

Member Briefing

Number: 1124

Title: Chester History and Heritage and St Michael's Church, Chester

Summary: To brief members on the move of the History and Heritage Service, from St Michael's Church to the Grosvenor Museum, and the future use of the church.

Background

Chester History and Heritage Service, which provides a local and family history service for residents and visitors, including a volunteer programme, is to move from St Michael's Church in Bridge Street, Chester. It will close to the public at St Michael's on 12 January and relocate to the Grosvenor Museum. It will re-open to the public in the spring.

Chester History and Heritage Service

The team has been based at St Michael's Church for many years, providing access to family and local history resources, a volunteer-run family history helpdesk in partnership with the Family History Society of Cheshire, a very popular Facebook page of historic photographs of Chester and a range of popular exhibitions and events. They already work closely with Chester Civic Trust, volunteers and owners of many historic buildings on the Heritage Festival, and the annual Heritage Open Days.

The move to the Grosvenor Museum will enable the team to continue to deliver these services, without the constraints of managing St Michael's Church. The move will give the team more time to work on additional projects. It will also complement the offer to visitors to the museum by telling another aspect of the story of Chester and, because the Museum welcomes over 80,000 visitors each year, provide a larger audience for Chester History and Heritage.

Once re-opened in the spring, the team will be keen to widen their reach and find ways to improve access, bringing the service into different buildings and sharing their exhibitions with more locations across Chester and the wider borough. They will be consulting with service users to help to develop the future look and feel of the service to ensure all of the most valued resources are maintained and new ideas explored.

Later in 2018, a brand new heritage attraction will open at the church run by Chester based Community Interest Company, Big Heritage. Details about this new attraction will be revealed by Big Heritage very soon. The Council will retain ownership of St Michael's that will benefit from new investment. The surplus generated by the attraction will be reinvested in the attraction and activities which engage people in Chester and the surrounding area. Big Heritage will also continue to run a visitor experience at the Water Tower on the City Walls, which will see additional reinvestment from the Big Heritage team.

This proposal is in line with the Chester Heritage and Visual Arts Strategy, which identifies Chester's unique built heritage as the city's greatest asset and the One City Plan, which

recognises the need for renewal and development in St Michael's Church alongside other cultural facilities.

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Responsible Committee, Cabinet Member: Councillor Louise Gittins

Date: 14 December 2017