

South West Heritage Trust Update

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Cabinet Member: Councillor David Hall, Cabinet Member for Business, Inward Investment and Policy

Division and Local Member: n/a

1. Summary

1.1 As requested by the Scrutiny Committee, this report provides an update about the South West Heritage Trust following its second year of operation from 1 November 2015 to 31 October 2016.

1.2 The report highlights the successful delivery of Agreed Activities specified within the Grant Agreement to ensure that Somerset's rich heritage is better protected, celebrated and made available as well as demonstrating financial savings to Somerset County Council.

2. Background

2.1 The South West Heritage Trust (the Trust) came into being on 1 November 2014 as an independent company limited by guarantee with charitable status. A subsidiary trading company was also formed. The Trust delivers the archives and local studies services formally provided by Somerset and Devon County Councils, and Somerset's Museums and Historic Environment Services. The Trust is led by a Board of eleven Trustees including SCC and DCC nominees. Councillor David Hall has recently stood down; after May 2017 elections SCC will appoint its Trustee representative on the Board.

2.2 The principal legal agreements are the Transfer Agreements, Grant Agreements and Collections Management Agreements between the Councils and the Trust. The Grant Agreements with SCC and DCC provide a 5-year funding agreement and define a number of outcomes that the Trust is committed to achieve. The Trust sets out how it will deliver these outcomes through a rolling three-year business plan, guided by its vision to "celebrate and protect our rich heritage, helping everyone to enjoy it now and in the future".

2.3 The aim of establishing the Trust was to provide a resilient future for the heritage services of both Somerset and Devon, and in so doing to enable us to better protect, celebrate and make available the rich heritage of Somerset and Devon, ensuring its continued contribution to our economy and cultural life.

3. Key achievements during year 2 (1 November 2015 – 31 October 2016)

3.1 Key achievements in the second year of operation, and in particular since 1 March 2016 Scrutiny, include the following examples:

The Museums Service has achieved national profile and excellence through

- Retaining accreditation under the Arts Council England scheme for four of the five museums it manages or supports
- The Museum of Somerset retained its place in the top 20 free attractions in the South West (Visit England visitor insights), and the average visitor rating on TripAdvisor was 4.65 out of 5 stars
- The Becket Casket was loaned to the Museum of Somerset from the Victoria and Albert Museum. 15,400 people viewed the casket made in 1180, which depicts the murder in 1170 of St Thomas Becket, Archbishop of Canterbury by Somerset and Devon knights
- The War Stories film, made as part of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) funded War Stories Project, received the Audience Vote as best film at the Imperial War Museum Short Films Festival 2016
- Phase 1 Main Build Works at the Rural Life Museum was completed and the Trust took formal possession on 13 July 2016 with a lease until 2044. Phase 2 Fit Out is nearing completion with a planned opening date in June 2017

The **Somerset Archives and Local Studies service** brought a dramatic improvement to over 1 million online archive resources with the launch of the

- Somerset Archive catalogue <http://somerset-cat.swheritage.org.uk/home>
- Devon Archive catalogue (containing many entries relevant to Somerset) <http://devon-cat.swheritage.org.uk/home>
- Somerset and Devon Local Studies Library <http://library-cat.swheritage.org.uk/home>
- The Trust won the award from the Archives and Records Association for Record Keeping Service of the Year following nomination by the Friends of Devon's Archives
- Somerset Archives and Local Studies Centre received 5,181 visits, a decline in line with national trends and increased access to on-line resources

The Historic Environment and Estates service also saw major on-line developments:

- The Somerset Historic Environment Record (HER) online was re-launched on 5 September 2016 and contains 34,131 entries including new map and aerial photography data <http://www.somersetheritage.org.uk/>
- This resource enables the work of the service, including 1,524 requests for archaeological and conservation advice from local authorities and 227 from Natural England on agri-environment schemes
- The service managed the largest proportion of Trust income from externally funded projects including Hinckley Point C and the Avalon Marshes Landscape Partnership
- Avalon Marshes work included excavations on the line of the Neolithic Sweet Track (3806/7 BC) and rapid progress with the historic reconstruction buildings at the Centre

- Excavations at the medieval chapel of St Bridget at Beckery, Glastonbury, received national media attention

The Learning service remains resilient:

- The formal learning subscription system has been restructured with new marketing and charges
- Over 10,000 school pupils engaged in formal learning sessions and just under 10,000 informal learners engaged
- Reminiscence sessions are being run for older people, with considerable scope for expansion, with particular benefits for those with dementia and their carers
- The Rural Life Museum will extend the Learning offer from June onwards, including through the new Learning Centre built as part of the museum transformation project

Collections Care and Acquisitions

- The Frome Hoard, the largest hoard of Roman coins ever discovered in a single container in Britain, was the centrepiece of an exhibition at the British Museum
- Public fundraising enabled the acquisition of the Yeovil Hoard dating from the second and third centuries AD, discovered in March 2013 when ground works were taking place at Yeovil Recreation Centre
- Phase 2 of the review of the fine art collection has been completed, enabling a programme of conservation works to be agreed
- The Kenyon Photographic Project has digitised 58,000 acetate images taken by Stanley Kenyon of Wellington spanning his career between 1938 and 1994 and depicting Somerset people, places and communities, saving the collection from decay

3.2 Full reports of the activities of the Trust during the second year can be found in the Background Papers.

3.3 Volunteers are central to the work and success of the Trust and gave the equivalent to 3,147 working days over the year.

3.4 The Trust completed its design and procurement of a new ICT system and the successful migration from Somerset County Council ICT services to an independent environment took place in October 2016.

3.5 The second formal Annual Report and Outcomes meeting took place on 22 February when both Somerset and Devon commissioners met with the Chair of Trustees, the Chief Executive and the Business Manager. The Annual Report and the 6 Month Report are available as background papers.

4 Consultations and engagement

4.1 Responsibility for consultation regarding heritage services lies with the Trust.

4.2 An Advisory Forum meets twice a year and is an increasingly successful vehicle for ideas and feedback, for example on the recruitment of new trustees, the Supporter's Scheme and progress with the Rural Life Museum.

4.3 Customer feedback from visitor surveys, comments books, emails, other correspondence and social media reviews is collated. In the second year of operations the Trust received 5 complaints, all of which were resolved and nearly 2,000 positive feedback comments.

4.4 The Trust's staff forum met five times during the year, attended by at least one Trustee, and discussed matters concerning HR, personnel and working conditions. There is 77.75 staff FTEs.

5 Financial update

5.1 The status of the Trust as an independent charitable body continues to present new opportunities for income generation that are unavailable to County Councils. These include the ability to bid for heritage grants available only to charities and to achieve increased donations, as well as the economic benefits of charitable status such as tax relief and exemptions. The subsidiary trading company enables additional income.

5.2 The initial 5 year budget of £8,441k negotiated with the Trust has been revised to take into account a MTFP saving agreed in February 2016 for year 3 onwards totalling -£75,000. Initial and MTFP agreed contributions from Somerset County Council are shown below. Devon County Council contributions, for Archives and Local Studies only, are shown in italics.

	Year 1 (Nov 14 – Oct 15)	Year 2 (Nov 15 – Oct 16)	Year 3 (Nov 16 – Oct 17)	Year 4 (Nov 17 – Oct 18)	Year 5 (Nov 18 – Oct 19)
Initial	£1,769,300	£1,741,224	£1,641,274	£1,662,424	£1,626,688
<i>DCC</i>	<i>(£347,358)</i>	<i>(£347,910)</i>	<i>(£345,451)</i>	<i>(£350,095)</i>	<i>(£354,846)</i>
MTFP agreed	£1,769,300	£1,741,224	£1,626,274	£1,632,424	£1,596,688
Variance	n/a	n/a	-£15,000	-£30,000	-£30,000

The reduction in SCC contributions across the 5 year period reflects the anticipated income tested through the non-charging / charging modelling carried out by Stuart Davies Associates prior to the detailed financial negotiations. In particular the significant drop in County Council funding from Year 3 onwards is due to the anticipated income from the Somerset Rural Life Museum when it reopens in June 2017. Audited accounts are available on the Trust's website and the Charity Commission website.

6 Background papers

6.1 South West Heritage Trust Annual Outcomes Report November 2015 to October 2016

Note: For sight of individual background papers please contact the report author