

### Portsmouth Museums Strategy 2022-26

#### Introduction

The past five years have seen the successful delivery of the project to transform the former D-Day Museum into The D-Day Story. The highlights of our journey have been creating a compelling and evocative narrative based on the stories that accompany many of the objects we hold complemented by the personal accounts of the people who were there. We worked to ensure that the story engaged families, schoolchildren and young people and the Disability Advisory Forum helped to ensure that the exhibitions could be enjoyed by people with disabilities. Feedback from visitors and being shortlisted as a finalist for European Museum of the Year 2019 are testimony to our success.

The 2015-2020 Museums Strategy Unlocking Potential Transforming Lives identified six key aims that defined the direction we wanted to take underpinned by twenty-five objectives. They referenced diversity, learning, profile and reputation of the city, resilience, developing staff and digital access.

These have largely been addressed through the delivery of the Transforming the D-Day Museum project. Through its delivery for example we have: added to the reputation of Portsmouth as the Great Waterfront City: created a shared inclusive space in which people feel welcome: involved young people as paid interns and through the youth organisation UnLoc: provided a range of volunteering opportunities and further broadened engagement through special projects which took place in both the community and museum: delivered access for all through the involvement of the disability advisory forum in the development of the exhibitions and through events programming once the museum opened: supported Portsmouth D-Day Museum Trust with fundraising; digitized collections and made items from the D-Day Collection accessible online.

Although the D-Day project was almost all-consuming we also made progress elsewhere. Access to the Natural History Collection is being transformed through improved standards of storage and documentation following the appointment of a curator of natural history although we have made only limited improvements to the main museum store. Income generation has been overhauled at Southsea Castle through relationships with commercial partners. Partnerships have contributed to programming at Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery with loans from institutions such as the Royal Collections and TATE and an exhibition featuring Sherlock Holmes and the city's Conan Doyle Collection was developed in partnership with the late Neil McCaw, Professor of Victorian Literature at the University of Winchester. Inspirational learning programmes have taken place across our sites catering for a range of audiences from schools to families to adults and we opened a new Butterfly House at Cumberland House and obtained a Zoo Licence for its operation. We have developed our social media platforms. Building maintenance work has taken place at Cumberland House, Southsea Castle, Dickens' Birthplace and Eastney Beam Engine House.

Where we have perhaps underachieved is against our ambition to reflect the diversity of the city's culture and communities in what we do. Although we have broadened involvement through activities such as the D-Day 75 community projects, which engaged people from BAME groups and people experiencing isolation and have acquired objects relating to communities under-represented in the city's collections, Paulsgrove for example through our support of the capturing the spirit project, there has been a loss of momentum in terms of community engagement. We have yet to live up to our 'unlocking potential, changing lives' ambition.

Pressures on council budgets continue to take their toll. Following cuts totalling £611,780 between 2009/10 and 2014/15, a further loss of £180,800 has occurred during the life of the current museum strategy (ie from 2015/16 to 2019/20); a reduction of almost £800,000 in 10 years. And 25% of the council's current funding pays for business rates. Although the service has increased the amount of earned income and has continued to attract support from a range of funders - notably the National Lottery Heritage Fund - this does not equate to the loss of revenue funding from the council. The cuts have resulted in reductions in our offer for schools for example and activity in the community.

Digital access has become of greater importance during the coronavirus pandemic and digital ways of working are now the new norm. Our approach to digital needs to be embedded across the service. Training is needed for staff and volunteers on how to use digital platforms and greater sharing of skills across the staff and volunteer team to make for a digitally empowered workforce. Staff need to be enabled to work remotely and flexibly to build on the changes brought about by Covid-19.

As we emerge from the coronavirus pandemic, should we rethink the purpose of Portsmouth Museums; to become more about transforming lives through engagement with heritage and culture and less about property management? Can we find alternative uses for less efficient cultural assets - now further compromised by the need for social-distancing and the impact of reduced visitor numbers? Can we use digital more to develop audiences? Can we harness the new sense of community that has arisen during the pandemic?

Prior to lockdown and to kick-start the review process a facilitated workshop was held with museum staff and Tony Butler the CX of Derby Museums Trust was invited to undertake a 'peer challenge' review of our current activity. During lockdown we held two facilitated virtual workshops with community representatives. These all inform what follows.

## **Core purpose and values**

We want Portsmouth's museums and the collections they hold to be relevant and inclusive, used and valued by the city's communities. We shall not be limited by our buildings and gathering engagement will require the service to be visible in the streets and on the doorsteps. We shall recruit 'feet in the street' volunteers and we will be proud to be in the thick of it. Our purpose therefore is:

To give local communities and individuals the opportunity to engage with the city's amazing heritage and people, to tell their story, be inspired, learn new things, gain new skills and feel happier and more optimistic about the future.

We will do this by:

- Being inclusive and reaching all parts of the city and society
- Benefiting residents and communities - enhancing wellbeing, raising aspirations
- Working together - as a team, with communities, with partners
- Embracing new opportunities and being a catalyst for change
- Proving that we are doing it

## **Vision**

To create a new Museum of Portsmouth in partnership with the city's communities which captures the spirit of Portsmouth and is at the heart of the city.

## **Strategic Objectives**

- 1. Be more relevant to all our residents**
- 2. Be more in the thick of it**
- 3. Be more environmentally sustainable and resilient**

By 2026 (ie measures of success)

- Communities from across the city recognise that they have something to contribute to the city's museums.
- Museum collections will be cared for and developed to tell a wide range of stories relevant to people across the city.
- We will have increased income from other sources while council funding is maintained at current levels and will be a National Portfolio Organisation funded by Arts Council England.
- Portsmouth Museums will be the partner of choice for organisations and communities across the city
- Museums will deliver projects, programming, and site management with an environmentally sustainable and responsible approach.
- Every school in Portsmouth engages with at least one of the museums in the city.
- We will increase the visibility of the contribution we make to council priorities and initiatives and be acknowledged as a significant contributor to the City Vision.

## **Be more relevant to all our residents**

There are many reasons for people to feel excluded or neglected, undervalued or under-represented. We can provide opportunities to address these divisions, even celebrate

rather than ignore them, and build a better understanding of a sense of belonging that all can share.

In the facilitated workshop staff asked: How can we help people be part of the story? How can we help people connect with each other? How can we be relevant and current? How do we maximise volunteering opportunities? The Peer Challenge report recommends that we create a new narrative for Portsmouth Museums; one that identifies the qualities, characteristics and distinctiveness of place; ie Portsmouthness. This should further convey the idea to residents that history happened where I live, on my street, my doorstep and therefore it makes me matter.

Although Portsmouth Museums has a track-record of community participation - over at least the past 25 years - this has been largely delivered 'to' or 'for' the community (ie largely on our terms) and dependent on external funding. If we are to become relevant to communities across the city we need to embed participation and involve residents in what we do, transforming into a service working 'with' the local community for the longer term.

To achieve this the museum team will need the confidence and flexibility to work more collaboratively with communities across the city. The separation between frontline / visitor services and collections staff roles will be reduced. The museum team needs to be more representative of the communities it serves. If we can reduce our preoccupation with buildings, capacity will be increased and opportunities to create new posts will emerge.

The peer challenge report also noted that access would be enhanced by the relocation and transformation of Portsmouth Museum to a more central location to enable its habitual use by people from across the city and the provision of facilities that drive footfall. This in turn would contribute to the regeneration of the city centre. Developing the main museum store would be an alternative (or complementary) option.

Alongside these developments is the need to create an effective digital strategy and clear delivery plan. Delivering the strategy will improve access and virtual visits and promote our identity.

## **Objectives**

- Achieve ACE National Portfolio Organisation status as the opportunity to build upon a good track record and high quality public engagement to help transform cultural and creative life across the city.
- Work with stakeholders to elucidate Portsmouthness.
- Deliver co-production initiatives involving the core museums team and the community which explore new mutually beneficial ways of working, the barriers to access, and increase the range of ways in which people can volunteer.
- People find themselves reflected in the city's museum offer.
- Develop a digital strategy and delivery plan as a means of strengthening digital engagement and participation, developing and equipping staff and volunteers to undertake the roles required.

- Develop momentum and consensus for the development of a new Museum of Portsmouth in partnership with the city's communities.

### **Be more in the thick of it**

In the facilitated workshop staff asked: How can we be relevant and current? How can we have influence at city council level? Enthusiasm was expressed for connecting people and collections. Having a presence in community spaces and developing an identity for the service is key to maintaining a relevant public profile.

The peer review recommends that we improve internal advocacy and contribute more to public policy areas such as learning, health and wellbeing and community cohesion. The report suggests several immediate actions: relocation of the museum manager to civic offices where the opportunities to network are more readily available, improving data collection and using it for advocacy, investing in non-user market research, strengthening the role of the Cultural Development Project Officer to focus on internal and external advocacy and by helping to revitalise the Portsmouth Cultural Education Partnership.

### **Objectives**

- Proactively engage and network with colleagues and services across the council, seek and initiate opportunities to contribute to citywide projects and initiatives.
- Develop the workforce so that people can work flexibly, are empowered to make a positive contribution, and can articulate the difference museums make.
- Utilise and develop the collections to make meaningful connections with underrepresented communities.
- Extend and build strong partnerships with other cultural providers and provide support and leadership for museums across Hampshire through our networking and mentoring activity.
- Advocate and evidence what we do, the difference we make and improve data collection to underpin this.

### **Be more environmentally sustainable and resilient**

In the facilitated workshop staff asked questions around sustainability and how we make best use of resources, specifically space: How can we make sustainability central to all our decisions? How can we create spaces that groups and communities can use? How can we use our space in a more versatile way? Work to improve the main museum store was felt to be of particular importance.

Space is a finite and valuable resource. Our current use of space is not sustainable. The legacy of material accumulated by former staff for various purposes although often neither processed or used is an issue which we have now started to address in earnest. In addition the peer challenge review suggests that a more dynamic approach to the development of

collections in which decisions are made with the community would enable us to thin out irrelevant objects and make room for contemporary collecting.

The peer challenge report also highlights the number of museums run by Portsmouth City Council compared to other cities - Portsmouth six, Derby three, Bradford four and Plymouth and Exeter one each - and notes that this prioritises asset management over programming and public engagement. The report suggests that the council explores the re-purposing of inefficient cultural assets (buildings and collections) to free up resources to deliver better services and notes that this would be easier to justify alongside a major capital project.

The report also recommends we improve onsite programming to stimulate repeat visits and secondary spend through more readily affordable options involving community groups or artists collectives, pursuing external funding to buy in exhibitions also developing further our relationship with major lenders such as Tate and the British Museum to encourage more high-profile 'spotlight' loans.

### **Objectives**

- Continue to drive footfall and income generation at The D-Day Story through events programming and hire of The Dulverton Room and explore ways of improving footfall and secondary spend at other sites especially Portsmouth Museum and Art Gallery.
- Streamline the permanent collection to reflect community priorities and create space for contemporary collecting around current issues such as climate change. Review and rationalise handling and other collections which are not accessioned and do not form part of the permanent collection. All acquisitions and any disposals will be made in accordance with the council's Collection Development Policies.
- Improve the condition of the main museum store and the facilities it offers for collections and people with the support of Property Services.
- Use the natural history collections to explore climate change and biodiversity by providing opportunities for public engagement and by contributing to environmental research.