

The Helena Thompson Museum
Workington

Options for Future Operation and
Development

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY AND
RECOMMENDATIONS

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SUMMARY

1. The report considers the options for the future of the Helena Thompson Museum. Key questions addressed by the report include:

- **Does Helena Thompson Museum deliver ABC Objectives?**
- **What change is needed to deliver ABC Objectives? Community Objectives?**
- **Is that change sustainable?**

The report produces evidence in support of the following:

2. Workington has a rich and unique history which has shaped the communities and landscape of the present town. This includes industry, trade, sport, institutions, and the everyday lives of the people of the district.
3. This heritage is a great feature of the town which must be conserved, interpreted and communicated, particularly to the young people of Workington to encourage a sense of community and pride of place.
4. Heritage can, and does, play a major part in regeneration and its value is recognised in nation, regional and county strategies as well as by the CPA Inspectorate.
5. Allerdale Borough Council is energetically and effectively pursuing the regeneration of the district and is committed to being positive about the Borough's good features.
6. Surveys indicate that the local community strongly support the provision of a museum service in Allerdale though they are used little.
7. The Helena Thompson Museum, at present, does not contribute greatly to regeneration or to education.
8. The terms of the Will of Helena Thompson provide the town of Workington with a resource which, if used creatively, could make a much greater contribution to regeneration and education. The resource can, as a result of the Will, only be used for "heritage" purposes. The resource does not have to be the existing building, Park End could be sold so long as the receipt is re-invested in pursuit of the same objectives.
9. The Helena Thompson bequest is a valuable asset which can be deployed in various ways to achieve the objectives of Allerdale Borough Council, to meet Community need and to satisfy the terms of the bequest.

10. A range of options were considered which, to different degrees, meet the objectives of Allerdale Borough Council, the Jubilee Group, and the Community. These options are:
 - **Closure** - The museum is closed, the property sold and the money raised from the sale is used to support other groups/activities consistent with the terms of the will of Helena Thompson. Those activities might range from simple investment in the restoration of the Workington Hall to the establishment and operation of a trust fund.
 - **Continuation at Park End** - The building and its contents are retained and operated broadly in line with the present arrangements. The continuing support of ABC would be essential to underwrite the core expenditure of the museum. The issue of outstanding maintenance would also have to be resolved.
 - **Continuation Elsewhere** - The continuation of a museum service broadly similar to that currently operated but relocated to more convenient more central premises.
 - **Refocus on Education and Heritage at Park End** - Instead of being building focussed the service should concentrate on outreach services to schools libraries, community centres, community groups, places of work etc.
 - **Refocus on Education and Heritage Elsewhere** - Instead of being building focussed the service should concentrate on outreach services to schools libraries, community centres, community groups, places of work etc
11. The Jubilee group would prefer to retain the present service at the present location (Option 2) but the option of moving the service to a new location (Option 3)would be their second preference.
12. Their second preference could be used to lever in resources to assist in the redevelopment of other buildings, for example the Workington Hall or the Carnegie or another location.
13. Officers of ABC recognise the value of the asset of the bequest and are keen to make best use of that asset for the regeneration and benefit of the Borough.

CONCLUSIONS

14. Allerdale BC needs to recognise that the Helena Thompson bequest represents a major community asset.
15. ABC can view this as an asset of little value (since it is obliged to be used for museum purposes) or as an asset of considerable value if used to lever in new funds. The former could lead to the asset being disposed of to a trust, the later could see the asset being reinvested for real community benefit.

16. The Jubilee group and other stakeholders need to recognise that the present outcomes do not represent the best use of the asset and acknowledge their own limitations in operating a sustainable, independent museum service.
17. The HTM cannot justify the continuing use of these resources since they make little contribution to the objectives of ABC. It can not therefore continue to function as a museum without a major re alignment of it's priorities.
18. There are potentially important partners, such as the North West Buildings Preservation Trust, who have not, so far been involved in the process.
19. The property could be used to unlock substantial grant aid to deliver a scheme which could produce both significant regeneration outcomes and an improved heritage/museum service. A illustration of this process is:
 - A vehicle (trust?) is established to deliver a heritage based scheme to regenerate one or more underused or redundant buildings. (e.g. Workington Hall, the Carnegie, or other).
 - Members of the partnership would include Allerdale Borough Council, Workington Partnership, North West Buildings Preservation Trust, Jubilee Group, Community Action Network.
 - Park End House is used as ABC's contribution to the funding package. Other funding would come from the partners, English Heritage, Heritage Lottery Fund.
 - In order to comply with the terms of the bequest an equivalent museum space/service and community facilities would have to be provided as a part of the package.
 - The development trust or a successor organisation assumes responsibility for the management of the museum service. (The collections would remain the property of ABC and loaned to the trust.)
 - A long term service agreement is entered into between Allerdale BC and the trust defining the nature and cost of the museum service/operation.
20. Further consideration needs to be given to the nature of the museums service which will emerge from this process. Key characteristics of the service must be:
 - That it is sustainable within the available resources.

- That it addresses the key objectives of Allerdale BC.
 - That an education function is at its core.
 - That it conserves, interprets the heritage of Workington and makes it available to all sections of the community.
21. I would recommend consideration of the model developed by Dacorum (Appendix 8) as an appropriate means of delivering these objectives.
22. There is considerable distrust of Allerdale Borough Council amongst the groups using HTM. There is a view that the proceeds from the above would never be reinvested back in a museum service and that the current service would be closed and never reopen.

RECOMMENDATIONS

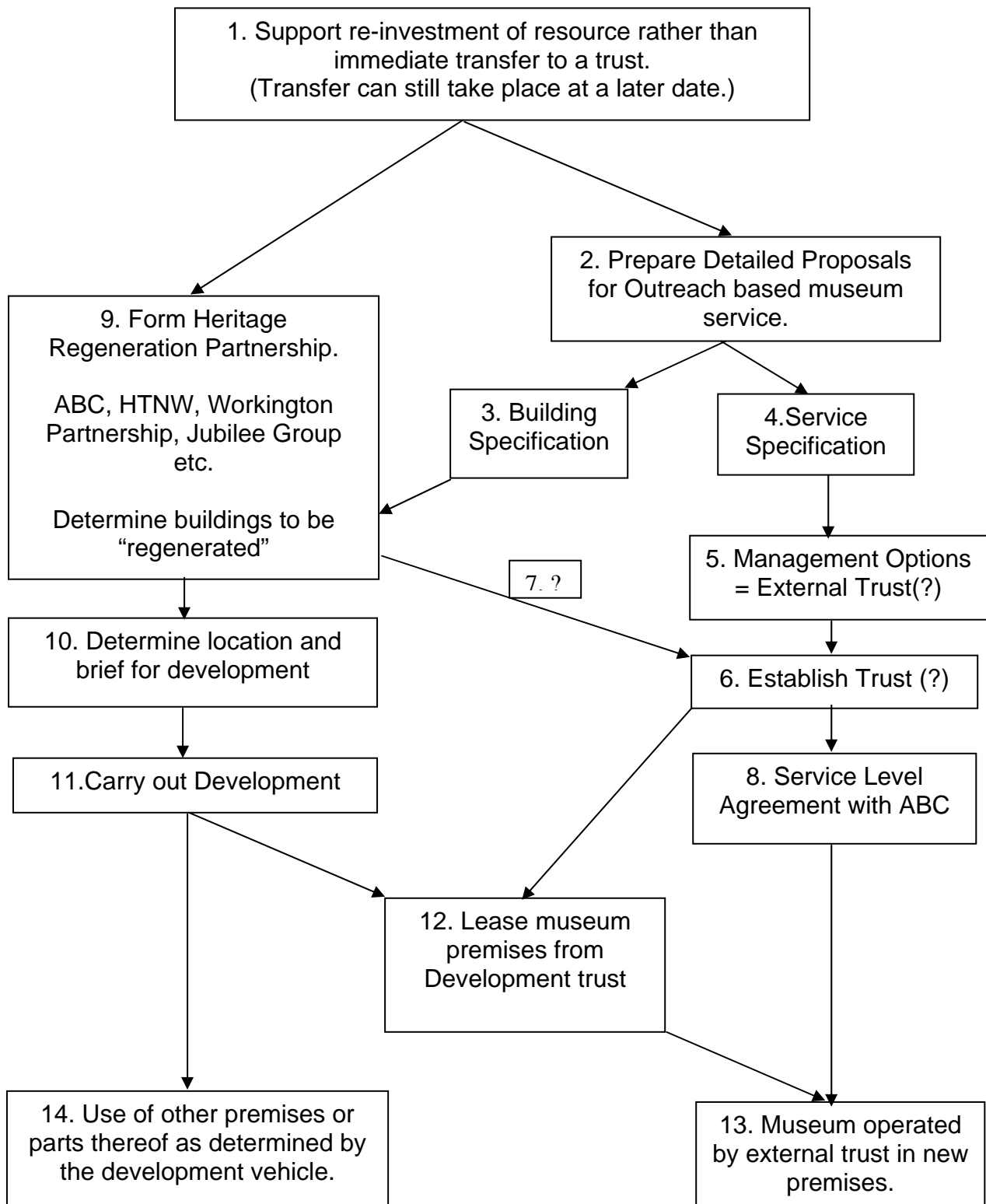
It is recommended that:

1. The immediate transfer to a trust based upon the Jubilee group should not proceed as it is not the best use of the assets to deliver the Council's objectives and is unlikely to be sustainable in the long term.
2. Ongoing discussions should continue involving ABC, Workington Partnership, the Heritage Trust for the North West, Jubilee Group, Community Action Network and other with a view to preparing a proposal for a heritage development trust to undertake a regeneration project. ABC's capital contribution to that project should be Park End House. This proposal should be available within 6 months.
3. The Heritage Service Manager should be instructed to prepare a proposal for a future museum service to serve a wider community in Allerdale through an outreach service and to meet the obligations under the Helena Thompson bequest. This plan should be completed within 3 months so that its implications can be considered by the group convened under 2 above.
4. Progress with 2 and 3 above will need to be co-ordinated and the relationship to decisions regarding the museums at Keswick and Maryport should also be considered.
5. ABC should give consideration to the project management of this scheme particularly the issues of project champion and of risk management within the proposal.

A flow chart follows which demonstrates how these decisions interrelate.

Euan Cartwright
17th April 2003

SUGGESTED DECISION PROCESS



NOTES

1. Acknowledgement that the Helena Thompson bequest is an asset which can be employed for the wider benefit of the community.
2. Such a service will need a base for operations and a store but these need not be expensive to maintain. Alternative arrangements will also have to be made for the community activities presently accommodated at HTM.
3. The building requirements for the service will have to be met as part of redevelopment proposals.
4. A detailed specification for the service will be needed, this will form the basis of 8.
5. There are a number of options for future external management of the service these will need to be considered.
6. If the independent trust route is preferred then this will need to be established.
7. The development trust may be in a position to operate the facilities too.
8. Since the collections will remain the property of ABC (and financial support may continue to be provided by ABC) an agreement will be needed.
9. A partnership will be formed, ABC will put property into the partnership and other partners will bring access to grant aid.
10. The properties to be included and the nature of their redevelopment will be determined by the partnership.
11. The partnership may be the vehicle for carrying out the physical development or may use an external agent.
12. The premises required by the redefined museum service will be provided by the partnership in "exchange" for Park End being included in the partnership.
13. The new museum service is established in the new premises.
14. Other uses are found for other parts of the premises redeveloped by the partnership.