

REPORT TO FULL COUNCIL

KNUTSFORD HERITAGE CENTRE SUPPORT GRANT FUNDING



Report Reference C-22-15
Meeting Date 5th September 2022
Agenda Item 7
Prepared by Town Clerk

1.0 BACKGROUND

In 2018, the Town Council agreed a four-year core funding programme for Knutsford Heritage Centre, providing a grant of £5,000 per annum to support its central costs. The final year of the agreement is the current (2022/23) financial year.

Knutsford Heritage Centre has requested a new four-year funding agreement. The application is set out in section two. Any decision would commence in the 2023/24 financial year and would be factored into the council's budget.

2.0 REQUEST FROM KNUTSFORD HERITAGE CENTRE

Coronavirus has made the past two and a half years difficult for the Heritage Centre. We obviously had to close for the majority of 2020 and opened up properly in June 2021 operating for two days per week due to many of our elderly volunteers declining to return due to the threat of Covid infection. Visitor numbers in 2019 were some 5800 compared with just 783 in 2020, some 920 in 2021 and 780 so far this year up until the end of May.

We have lost the income of around £3,200 per annum we received each year from the two bridge clubs who rented the Tapestry Gallery for two evenings per week and with our reduced opening days our income from donations and shop sales are much reduced giving us cause for concern. Our net income last year before any grants was around £650.

We were however very fortunate to receive Business Interruption grants from Cheshire East totalling some £21,000 which has enabled various overdue improvements to be made at the Heritage Centre. These have included a new alarm and CCTV systems, a more efficient heating system to the shop and office and the replacement of the door and surround from Heritage Way with a more appealing steel and glass entrance (to be fitted in September at a cost of £5,103).

The grants have given us a healthy bank balance for future improvements although our fixed costs in opening the Centre are still considerable and support from the Town Council is still required particularly until our income improves. We would not wish to see our reserves used for ongoing operating costs.

Our current operating costs comprise for 2022/23:

Electricity	6500
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Water	160
Telephone	400
Refuse	288
Subscriptions	85
Insurance	950
TV licence	159
GDPR	35
Music Licence	160
Garden Costs	150
Marketing	250
Stationary etc	125
Repairs	500
Staff welfare	100
Total	£9,862 = say £10,000

As you will note the major expenditure is on electricity which has almost doubled in price over the last six months. We have to keep the premises properly heated not only for the benefit of our volunteers but also to preserve the unique Tapestry and our considerable collection of archives. An annual inflationary increase to any base award agreed by the Town Council would be greatly appreciated as is provided to the Citizens Advice service.

We have been able to recruit recently some 10 new volunteers and our hopeful of being able to increase our openings to 4 days a week rather than the current 3. This will hopefully allow for greater visitor numbers with the ongoing increases in donations and shop sales.

Various fundraising events have recently taken place including a talk and tour of the gardens at Arley courtesy of our Patron Lord Ashbrook, and tours of the Town with strawberry teas at the Heritage Centre. These will provide additional funding for a carved statute of King Canute to be placed the the garden at the Heritage Centre and will feature a grand opening next year involving the Danish Ambassador from London and the Town Council and a Major sponsor. This new addition should provide a welcome boost to the Towns attractions.

The Friends of the Heritage Centre continue to donate funds towards improving the facilities at the Centre and we are grateful for their limited financial support.

Every effort is being made to increase visitor numbers by way having interesting exhibitions and using our revamped website, social media, Town Trail leaflet, Museum in the Street at Knutsford Station amongst others.

Exhibitions over the last four years have been:

Jan - April 2018	Marvellous Days Out (sponsored by Mid Cheshire Community Rail)
May-August 2018	Edward Penny and local artists (sponsored by Freemasons Arms)
May-May 2018	Knutsford Royal May Day (in house)
Sept- Dec 2018	Inside Story Knutsford Prison (sponsored by The Courthouse)
Sept- Dec 2018	Lt Douglas Marshall Rigby (sponsored by Richard Eisner)
Oct 2019- April 2020	Story of Knutsford (sponsored by Stuart Rushton)
April 2022- Sept2019	May Day century of change (sponsored by Lord Eldon)
April to August 2022	It's Back - Knutsford Royal May Day (in house)

April to August 2022 25th Anniversary of Battle on the Heath(Martin Bell) (sponsored by Danebury Serviced Apartments Stephen West.)

We are continuing to offer archiving services to the people of Knutsford and elsewhere both by way of answering requests and also receiving archive material to add to our extensive collection. We have now over 20,000 items in the collection and have received recently a large number of items including donations from Knutsford Women's Institute, Booths Hall, Rotary Club, Knutsford Royal May Day, Pam Savage papers and Mellor Braggins Business Archives.

All the archives belong to the Town of Knutsford which the Heritage Centre are the custodians and these are looked after in a very professional way by our expert Archivist.

A series of booklets on various historical matters around Knutsford have been produced and are very successful and sell well in the shop.

In terms of obtaining Museum status we have received various visits from Manchester University who are tasked by the Arts Council with monitoring our progress towards accreditation. They have been very impressed with our archiving and we are well on the way to achieving our aim of Museum status within the next 2 to 3 years. There are one or two matters still to be approved which we are currently working on.

Our business plan is being reviewed following the Covid epidemic and it will take some time for visitor numbers to return to 2019 levels. Our most pressing aim is to obtain the services of an Education Officer who will make contact with local schools and work with them to provide resources for their curriculum.

We are still the major contact for visitors to Knutsford and act as the Tourist Information Centre for the Town assisting local businesses and providing information as required.

In summary the Town Councils Support is still required if the Heritage Centre is to survive and flourish and to continue to provide such a unique service to this historic Town. We are looking at a possible grant to cover up to 75% of our fixed costs possibly index linked each year to allow for inflation i.e. circa £7,500 per annum.

3.0 DECISION REQUIRED

Council should consider whether it wishes to offer a new four-year funding agreement to Knutsford Heritage Centre, the value of the agreement and any conditions it wishes to place on the agreement.