



## **Executive 18<sup>th</sup> October 2006**

### **Museum of Somerset – request for funding**

#### **Report of Strategic Director, Joy Wishlade**

(This matter is the responsibility of Executive Councillor J. Clark)

##### **Executive Summary**

Somerset County Council is leading the project to re-develop the Museum of Somerset into a vibrant visitor attraction which will significantly boost the local economy. A major funding bid of £4.8m is being made to the Heritage Lottery Fund and support of partners needs to be demonstrated in order that the project has the best possible chance of approval. Members are therefore requested to approve a supplementary estimate of £20,000 from General Fund reserves to support this project.

#### **1. Background**

- 1.1 The vision for the Museum for Somerset is that it will unlock and interpret Somerset's rich history and heritage in an innovative and sustainable way for the benefit of Somerset people of all ages as well as for visitors to the county. The project will also support the Vision for Taunton in that it will provide a focus for renewal and regeneration in the town and develop a central visitor attraction in the cultural quarter.

#### **2. Taunton Castle**

- 2.1 Rejuvenation of the museum will allow for the conservation and interpretation of the castle as a historic structure which has been central to the story of Taunton and of Somerset. The need to rediscover the Castle as a historic structure and public space is fully supported by the owners of the building, the Somerset Archaeological and Natural History Society.

#### **3. The Project**

- 3.1 The project aims to restore and interpret the ancient fabric of Taunton Castle by the redisplay to the best modern standards of the County Museum located

within it and by creating a museum which has learning, inspiration and discovery at the heart of its ambitions.

3.2 The project aims to optimise space within the Castle and improve its

immediate environs. The Museum will provide greatly enhanced physical and intellectual access to heritage, outstanding learning opportunities and an excellent visitor experience which is enriching, challenging and enjoyable.

3.3 The project seeks to create a first class 21<sup>st</sup> century museum that will tell the story of Somerset eloquently and memorably for the first time. The collections have been assembled and curated over a period of 150 years but much is currently hidden from public access. The new museum will allow for improved and more accessible displays of the collections.

3.4 The objectives of the project are to:

- Increase the profile of Taunton Castle as a historic structure by telling the story of the building itself
- Improve the physical access to the building and to comply with DDA legislation
- Create public spaces for events etc
- Create display spaces to provide access to the museum collections
- To provide an experience which inspires renewed pride in Somerset and concern for its future
- To create secure temporary exhibition space to attract regional and national touring exhibitions
- To increase revenue streams through marketing, sales, visitor refreshment facilities etc.
- To greatly increase visitor numbers
- To remove current uses of the building that are inappropriate to the historic structure
- To provide increased public access to the Castle site by opening up and interpreting more of the Castle grounds including the remains of the Castle keep

#### **4. Funding**

4.1 The total cost of the project is £6.43m. The bid to the Heritage Lottery represents £4.8m of this, the remainder of £1.63m to be found from partner match funding. To date £55,550 has been raised, not taking into account any contribution from TDBC. Somerset County Council is underwriting the remainder at this stage. In order for the bid to HLF to succeed it is essential that key partner organisations are seen to demonstrate their support. It is felt that a capital contribution of £20,000 from this Authority would greatly assist with the success of the HLF bid and with demonstrating our support for the project. Given the restricted amount of capital reserves available this would need to be financed from General Fund reserves. For members information the balance on the General Fund reserve as at 31 March 2007 is currently forecast to be £1.287m.

4.2 It should be noted that TDBC will also be contributing in kind towards this project as we seek to enhance the surrounding area of the Castle, including Castle Green, as part of the Vision developments.

**5. Recommendation:**

5.1 The Executive is asked to demonstrate its support for the Museum for Somerset project and are recommended to request that Full Council agree to a capital contribution of £20,000 towards the project. Finance for this would be sourced from a supplementary estimate from General Fund reserves.