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Potteries Heritage Society
Stoke-on-Trent's Civic Society

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To Whom It May Concern

Stoke-on-Trent City Council Budget 2022-23 (Museums Service)

Potteries Heritage Society (PHS) is the civic society for Stoke-on-Trent and cares about the towns and places that make up the city, its history and its future. Our aims are to:

- Preserve the unique character of Stoke-on-Trent by maintaining the individual identities of the Six Towns and surrounding communities which make up the City;
- Promote awareness of the benefits of good design and well-maintained historic environments to the creation of a more prosperous, inclusive and sustainable city;
- Encourage the creation of better streets, spaces and buildings, and promote innovative and challenging design;
- Promote the continuing use of the city's historic buildings, supporting policies of repair and adaptation, rather than demolition;
- Promote effective practices to involve local communities in decisions affecting their local environments.

Crucial to our aims is stimulating an interest in local heritage and engaging with local people to help protect and enhance our unique urban environment. Our members include individuals, families, charities and businesses.

As founder members of Civic Voice, we are part of a network of several hundred such societies focussing on civic amenities, conservation issues and pride of place. Locally we have helped establish The Heritage Network and provide support for The Potteries Bottle Oven Owners Club alongside our Ceramic Heritage Action Zone partners.

We write in response to the City Council's Budget 2022-23 consultation. Having already contributed to the response submitted by The Heritage Network for Stoke-on-Trent, we do not intend to cover the same ground in detail, suffice to echo the Network's concerns regarding:

- the lack of proper engagement with stakeholders in preparing the proposals;
- the potential damage to the reputation and the unique cultural brand of the city;
- the loss of personnel from the museums service, including key curatorial staff;
- the reduction of opening hours of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery (PMAG) and seasonal closure of Gladstone Pottery Museum (GPM);
- the reliance upon untested and unsecured film, TV and event hire income;
- the use of a prized cultural asset to generate income for a separate department;

- the impact of reducing financial support to Etruria Industrial Museum (EIM) and Ford Green Hall (FGH);
- the potential loss of faith from donors, funders and users for our museums to remain fully open and accessible to all.

(The full response is available here: https://potteries.org.uk/sites/default/files/Heritage_Network_Budget_2022-23_Response.pdf)

In considering the proposals, our members were mindful of potential impacts they may have on the city's heritage and the area's appeal as a place to live, work and visit. These include the following:

1. Fewer people will be involved in heritage	We believe this will inevitably be the case as PMAG's opening hours are reduced and GPM closes for the winter months. School groups will be severely affected, restricted by a shorter week (from 5 to 3 days) and having only the choice of the summer months when exams and holidays dominate. Consider also the traveller who has a few days in the area, expecting to visit the famous GPM on a particular day. 7-month and 5-day opening means the chances of the museum being open are less than 50% (approx. 152 days/year = 42%). They are not likely to be consoled by a cup of coffee in the rain. Reducing staff numbers is also likely to diminish the Service's hands-on activities, in house events and outreach work. With reduced financial support, Ford Green Hall and Etruria Industrial Museum (both PHS members) will struggle to maintain their opening hours and activities. Although the proposed Sunday opening at GPM is to be welcomed, this is likely to impose further stress upon a reduced and under-resourced workforce.
2. The city's heritage will be in a poorer condition	With the loss of key staff and experienced personnel, we believe the city's unique collections, exhibits and museum buildings will be less meticulously kept, maintained and protected. Conservation work requires grant support but, although funding opportunities exist, a reduced staff team will lack the capacity to apply.
3. The city's heritage will not be properly identified or interpreted	Our work with bottle ovens and the Heritage Action Zone (HAZ) over the past few years has demonstrated that there is still much to learn about the industry, ceramic manufacture and materials, processes and the buildings that housed them. We need the expertise to be retained within the Service so that we can take appropriate advice, compare archaeological evidence with artifacts, and interpret our rediscovered heritage for future generations.
4. Heritage skills will not be retained and developed	We fear that both traditional skills and highly trained staff will be lost to the Service. GPM is renowned for its demonstrators, many of whom have first-hand experience of the pottery industry and embody skills that have been otherwise lost and mechanised.

The same applies to recording and conservation skills with the museums. Existing and experienced staff need to be retained as they will recognise artifacts and their significance, as well as passing on their knowledge to trainees.

5. Fewer people will learn about heritage and have their views challenged

As a conservation- and built environment-focussed Society, we have come to recognise the importance of stimulating and engaging with local people and visitors. Without sharing our understanding and illustrating heritage issues, it is not possible to communicate the significance of the local heritage or stimulate a passion that leads people to take action on conservation matters and advocate on behalf of the city. We need full access to our museums and their dedicated staff to satisfy an interest that we have seen grow significantly over recent years.

6. People's well-being will be adversely affected

"*Museums make a real difference in people's lives. As well as providing access to culture, history and science, they play a role as hubs at the centre of their communities. They support health and wellbeing; help to make better places to live, work and visit; and inspire people to engage with contemporary issues.*" – Museums Association, LA Funding Report 2021.

At a time when health, including mental health, and particularly that of children in the wake of the Covid pandemic, is deteriorating, this is the wrong time to be withdrawing and reducing museum services.

7. The Museum Service will be less resilient

There is no doubt that the proposals will lead to a less resilient service, its staff and capacity being significantly restricted. This will leave it less able to cope with challenges, such as a downturn in the local economy, or to respond to opportunities, such as new funding regimes.

During the first Covid lockdown, we helped establish the Museums Sub-group with our Heritage Network partners, which enabled local museums to share information about re-opening. The city's museums played an active role in that initiative, learning from and sharing good practice with others. How would a slimmed-down staff team be able to respond to such a crisis in future?

8. The city will be less attractive to residents, workers and visitors

Cities have played an important role in the development of civilisation on earth, not just because they bring people together physically, but because they stimulate intellectual debate and provide spaces for collaboration and shared learning. Museums are not only integral to this, but also celebrate the differences between one city and the next.

These are important considerations when people choose where to live, where to set up a business or where to spend their leisure time.

Our renowned and specialist museums are part of Stoke-on-Trent's unique identity, each having a distinctive role to play in

the story of our city's development as a world centre for ceramics. What will happen when GPM closes for long periods and several chapters vanish from our story?

9. The local economy will be supressed

If the city becomes less attractive to residents, businesses and visitors, then the local economy will certainly be affected. The Heritage Network has already highlighted, in its response, how the number of visitors the city receives has a direct benefit to the economy and that the 11,000 visits made during last year's 10-day Heritage Open Days (HODs) festival was worth an estimated £90,000. (GPM was closed for filming at the time and would have otherwise added around 700 visits to the total.)

Much of that 'spend per head' is made at our local museums, not only from entrance fees (which are generally waived during the HODs festival), but from souvenirs, gift purchases and catering. An itinerary including several museums and attractions might also include other hospitality, overnight stays and local transport.

But we expect the proposals will have a farther reaching and sustained effect on the local tourism offer and economy. The loss of part of the Council's museums service and the potential impact on EIM and FGH will have an impact on all of the city's attractions, both through the suppression of visitor numbers and the income they generate. The museums directly affected also provide an outlet for sales for other heritage organisations, including suppliers, such as ourselves, that rely on them to sell locally made products and artworks – particularly during the festive season when GPM is proposed to be closed.

This is not an exhaustive list of potential impacts and there are plenty of further examples that we could use to illustrate them.

If these concepts and the language used are familiar, particularly to those who have been involved in seeking investment for heritage projects, it is because these impacts represent the *direct opposite* of the kind of outputs expected by funders, such as the National Lottery Heritage Fund.

In conclusion, we urge the Council to halt these proposed changes, engage with stakeholders across the city and invest in this crucial service. We are pleased to have seen a renewed and increasing interest in the city's heritage and have yet to reap the benefits as people re-engage following the pandemic and respond to the national exposure we have enjoyed.

This is not the time to pull the rug from under a valued and respected service that is a credit to the city.



Andy Perkin, Treasurer
On behalf of Potteries Heritage Society