

# RUSSELL COTES ART GALLERY AND MUSEUM MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE



Report subject	<b>Russell-Cotes Art Gallery &amp; Museum Update Report 1 December 2020 – 31 September 2021</b>
Meeting date	22 October 2021
Status	Public Report
Executive summary	<p>This report provides an update on the activities of the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery &amp; Museum from December 2020 – September 2021 including the ongoing impact of the coronavirus pandemic.</p> <p>Operating restrictions have impacted, with a reopening in December 2020 and then closure again from 31 December to May 2021, with the partial reopening of the shop and outside café in April.</p> <p>This has had an inevitable impact on visitor numbers, income and activities. However, visitor numbers have recovered gradually to reach pre-pandemic levels by August 2021 and income targets for admissions and secondary spend are being met currently.</p> <p>Exhibitions, programming and engagement are coming back on track as restrictions lift. The new Century of British Art exhibition commemorating the centenary of the Bournemouth Arts Club (BAC) has opened. Plans are underway for a range of activities and events to mark the Russell-Cotes centenary in 2022.</p> <p>The receipt of £226,000 from the Arts Council England (ACE) Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF) has supported the Museum due to the loss of visitor income which it needs for core funding. It has enabled significant investment into the financial sustainability of the Museum (outdoor catering, improved signage, new integrated till systems with online capability and marketing support) which has delivered demonstrable benefits already.</p> <p>It has also provided funding for the ongoing review of governance and the progress towards externalisation. Notably it has supported professional and consultancy fees associated with developing the business model and understanding the liabilities around the building and exploring the complex legal position of the Museum's governance with the Charity Commission.</p> <p>The Museum has passed the Expression of Interest stage for the ACE Museum Estate and Development MEND Fund and with a very short time frame is applying for a significant contribution (£518,000) to improve the Museum's fabric and services – notably the conservatory, water ingress issues, drainage and a new air</p>

	<p>handling system with match funding (£426,000) from BCP Council (subject to Council approval) and £30,000 from the Conservatory Fund. If successful, this capital project would commence in April 2022.</p> <p>The Russell-Cotes is considering applying for National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) status and funding in 2022 for the period 2023-27.</p>
<b>Recommendations</b>	<p><b>It is RECOMMENDED that:</b></p> <p><b>The Management Committee accept the Russell-Cotes Art Gallery &amp; Museum review report for the period 1 December 2020 – 31 September 2021 and agree the actions suggested in the report.</b></p>
Reason for recommendations	<p>To demonstrate the fulfilment of the Committee's responsibility to provide strategic oversight of the Russell-Cotes as the delegated governance body for the Charity.</p>

Portfolio Holder(s):	Councillor Mohan Iyengar, Portfolio Holder for Tourism, Leisure and Culture
Corporate Director	Kate Ryan, Chief Operating Officer
Report Authors	Chris Saunders, Service Director, Destination and Culture Michael Spender, Head of Culture Sarah Newman, Museum Manager
Wards	Not applicable
Classification	For Update and Information

### Impact of Covid

1. Due to the Covid pandemic and the regulations introduced the Museum has had periods of closure, however it has sought to reopen, at the earliest opportunity under the regulations at the time:

Museum Closure/Opening	
4 Nov – 4 Dec 2020	Closed
5 Dec – 30 Dec 2020	Open – 4 days per week (because of limited demand and capacity)
31 Dec 2020 – 12 April 2021	Closed
13 April -17 May	Shop and outside catering open, Museum closed
18 May – 18 July	Museum and indoor catering reopened – 6 days per week
19 July -	Restrictions lifted nationally. Some measures were removed eg one-way systems but museum has retained sneeze screens, sanitizers, reduced capacity and a recommendation to wear masks

2. During the extended period of closure from January to April 2021, staff continued to be employed and were as far as possible deployed to work behind the scenes or from home on museum projects such as cleaning, conservation, marketing, ticketing etc, particularly on ACE CRF- funded activities.

## **Financial Impact**

3. The Museum's enhanced Covid budget from BCP Council was supplemented by a significant grant from ACE CRF of £226,000 which has addressed the shortfall of the loss of visitor income. Funds have also been allocated to specific projects (see below).
4. The Museum has benefited from the Rate Rebate and from the VAT reductions on admissions and catering.
5. In 2021/2, the Museum budget from the Council has been uplifted to £595,000 in expectation of reduced visitor income and additional covid related costs because of the ongoing uncertainty about opening regulations and visitor confidence.

## **Visitor Figures and Performance**

6. The museum sought to reopen as soon as feasible under the regulations at the time. There was relatively little take up of the outdoor catering and shop offer in April and May but it is clear that visitor confidence has grown significantly over the summer. In May, visitor figures were 47% of 2019 numbers, while by August this had increased to 91%.
7. The museum has been helped by improved visibility with new signage around the building and in the resort, new marketing material, an outdoor catering offer and the efforts of a full-time marketing officer. In addition, the audience has benefited from the number of people staycationing in Bournemouth, either in serviced accommodation or staying with family and friends, even though overseas visitors and the language school audience are absent.
8. In addition, the improvements made to the displays of the upstairs rooms and the introduction of outdoor catering have significantly lifted the visitor offer.
9. Our performance is better than the average for the sector and visitor feedback is exceptionally strong.

## **Accreditation**

10. The Russell-Cotes was due to be invited to submit its renewal of accreditation between Jan 2020 and April 2021, but this has been delayed because of Covid and its current accreditation status has been extended. A revised timetable for submissions is due to be issued by the Arts Council in due course. However, staff have continued to revise policies and plans in preparation. See Agenda Item. Maintaining Accreditation status is of vital importance to all museums.

## **Building**

11. The installation of a new fire panel and of wireless devices throughout the building has been commissioned and will begin in November necessitating the closure of the Museum from 8 – 19 November 2021.
12. The insurance repair to the Conservatory from the loss of glass in February 2020 has yet to be commissioned but should be scheduled shortly by Building Services.

## **Collections and Conservation Care**

13. The Conservations Audit, by conservator Sarah Howard, was conducted in the spring. It was extremely complementary of the good practice by the Curator and the museum team of staff and volunteers and gave some useful advice on further improvements which have been added to the Care of Collections Policy and Plan.
14. The Museum has a scheduled closure for its annual conservation programme from 3- 10 January 2022. This allows the museum to polish all the floors and undertake other vital conservation and collections care work that cannot be achieved in the one day a week routine closure. It is scheduled for a period of limited visitor numbers to minimize impact.
15. For acquisitions, loans and disposals see Agenda Item.

## **Programming**

16. Due to Covid, the scheduled exhibition programme continues to be modified. The stop-gap 'Hidden Highlights: Life in Lockdown' exhibition of paintings from our collection with humorous, lockdown-related humorous captions ran from 20 October 2020 – 12 October 2021. It enabled the Museum to display some of its exceptional collection and was enjoyed for its light touch and opportunity for visitors to engage with their own witty captions.
17. On 1 October 2021, 'A Century of British Art: Bournemouth Arts Club 1920 – 2020' opened in the main galleries. This commemorates the centenary of the Bournemouth Arts Club, with which the Russell-Cotes has had a close connection. Shortly after the ending of the First World War a group of accomplished artists most notably Geoffrey Baker, Head of the Municipal College of Art; Eustace Nash and Leslie Ward formed the Bournemouth Arts Club (BAC) to support and promote art and artists in the area. They invited leading contemporary artists to join them in exhibitions and events. Showcased in this exhibition are some of the finest twentieth century British Art drawn to reveal fascinating insights into how the Club flourished and responded to radical ideas and changing approaches in art. Alongside work by well-known BAC members are works by internationally acclaimed artists including Henry Moore, John Nash, Ben Nicholson, Prunella Clough and William Crozier who inspired them. Loans have been received from Southampton City Art Gallery, Swindon Art Gallery and numerous private collectors. The exhibition will run until March 2021.
18. An outline exhibition programme for the main galleries is now in place until 2024.
19. A small exhibition on John Thomas, the muralist who was responsible for much of the decoration of the Museum is on display in the Secretary's Room. Further programming for this space is being scheduled.

## **Russell-Cotes Centenary 2022**

20. The Museum Centenary will take place in 2022 and a small steering group has been convened of Management Committee members, stakeholders, Friends, volunteers and staff to advise on activities. The response has been really positive, but with the uncertainties around Covid, and limited funding or staff, we plan to develop a series of relatively small scale events, exhibitions and activities throughout the year to commemorate, celebrate and engage in

line with our general strategy. However with a Centenary logo and good marketing we hope it will still have significant impact locally.

### **Education, Engagement and Digital**

21. On-line activities have increased with on-line talks by staff, volunteers and external curators, on-line performances and increased content on the web and social media. These have seen a significant uptake with 690 people attending 9 talks. This model of delivery will be continued.
22. As confidence and regulations have allowed, in-person activities have restarted in the museum with volunteer musicians performing regularly, stewards on site, guided tours, some educational activities for home schoolers and for university groups.
23. The Museum held 4 themed garden events through August funded by Festival Coast Live!, with live music, performances, dancing, handling activities, story-telling, quizzes etc. these were extremely successful, attracting hundreds of additional visitors, although their operation was heavily weather dependent. Such was the success, we are looking to replicate next year if possible.
24. The RCAGM has applied for a funded place on the Equity and Inclusion in Museums Programme run by Museum Development and the Association of Independent Museums on a national basis. This would help the museum take an effective, whole organisation approach to equity and inclusion, to the benefit of your museum and ultimately the communities we serve. Staff time and governing body support are required.

### **Operational**

25. The CRF grant enabled the museum to invest in a new integrated till system which enables admissions, catering, retail, Gift Aid and membership data and income to be recorded in one system. It allows on-line bookings and will enable automated reconciliation. It has been challenging to implement, because of the impact on operations but ultimately will save significant staff time, reduce errors and provide data that can drive improvements to operations and planning.

### **Facilities and Income Generation**

#### **Café**

26. With funding from ACE CRF fund, the museum has invested in a catering cart on the terrace, and outdoor tables and chairs etc. With spectacular views and setting, this has been a great hit with visitors and drives visitors to the museum when the sun shines. Income has risen considerably since it opened in May and we anticipate increased profits to support the museum as operations and staffing levels bed down.
27. During the Summer, afternoon teas continued to do very well and particularly during the Air Festival.
28. We anticipate that on good weather days, even through the winter, it may be worth opening the outdoor café.

#### **Shop**

29. Shop sales continue but are a little lower than the general trend over this period. This reflects the problems with getting stock because of supply chain issues around lack of materials and furloughed staff; the change in visitors (fewer overseas visitors who tend to spend more in the shop, and more 'friends and family') and the impact of the one way system whereby for a period visitors did not exit through the shop.
30. The situation should improve as tourists return, supply issues ease and the normal visitor journey is reinstated.

### **Venue Hire and Weddings**

31. During this period we tried to take advantage of the Covid-related closures to generate more venue hire business, which we managed with some success. We had 5 filming bookings which brought in a total of £9,660 and three wedding bookings, which generated £3,629 in venue hire income, as well as some additional catering income.

### **Marketing**

32. A significant portion of the CRF funding was earmarked for marketing and along with the first ever appointment of a dedicated full-time Marketing Officer has clearly delivered good results. New signage round the building, signage on the beach, new leaflets and advertising for the reopening helped raise our profile.
33. A marketing review was commissioned from consultants, Blue Sail with ongoing mentoring for the Marketing Officer. This detailed report by visitor attraction experts has given the museum an excellent framework to develop new audiences over the next 18 months through better market focus of our existing resources.

### **Funding**

#### **ACE – Coronavirus Recovery Fund**

34. The Museum completed its CRF project in the summer after an extension from the ACE because of the significant difficulties in procuring work and supplies during the Covid crisis.
35. In addition to covering the shortfall in visitor income the grant enabled us to invest in activities to support financial resilience (outdoor catering, new tills, marketing etc), the benefits of which are already demonstrable.
36. It also funded professional and consultancy support for the progress of the Museum's externalization particularly legal fees, surveyors fees, VAT and business support and governance advice to progress the Business Plan and interrogate further the legal position of the charity. See Externalisation Report.

#### **ACE - MEND Fund Application**

37. In June 2021, ACE announced a new fund to support the infrastructure and urgent maintenance backlog work to non-national accredited museums. This has been a major opportunity for the Russell-Cotes to apply for funding to support its manifest needs. It passed the EOI stage in July.
38. Working with Council surveyors and independent conservation qualified surveyors and specialist M & E engineers, we have prioritized the most urgent and essential areas for funding.

- a. The repair of the Conservatory which is already collapsing
  - b. Improvements to drainage to stop regular foul water flooding by the entrance
  - c. The replacement of the air handling units which are at 'end of life', combined with a new approach to controlling the plant to significantly reduce energy consumption whilst maintaining reasonable environmental conditions.
39. The Russell-Cotes has requested a grant of £518,000 from ACE MEND fund, which will be matched by £30,000 from the restricted Conservatory fund (See Item) and £426,000 contribution by BCP Council. No funding sources have yet been approved for the earmarked local contribution. As the contribution is for capital works the Council retains the potential to use prudential borrowing. Annual borrowing repayment is estimated at £28.6k (principal and interest). Alternative funding sources (for example the used of Futures Fund or CIL) will be explored should the ACE MEND bid be successful.
40. The deadline for the application is 18 October and significant preliminary work has been undertaken to reach RIBA stage 3 as required. A report from Historic England has given feedback on this project and stated that the work meets the MEND priorities and is viable and achievable. Under the requirements for the grant a lead design contractor must be in place and the museum in a position to start design work as soon as a decision is reached in February. Budget has been allocated to fund the work needed so that we are in a position to proceed should we be successful.

#### **ACE - National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) (2023- 2027) – Potential Application**

41. ACE is due to announce details of its next round of funding for new and existing NPOs to provide core funding for activities to meet its key objectives as outlined in the 'Let's Create' agenda. Applications are due to be made in the New Year/Spring.
42. The Russell-Cotes is intending to apply for NPO status, if it has sufficient staff resource as it is a significant undertaking to draw together the proposal and business plan.

#### **Staffing**

43. The Marketing Officer, Visitor Services Assistant and Finance and Administration Officer left or retired during this period and their positions have been or are being filled currently. The contract of the ACE funded Interpretation Officer ended in January 2021.