

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report, by Robert Aitken Museum Design in association with ApplyInnovation, is a response to a brief issued by Lancaster City Council (Community Engagement Service) in April 2011 which asked for an indication of how the City Museum's current offer could be improved in order to bring it up-to-date, attract more visitors and make a positive contribution to the District's cultural and economic assets. The work also addressed the issue of whether the existing Lancaster Indoor Market could be transferred to the Old Town Hall in some form, and what impact this would have on the Museum offer.
- 1.2 This report addresses these issues and makes a number of observations and recommendations which, when taken together, provide a phased, realistic and low risk strategy for the future development of the Museum in ways that will enable it to contribute, in a timely manner, to the developing heritage offer in the City and its District.

2 CURRENT POSITION

- 2.1 The museum offer in the Old Town Hall constitutes the City Museum and the King's Own Royal Regiment Museum. Traditionally, both have been regarded as one museum as far as development is concerned. They are, however, owned and managed separately. Located in Market Square the museum benefits from a central location within the city and the heritage appeal of the historic building it occupies. The Old Town Hall is Listed Grade II*, as is the adjoining rear wing, and the Listing description is held under English Heritage reference 383208. The City Museum, which opened in 1923, occupies an area of approximately 550 m², excluding attic and basement storage. It is a valued resource for education, enquiry and investigation providing access to and interpreting important collections relating to the history and heritage of Lancaster and District from the Neolithic age to 1937, the year in which Lancaster achieved city status.
- 2.2 In summary, despite its central location, and obvious architectural merit and strengths, the City and King's Own museums' offer is heavily constrained by the

architecture and internal layout of the Old Town Hall building, which itself has evolved over some 200 years. These constraints can be summarised as:

- lack of space
- poor access
- poor visitor and staff facilities
- the building's condition
- the building's Listed status
- the building's relationship with the Market Square
- inadequate temporary exhibition and commercial facilities to support:
 - a vibrant changing programme to encourage repeat visits
 - generate revenue and hence
 - contribute more significantly to the cultural offer and economy of Lancaster District.

2.3 Both the City and King's Own displays are worthy, well planned and of a high standard, but they do not in themselves constitute a significant attraction to today's visitor and are in urgent need of refreshment and renewal. Addressing these weaknesses in a sustainable, affordable way is a major part of this report.

3 CONTEXT - MUSEUM IN TOWN HALLS

3.1 There are literally hundreds of examples in England of the re-use of town halls as their original functions are replaced by more specialised, and often larger, buildings. Typically located in their respective market squares, their re-use emerges as a mix of museums (some military), heritage centres, arts centres, tourist information centres, farmers' markets, offices, market stalls, shops and spaces for hire. Their modern re-use seems to depend on a combination of factors including (a) their age, (b) architectural importance and Listed status, (c) relative size, (d) ease of conversion, (e) access, (f) competition in the immediate vicinity, and (g) whether their square is used for regular markets. A further factor appears to be (h) when the town hall was converted, and whether any later conversions have taken place.

3.2 Town halls with museums, including regimental museums, appear to be earlier conversions often taking place in the years immediately following the First World War.

Lancaster Old Town Hall is a prime example. Town halls with mixed uses (which may be museum, heritage centre, or arts centre) coupled with more commercial uses (such as retail and catering space or events hire) tend to be either later conversions or secondary conversions from their early 20th century counterparts.

4 LANCASTER INDOOR MARKET

4.1 Lancaster Indoor Market is located in Common Garden Street close to the city centre. The Market Hall consists of two shopping levels, linked by escalators, comprising a total gross internal floor area of some 4,200 m², providing approximately 70 individual trading zones. Footfall through the market has declined in recent years and, currently, only about half of the available spaces are taken up, with traders having retracted from the upper level in particular. The market currently attracts around 800,000 shoppers per year.

4.2 The City Council has been considering innovative ways of reducing the deficit associated with Lancaster Indoor Market, while maintaining a vibrant indoor market in the city. One such option is the possibility of developing and extending the Old Town Hall building to provide an improved City Museum and indoor market as it was felt that this arrangement could give traders a more central location and would combine well with the traditional Charter Market and retail heritage tourism offer of the city centre whilst also, potentially, providing improved museum facilities.

4.3 The possibility of providing space for market stalls on the Ground Floor of the Old Town Hall, currently occupied by the City Museum, has been considered but it is recognised that this could only be applicable to a small number of traders whose produce and stock is synergistic with an improved museum offer. In view of the current Indoor Market offer it is difficult to identify any retailer whose presence in the Old Town Hall would improve the Museum offer, other than perhaps the café, or bookshop. Realistically, however, there would need to be a step change in quality and aspiration if either were to appeal to modern museum visitors, whose expectations regarding catering, information and merchandising are justifiably high.

4.4 There is, therefore, an inherent incompatibility between both the nature of the current Indoor Market offer and City Museum offer and the availability of space for market

stalls in the Museum. Whilst there is no doubt that improvements can be made at the Museum, it will not be possible to improve the Museum *and* run a market (or part of the market) in the same building.

- 4.5 At the expense of the existing temporary exhibition galleries, approximately 100 m² could be made available for market stalls on the ground floor of the Old Town Hall. However, this represents less than 2.5% of the total floor area of the Indoor Market and only 5% of the area currently occupied by traders. The basement vaults, it is felt, would be inappropriate accommodation for market stalls due to restricted access and, therefore, footfall. There would, therefore, appear to be an inherent incompatibility between both the nature of the current Indoor Market offer and City Museum offer and the availability of space for market stalls in the Museum in the short term.
- 4.6 However, as a corollary to this proposition, it is envisaged that the Museum, as part of its outreach programme, could forge closer ties with commerce in general and the Charter Market in particular by occupying a stall of its own on market days which might for example, sell army ration meals or provide a curatorial drop-in service.
- 4.7 Moving any part of the market into the Museum at the present time is therefore not recommended. However, this could be reviewed in the future if the Old Town Hall were to be extended at ground floor level.

5 THE FUTURE MUSEUM OFFER

- 5.1 There was agreement that the Museum should aim to offer a comprehensive interpretation of the history of Lancaster City and District (defined as the administrative district) and that it should continue to offer the traditional museum functions of preserving objects and information for future generations. It is therefore to be a museum rather than a wider 'cultural centre'.
- 5.2 Variety in displays was considered an important aspect, with a renewed emphasis to be placed on the mix of permanent and temporary exhibitions and associated programmes and events. In terms of audiences, both visitors and locals are to be accommodated equally and hence the museum would be required to operate as a mix of heritage attraction and community and educational resource. Although rooted

in the history of the District, the displays should be capable, mainly through the temporary programme, of exhibiting objects that explore the culture of the District, for example through the work of local artists and crafts people. This would enable contemporary material to be displayed considering, for example, the local landscape and the communities of local artists. The future Museum was seen as being an all-year attraction that needed to balance its social role as an educational and community resource and visitor attraction with a greater emphasis on a commercial approach.

- 5.3 However, differences arose between the City and Regimental Museums in the style of presentation, with the former moving more towards an experiential, story-lead presentation, and the Regimental Museum wishing to preserve its object-rich, collections-lead approach. Further, the City Museum was seen as being part of a wider visit to Lancaster, whilst the Regiment saw itself as being a destination in its own right. These views were held sufficiently strongly to observe that different presentational approaches for the 'two museums' are required, and that the value of the co-location of the two museums (an historic accident, we understand, rather than a planned conjunction) is open to question. The possibility of the two collections being more closely integrated is therefore an unlikely proposition but the opportunities presented by the two museums being separately located are worthy of further consideration.

6 THE MUSEUM AND SQUARE ROUTES PROJECT

- 6.1 The Lancaster Square Routes project aims to rejuvenate the historic city centre, strengthening its position as a quality destination both for visitors and residents of the district. From the current design panels, Square Routes proposes an uplift of Market Square by (a) de-cluttering and improvement of materials, lighting and seating, (b) the replacement of the fountain with an interactive stage (c) improved facilities and layout for the street market, (d) a café presence at the opposite end to the Old Town Hall and (e) a 'stock exchange' interactive.
- 6.2 The Museum building's profile, visibility and accessibility is diminished by a cluttered streetscape, the presence of market stalls, undesirable use of its front steps as casual seating and anti-social behaviour. It is anticipated that the Square Routes

proposals will go some way to improving the perception and operation of the City Museum and that in due course the Museum will both influence and become an integral part of the cultural offer in the Square. The possibility of extending the Museum into the small square at the junction of New Street and Market Street will have implications for the Square Routes project, but initial discussions suggest that this would be viewed as a positive, rather than negative, proposition.

7 EXTENDING THE MUSEUM

7.1 The prospect of expanding the current museum offer can be considered in the following terms: (a) the reuse of space within the existing building(s), (b) the use of gallery space in other buildings (e.g. the Storey) and (c) extending the existing building. The first two options represent 'quick wins'. The third option is a longer term prospect representing a considerable investment by the Council and its development partners in the City Museum in the Market Square.

7.2 The square adjacent to, and to the north of, the Old Town Hall provides the opportunity to consider an extension to the building, which would significantly improve the Museum's offer on its current site. A new two-storey extension could provide some 300 m² of additional floor area which could accommodate, for example, a new museum entrance, visitor information, orientation and a retail/café offer on the ground floor with a fit-for-purpose special exhibitions gallery at first floor level. A new passenger lift would enable ease of access to the upper levels of both the new and existing buildings whose existing arrangements are inadequate. This development would free up space on the ground floor of the existing building vacated by the proposed 'quick win' insertion of the Orientation gallery and Visitor Information Centre. This space which could be separately accessed from the existing portico entrance could either accommodate permanent exhibitions, other museum facilities or, alternatively, a commercial operation.

8 INTERPRETIVE PLANNING

8.1 The City Museum's current offer interprets collections relating to the history and heritage of Lancaster and District from the Neolithic age to 1937, the year in which Lancaster achieved city status. The collection is rich in Roman archaeology and

includes a recently discovered Roman carved tombstone as its key artefact. Other key exhibits include the 7thC Quernmore woollen burial shroud and oak coffin which were excavated in 1973. The shroud is one of the largest pieces of woven cloth dating from the Dark Ages to be found in the UK. The King's Own Royal Regimental Museum, in the rear wing, is an object-rich permanent exhibition which documents the history of the Regiment and its campaigns from 1680 to the current conflict in Afghanistan. The soldier's life and its impact on the family is a particular focus of the exhibition.

8.2 As proposed, the redeveloped museum aims to:

- tell the story of Lancaster and district in an imaginative and innovative manner
- widen visitors perceptions of the development of the City and District
- interpret the Museum's collection in ways that allow local visitors to enjoy and be proud of their past and take ownership of it
- provide space for open storage of the collection or alternatively provide effective public access by 'virtual' means
- be a 'gateway' to the surviving heritage of Lancaster and District for locals and tourists
- use archaeological and historical processes as a way of exploring the collections and the history of Lancaster
- stimulate enquiry-based learning
- prompt visitors to actively consider how the past can be related to today's world
- engage and enthuse visitors by current historical discoveries and debates
- provide a changing programme of exhibitions and events to ensure repeat visits
- provide different levels of information for particular groups of visitors

8.3 It also aims to appeal to a variety of audiences including local people, tourists, the repeat visitor and children and young people. The needs of visitors with physical and learning difficulties must also be addressed, with exhibits selected and displayed to be accessible and a range of interpretive media being available. Visitor comfort will also be critical to the success of the Museum. As well as catering for people's

different interests and abilities, the design should incorporate resting places as well as changes in pace and mood.

- 8.4 In the redeveloped museum, we propose that the interpretive experience is divided into three zones: (a) 'Orientation', (b) 'Narrative' and (c) 'Insight'. This approach is applicable to the City Museum regardless of its future location but the following commentary is based on the museum remaining in the Old Town Hall building, albeit extended at some future date. The first two zones can be accommodated fully within the existing spaces occupied by the City Museum together with a fledgling interactive zone which would be fully developed once additional space becomes available either in the rear wing gallery or when a new extension is built.

9 COSTS AND MANAGEMENT

- 9.1 At present, the City has a management contract with Lancashire County Council whereby the latter manages the former's museums for an annual fee. Essentially, the County provides technical (e.g., conservation) and professional (e.g., curatorial, design) support to the museum, whilst the City remains responsible for the ownership of, and hence the long-term maintenance for, the building and the collections. The existing contract, on which notice was served by the City in 2010, is currently being re-negotiated for a renewed start date in 2012. Under the existing arrangements the City pays the County some £539,000 a year for its services, of which a nominal £236,000 is assigned to the City Museum and a further £39,000 for the King's Own Museum, with the remaining £264,000 set aside for the other two museums, of which £249,000 is assigned to the Maritime Museum and £15,000 to the Cottage Museum.
- 9.2 In addition to the City Museum, the City also manages a Visitor Information Centre in the Storey Institute. Cost estimates for 2010-11 suggest an overall expenditure budget of £232,400, which nets to £202,000 when sales and commission are taken into account. The VIC has eight posts filled by seven members of staff (3 full time equivalents) which cover front-of-house, staff and operational management duties as well as telephone and email enquiries. Of this £232,400, some £26,900 is property-related costs for the occupation of circa 90 m² of ground floor space at the Storey, including rent, rates, service charges and cleaning.

- 9.3 From these numbers, it appears that combining both operations in the City Museum building would offer significant budget, staffing and operational benefits, particularly as the VIC staff are all trained for front-of house activities. The headline figures suggest that at least £480,000 would be available to run the combined premises, allowing for £26,900 remaining at the Storey as premises costs for the occupation of the proposed new temporary exhibition facility in the space occupied by the existing VIC.
- 9.4 Whilst the previous management arrangement with the County may have had some merit in 2003, there is a strong case for the City managing the Museum in-house, particularly if the Museum – as is recommended – is to become the flagship operation for Lancaster, both as a resource for locals and the first port of call for visitors. These roles will be underlined if the VIC joins with the Museum. In-house management would also give greater and more direct control to the City over the public face of the museum, its brand and its outreach activities, the way it is promoted and the way it is managed – and accounted for – on a day-to-day basis, all of which lie primarily with the County under the existing arrangements.
- 9.5 A firm recommendation is, therefore, that the new contract with the County is restricted to back-of-house, technical support (e.g., conservation) services and that the operational, public-face aspects of the museum's operation are retained by the City. This gives the City freedom to develop the museum as it sees fit, with the County acting as a third party contractor for defined services, at an agreed fee, and under a revised service contract. One way of approaching this would be to agree a retainer with the County from which specific jobs would be undertaken for an agreed fee per job. This action might be necessary for the City Museums to retain its Accredited Status. Alternatively, or additionally, a number of other bodies or private contractors could be approached for specific packages of work.
- 9.6 The recommendations of (a) combining the VIC with the City Museum and (b) re-negotiating the contract with the County will enable the City to reconsider the management requirements of the City Museum as an in-house-managed, more broadly-based institution. This would create benefits to both the Museum and the VIC by combining footfall – and hence increasing visitor and user numbers – sharing staff and, by combining interpretation and information in the same place, adding

considerably and positively to the visitor experience. Following this logic, there is a very strong case, within the combined budget, for the creation of a new Museum Manager post whose focus is on the promotion and development of the Museum as a public and commercial resource rather than as an educational resource with overriding social objectives.

10 MARKET ANALYSIS AND THE BUSINESS CASE

10.1 At present, the City Museum records that it receives some 53,000 visitors a year. This is a substantial figure for a small museum, and one that implies an average daily throughput of some 24 people an hour every hour for the 312 days a year that the museum is open. This is nearly three times as many people as are recorded at the Maritime Museum which is open for seven days a week, but for which an admission charge is made. From a detailed market analysis, it is clear that to raise the City Museum from its current position to (say) a throughput of 100,000 annual visitors would require a substantial, multi-million pound investment in facilities that would increase the size of the Museum considerably and raise it to the status of a visitor destination rather than its current – and recommended – role of being part of a day trip or day activity in Lancaster.

10.2 Such a major development is impossible at the Museum in its current location due to the space available for development. Hence, it is unlikely that the City Museum – in its current location – will attract significantly greater visitor numbers than the 50,000 or so it currently records. With this being the case, the ways in which these numbers are generated, and the facilities to be offered to them, need to be considered in order to develop a more financially sustainable future for the Museum. Options for consideration are:

- Increasing stay time (at present estimated at around 1 hour) to encourage ...
- ... Retail spend and ...
- ... Catering spend
- Charging for special and temporary exhibitions at the Storey
- Outreach earnings (via retail) in Market Square itself
- Merchandising aspects of the collections.

10.3 As envisaged after the 'Gap Closing' activities, the City Museum (excluding the King's Own) will have control over the following spaces available to the visiting public, in addition to the launch of a new brand for the Museum and a new presence in the Market Square by the market stall initiative:

- Remodelled first floor exhibition galleries
 - VIC on the ground floor
 - New retail outlet on the ground floor
 - New orientation gallery on the ground floor
 - New education area on the ground floor
 - New temporary exhibition gallery in the vacated VIC space in the Storey.

10.4 With this in mind, it is reasonable to assume that the revised City Museum and Storey will increase their respective market penetration rates to a combined, stabilised 80,000 visitors a year, providing entry to both remains free (charges for special exhibitions at the Storey's ground floor gallery could be considered on an ad hoc basis, depending on the show). The Storey possesses a substantial, 'black box' exhibition space on the first floor. This could be used as part of the Museum's special exhibition programming as well as for events and, possibly, catered receptions. If special exhibitions are to be mounted in this space, the gallery should be refitted to meet Government Indemnity standards thus enabling it to attract national and international exhibitions.

10.5 It is clear that the eventual brand of the City Museum will have a substantial impact on its market(s) and the way in which they are attracted. This aspect cannot be rushed into – nor can its importance be underestimated – it is, after all, the intellectual umbrella under which the refurbished museum will grow and mature. We therefore recommend that a separate exercise to determine Museum's brand and brand values is undertaken as part of the 'Gap Closing' activities. At minimum, both the psychological aspect of the brand and the experiential aspect need to be settled and communicated through the promotional strategy in advance of re-launch, suggested as being August 2012 – the 400th anniversary of the Pendle Witch trials.

10.6 An analysis of costs has indicated that the combined Museum and VIC at the City Museum (plus the smaller temporary exhibition space on the ground floor of the Storey vacated by the VIC) would nominally require an annual operating budget of

just over £480,000. This would support 14 full-time staff at an average of approximately £20,000 per person measuring over all the activities of the facility. Bearing in mind that the Museum currently operates on 6 full-time staff (plus as-and-when casuals) there may be scope for an operational review in personnel terms, particularly as the post of Museum Manager (an additional post to the Assistant Keeper) is, it is recommended, re-defined in a more public-oriented way.

10.7 A further analysis indicates a combined nett retail income (excluding staff and all premises costs) of just over £70,000 in an average year. This is significantly more than the VIC is producing at the Storey and much more than the City Museum is at present. These are therefore targets to be achieved: activities and goods for sale, staff and the site's promotion should be geared to achieving them. The proposed Museum's market stall also has a role to play here.

10.8 This analysis has considered the impact of the delivery of, essentially, the 'Gap Closing' activities on the business plan for the City Museum. It has not considered the effect of any catering activity on site, nor the possibility of building of an extension. The financial outcomes of the 'Gap Closing' activities are to be considered conservative in their impact as much will depend on the qualities, drive and ambition of the staff that will implement and manage them. Nevertheless, it is clear that a combined City Museum and VIC at the City Museum would offer considerable operational and financial benefits to the City based on a redisplayed collection drawing on up-to-date museum thinking, effective front-of-house provision via, primarily, VIC staff, together with an improved retail offer, managed and marketed as such, at a prime location in the very heart of the city's shopping area.

11 RECOMMENDATIONS

11.1 This study has identified a number of options for the City Museum:

- Closure
- Stay as is
- Remain in the Market Square but with a different offer
- Move into Lancaster Castle
- Expand into the adjacent Library building

- Move to a new location in the city (possibly the Quayside)
- Combine with the Maritime Museum in a new location in the city (possibly the Quayside).

11.2 Options 4 through 7 are long-term solutions that will take many years to come to fruition. Unless Option 1 is chosen – which appears highly unlikely – then the City Museum will continue to operate in the Market Square for the foreseeable future, perhaps for as long as eight years (to 2019-2020). With this being the case, there is clearly a need to improve the existing offer both intellectually and physically so that the Museum engages more with its public and is seen to make a more substantial contribution to the heritage-lead focus of Lancaster’s development strategy of improving the (a) the product, (b) the way it is marketed, (c) the services it delivers and (d) hence the visitor experience.

11.3 Option 2 (Stay as is) may be initially attractive in financial terms, but the Museum is clearly in need of an uplift both to its exhibitions and to its presence in the Market Square. Failure to do this will result in declining visitor numbers and a reducing relevance and will be at variance with the published strategy of the City.

11.4 Option 3 (Remain in the Market Square but with a different offer) is the preferred option since not only can this be phased, it will – if managed prudently – enhance the value of the Old Town Hall building whilst not closing off any of the later options (4 through 7). It thus presents the least risk option for the City and the one that offers the greatest rewards.

11.5 However, there are a number of ways in which the Museum can “remain in the Market Square but with a different offer”. Below are a number of ‘quick wins’, defined as those activities that are within the Council’s control and do not require development partners. These could – and should – be applied to the Museum to effect a staged improvement of the building, its exhibitions and presence in the Market Square.

	Activity
1	Research, create and launch new brand for the City Museum
2	Research and produce a new interpretive master plan for the City Museum in the

	context of Lancaster as a whole
3	Master plan for the new museum offer including the extension and basement
4	Banners to front of building using new brand
5	Creation of branded market stall as outreach activity and link to Square Routes
6	Small promotional exhibition in The Platform on Morecambe Sea-front
7	Re-design and display of 1 st floor galleries (<i>not</i> Regimental Museum)
8	Design and move VIC from Storey to Ground Floor of City Museum
9	Design and install new temporary exhibition gallery on GF of Storey
10	Design and install new retail outlet on GF of City Museum
11	Design and install new orientation gallery on GF of City Museum
12	Design and install new staff and education areas on GF of City Museum
13	Design and make good etc new entrance to the rear of City Museum to take into account new retail, orientation and VIC spaces
14	Scheme Design for extended museum offer (including new extension and basement refurbishment) based on Master plan – Scheme Design fees only