Centre status.
- 11.2 It is proposed that Officers from Health and Wellbeing and Regeneration (and other services as required) work with the Trust's Board and Director to develop a business case to test the option of establishing the National Silk Centre and assuming it be found to be a viable option, preparing an action plan to map out the steps necessary to move towards achieving this status.
- 11.3 The Trust have submitted an expression of interest to the North-West Development Agency for £250,000 towards the costs of developing the National Silk Centre and will continue to explore other external funding opportunities. They are being supported in this by Visit Chester and Cheshire and the Cheshire and Warrington Economic Alliance.

12.0 Overview of Year One and Term One Issues

- 12.1 There are no Year One issues. The future of the Trust will need to be resolved during the first Term of the administration.

13.0 Access to Information

The background papers relating to this report can be inspected by contacting the report writer:

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