

Strategic Plan 2019-2024

To be reviewed June 2023

STATEMENT OF PURPOSE

We at Museums Worcestershire want to share with you our passion for the unique art, artefacts and stories that have shaped the identity of Worcester and Worcestershire for over 2000 years.

We believe museums help to make sense of the world by inspiring deeper knowledge of our history and culture and we want to make our collections, buildings and stories accessible, relevant and enjoyable for you.

The roles of Museums Worcestershire are to:

Enrich the cultural heritage and future of Worcester, Worcestershire and beyond.

Enable shared high-quality experiences, discovery and interaction at the County Museum at Hartlebury Castle, The Commandery, Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum, the joint collections store and through offsite projects and programmes.

Encourage understanding through the preservation and interpretation of the museum collections of Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council, and to make the collections widely accessible.

Expand opportunities by supporting other museums and organisations in Worcestershire and beyond.

How Museums Worcestershire works

Be *relevant* by

- Understanding our visitors and those who engage with us, and being responsive to their needs
- Planning in partnership and being flexible to change
- Connecting to wider audiences

Be *ambitious* by

- Building our reputation for quality with our visitors, our peers and stakeholders
- Leading and enabling projects that bring investment to the heritage of the city and county
- Fulfilling museums' ability to change lives, in both everyday and extraordinary ways
- Working entrepreneurially and learning from experimentation

Be *dedicated* by

- Ensuring all at Museums Worcestershire have a shared aim to make a difference to our communities and visitors
- Having pride in our expertise and the significance of our museums and collections
- Ensuring financial resilience

ACHIEVEMENTS

Considered to be the sixth oldest museum service in the country, Worcestershire people have supported their museums since 1833. In 2010, the two services of Worcestershire County Council and Worcester City Council joined together, creating a successful, efficient and ambitious service.

During the period of the last Strategic Plan, the service has developed the three museum sites and cared for the city's and county's collections, enabling their powerful stories to be given voice.

"Civic museums occupy a distinctive space in the life of the UK. Typically, they are deeply embedded in a place, whilst bringing a global perspective to the way that place's story is told.

"By revealing the past, they can help make sense of the present, and shape the future."

2018 The Future of Civic Museums report

Worcester and Worcestershire's Heritage

The Commandery was relaunched in 2017, with renewed focus on its important Civil War history. The visitor profile has been shifted to bring more visitors to Worcester, and welcome a more diverse visitorship. Research into the power of Worcester's Civil War history has reiterated Worcester's heritage internationally. The changes have increased dwell time for Commandery visitors and led to Visit Worcestershire's award of *Best Visitor Attraction 2018*.

Hartlebury Castle re-launched in 2018 as a significant visitor attraction, run in partnership with Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust. Major funding from Heritage Lottery Fund enabled the transformation of the site and a rise in visitor numbers. Museums Worcestershire has started rejuvenation of the museum displays with the new introductory Archaeology Gallery.

Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum's recent exhibitions programme has reflected a step change in how our peers viewed the gallery, giving national collections the confidence to partner with us. Bringing internationally-known artists to Worcester has increased our reputation and profile.

All three museums maintained high quality standards, being re-Accredited and retaining Visit England's visitor attraction quality mark. The Commandery and the County Museum were awarded the *Sandford Award for Heritage Education* and Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum was granted *Government Indemnity* status for its exhibition programme.

The Collections Centre developed as an accessible professional hub, hosting researchers, skills-sharing events, volunteers and tours. Wider use of external expertise has identified previously unknown items in the collection with international significance. We have led the profession in discussions and in Historic England's research about the management of stored collections.

Local cultural heritage partnerships have flourished, resulting in the *Love Worcester* festival, *Worcestershire World War 100* led by Worcestershire Archives, the *Lost Landscapes Ice Age* project led by Worcestershire Archaeology, the training of new heritage professionals through

Skills for the Future. Professional expertise has been shared across the county, including in the relaunch of the Museum of Royal Worcester.

Our Communities

Museums offer an authentic, real experience in a world of screens. Objects and their stories have the power to make real improvement in the lives of visitors and communities, offering a unique route to learning, emotional connection and mental wellbeing.

Social family visits to our museums continue to make up a large proportion of our visitors, providing opportunities for family and friends to spend quality time together. We provide safe, neutral spaces where visitors coming together or on their own all feel involved.

Our expertise in working with intergenerational groups is regionally recognised. Home educators make extensive use of our resources and the next generation of teachers currently studying at the University of Worcester learn from our skills.

Suitcase Stories has been a leading project for those living with dementia and their carers in Worcestershire, making a real difference to individual health outcomes.

Our projects and exhibitions *What Do We Want?*, *Battle of Orgreave* and *Civil War Stories* have encouraged our local communities to consider different perspectives on their own experiences. Participants in workshops have developed self-esteem by harnessing their creativity.

We have continued to recruit volunteers, embedding them in the core service operations. Volunteers have contributed significantly to all our externally funded projects.

Our Contribution to Economic Development

In 2018-19, the three museums attracted £1.5million into the local economy. Our developments have attracted new visitors and their spending into Worcestershire, benefitting local businesses and the mixed economy of Worcester City Centre.

The team has brought in over £1m in grant funding over the period of the last Strategic Plan, including two major awards by Arts Council England, Heritage Lottery Funding and many smaller project grants, often in partnership.

Commercial opportunities and a new membership scheme have been introduced. These contribute to operating costs, and build new relationships with our strongest advocates.

Focus on Evidence-based Planning

Much of our work is now informed by a robust body of research and data, be that visitor feedback, income targets or commissioned expertise.

We are using a data-informed approach to take Museums Worcestershire forward, delivering services and new developments throughout the period of this Strategic Plan. The Strategic Plan is supported by annual service plans, detailing the work to be undertaken to meet our strategic aims.

AIMS AND PRIORITIES

Strategic aim 1 - Develop the venues and collections for the future

Work with visitors, stakeholders, funders and partners to grow an ambitious and sustainable service.

In 2024, success will look like:

Museum venues celebrate our rich heritage and are fit for purpose, with business planning for sustainable improvement and audience growth through to 2030. Options for change have been researched and decided upon. Local authority commitment is harnessed to bring in significant external support and funding for redevelopment.

Challenges

- The County Museum at Hartlebury Castle and the Collections Centre current leases end in 2026
- The agreement by Worcester City Council to host the Mercian and Worcestershire Yeomanry Military Museum Trust displays at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum ends in 2026, with a decision point in 2023
- Hartlebury Castle Preservation Trust's Heritage Lottery Funding ends in 2021, representing a challenge to our partner's resilience
- Resident support for the value of museums remains high; visitor expectations for the preservation and presentation of their heritage are also high
- All three museums are important listed buildings, with property challenges in line with their historic fabric.

Priority areas for development

A masterplan for the City Art Gallery & Museum: venue expansion and development, income-earning opportunities, capital planning

Consideration of the service options for the County Museum: partnership(s) business plan post 2021, county-wide opportunities

Development of most significant collections and their displays; new costume and transport galleries research and development

Options appraisal for the Collections Centre: business and impact planning

10-year development plan for Commandery, capital planning and income business plan

Strategic aim 2 – Strengthen the core

Develop display and learning programmes and projects that identify, focus and promote the best of the collections, buildings and our expertise.

In 2024 success will look like:

Staff, supporters and stakeholders understand and advocate for where Museums Worcestershire is unique, important and successful. Difficult but informed decisions on the shape and size of the service and its collections have been made so that the most significant parts of the collection have a high profile and use. Staff have a culture of pride in their expertise and share their knowledge and experience throughout Worcestershire and the wider profession.

Challenges

- Maintaining development in partnership when partner capacity reduces
- Extending Museums Worcestershire's reach to users in more than just our own venues: locally, nationally and internationally
- Appropriately preserving and making accessible the large civic collections that represent the heritage of City and County with the capacity, funding and partnership opportunities available
- Growing our expertise within existing capacity, focusing on existing strengths, and embedding these into all our public programmes.

Priority areas for development

Vision for supporting other museums, heritage and cultural organisations in Worcestershire; developing new informal and formal partnerships, creating cost-neutral opportunities that increase capacity for all partners; investigate the best organisational structure for providing this work

Build a focused formal learning programme, defining partnerships and demand; grow informal learning programmes from the bedrock of our expertise in intergenerational engagement

Gap analysis based on Accreditation requirements, Accreditation resubmission 2021

Maintain the standards for Government Indemnity status at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum

Review of collections priorities and display; applications for key collections to be designated as nationally significant

Develop a culture of learning and development for all museums staff, maintaining a flexible and knowledgeable workforce

Strategic aim 3 – Learn from our audience and improve

Respond to feedback and data to broaden our engagement and prioritise annual work programmes.

In 2024 success will look like:

User needs and behaviour are understood and lead staff training and performance reviews, programming and development planning. Improvements are reflected in user satisfaction feedback. Focused work is undertaken to slowly expand the core audiences, maximising our working with partners in our communities. User numbers are on a rising trend and their feedback informs our planning towards capital investment.

Challenges

- Ensuring that improvements at The Commandery and Hartlebury Castle don't end with their relaunches, but that visitor response drives the next stage of displays and development, both small and large
- Making investment at Worcester City Art Gallery & Museum, ensuring that its visitor facilities and permanent displays reach the quality of welcome as at the other Museums Worcestershire sites
- Expanding the audience and visual profile of each site, deepening relationships with existing visitors and reaching non-users
- Rejuvenating formal learning programmes so that they respond to a changing national education context
- Understanding audience ambitions and commitment towards future significant change at museum venues.

Priority areas for development

Annual improvement plans from front-line teams based on Audience Finder and Visit England VAQAS reports

Align audience development targets with annual programme planning and long-term development

Map potential audiences against other successful heritage, cultural and wellbeing organisations in Worcestershire and nationally. Strategically build the right partnerships with local, regional and national heritage organisations that open up new audiences to mutual benefit

Strategic aim 4 – Make a difference in our communities

Creatively use museums' unique assets to increase our users' wellbeing and contribute to the economic development of the city and county.

In 2024 success will look like:

The social impact of the museum service is understood and can be measured. We can demonstrate we are improving lives and this contribution to the health of our local communities forms a central part of our service. The service takes risk with new projects, and shares evaluation so that benefits are more widely felt.

Challenges

- Creating community-based projects in partnership that have real social impact
- Building on the success of externally-funded projects for those living with dementia, and for training young people, within the core budgets
- Fully understanding the difference museums make to counteract social isolation, and embedding that in programming
- Better understanding the health benefits to visitors of our relaxing, atmospheric and creative spaces
- Developing voluntary experiences that contribute to wellbeing as well as museum capacity
- Maintaining the benefits of networks with staff who have moved to Worcestershire Children First, and continuing to make an active contribution to the wider County Council and City Council priorities
- Enthusiasing children and young people and non-traditional learners to develop their knowledge and skills within a challenging funding and performance position for formal education partners
- Contributing to Worcester's and Worcestershire's economy through cultural development.

Priority areas for development

Investigate where Museums Worcestershire is uniquely positioned to make a difference with community challenges, build networks with priority community partners, and measure the difference we make

Align informal learning and volunteer programmes to long-term social impact and wellbeing outcomes for young people (including looked after children) and older adults

Lead and disseminate findings on cultural visits and wellbeing and cultural economic development

Review opening hours in line with economic development planning for Worcester; in partnership develop city signage and street scene, promoting the museums' place in the city

Strategic aim 5 - Grow and diversify our funding and resilience

Maximise the potential of our resources to develop new, and further strengthen existing sources of revenue.

In 2024 success will look like:

The funding profile for the service is a sustainable balance between local authority contributions, earned income and other funding sources. Budgets and fundraising are focused on developing the service's strengths; commercial activity makes a significant net contribution to that core work. Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council contribution forms part of a diverse funding profile and their capital investment is matched with external funding; secondary spend per head is higher than the average of similar regional museums. Commercial elements are efficiently delivered with host authority support for cost-effective systems and partnerships.

Challenges

- Maintaining a viable funding level against a challenging local authority funding context and rising costs
- Maximising the benefits of the joint service and our commercial partners to spread capacity and expertise across both revenue generation and service delivery
- Ensuring staff teams remain flexible and motivated and that all of Museums Worcestershire are advocates for the success of the service
- Building secondary spend and individual donations in a competitive environment
- Growing our membership and involving them in our future plans and fundraising
- Maximising the opportunities of the Tickenhill Trust and charitable partners to bring in sponsorship and fundraising from foundations.

Priority areas for development

Maximise the opportunities of funding and partnerships towards celebrating national anniversaries

Research commercial development structure and opportunities in person and online, develop commercial partnerships

Review the service delivery model to ensure it remains the best fit for its purpose

Tickenhill Collection Trust established as a development trust for museums fundraising and investigate other opportunities of trust

Investigate opportunities for Exhibition Tax Relief, Gift Aid, and commercial trading arm for Worcester's heritage venues, including the opportunities of the Guildhall

Consider application in 2021-22 to become an Arts Council National Portfolio Organisation

OPERATING CONTEXT

Museums Worcestershire Strategic Plan 2019-2024 comes at a period of change at a national level and for the two partner authorities Worcestershire County Council and Worcester City Council. As well as the uncertainties surrounding central government funding and the impact of Brexit, the two major national cultural funders Arts Council England and National Lottery Heritage Fund are reviewing their funds and strategic priorities.

In 2019 Worcester City Council will adopt its City Centre masterplan looking towards 2040 and Worcestershire County Council will establish Worcestershire Children First to deliver services to children and young people. Both of these ambitious approaches offer opportunity and challenge for strengthening the role of the museum service within the local authorities' corporate priorities.

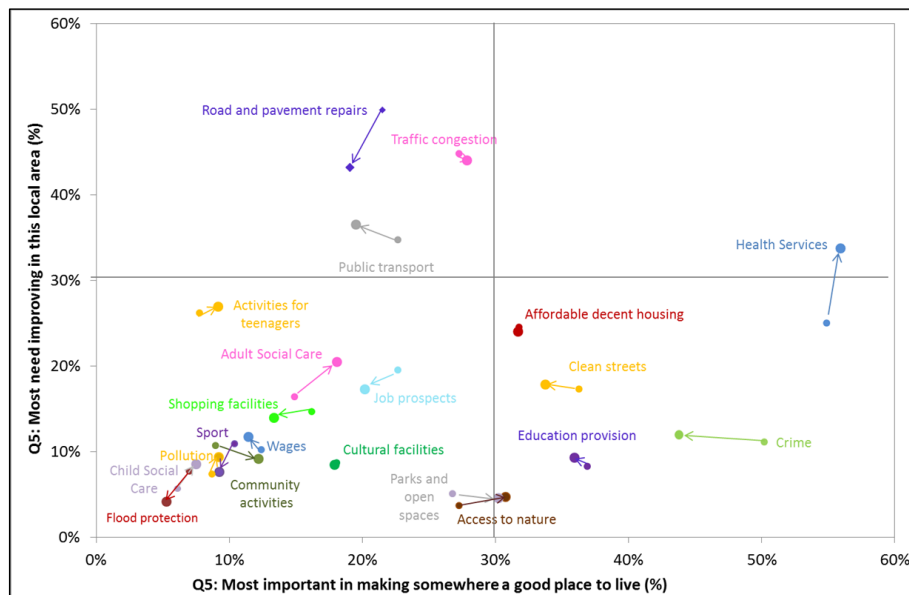
Museums Worcestershire sits within the Place Directorate at Worcester City Council and as part of Communities in the Commercial and Commissioning Directorate at Worcestershire County Council. Worcester City Council hosts the majority of the joint service, in line with its corporate priority of **A Heritage City for the 21st Century**.

This Strategic Plan follows the **Worcester City Plan 2016-2021** and Worcestershire County Council's **Shaping Worcestershire's Future 2017-2022**.

Museums Worcestershire's work is wide-ranging and cross-domain and it contributes outcomes across the work of both councils, referencing:

- Worcester City Community Engagement Strategy
- Worcester City Tourism Strategy
- Worcester City Art in Public Places Strategy
- Worcester City Council Employment and Skills Strategy
- Worcestershire's Children and Young People's Plan
- Act Local (Worcestershire's volunteering programme)
- World Class Worcestershire Strategic Economic Plan
- One Worcestershire
- Worcestershire Health & Wellbeing Strategy

The following data illustrates some of the context within which Museums Worcestershire operates.



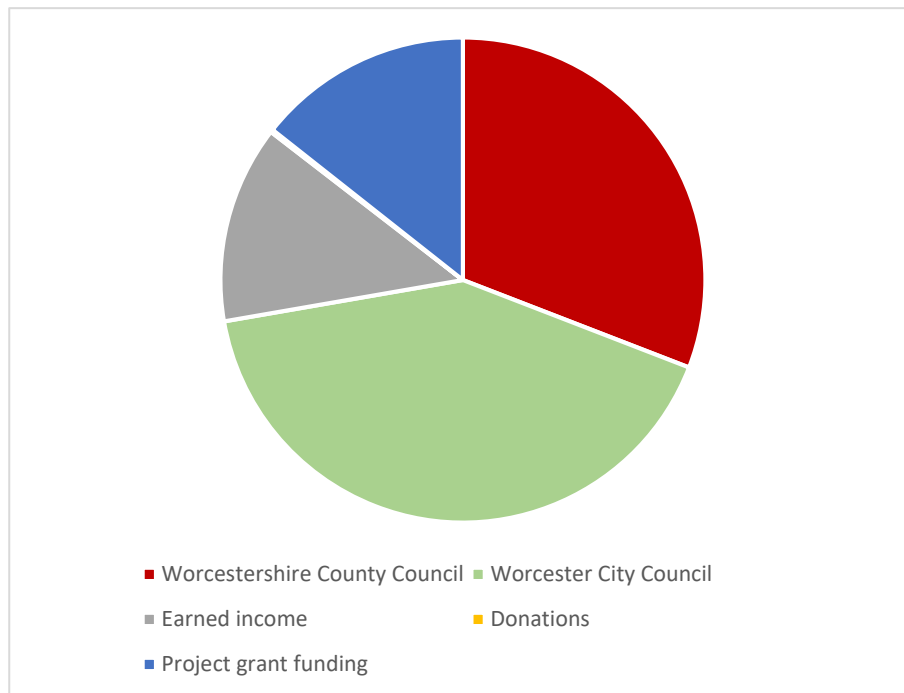
2017 Worcestershire Residents survey

shows that Worcestershire residents value their cultural facilities above their shopping facilities, sporting facilities, pollution and flood issues and even over their wage levels.



2018 State of the City report

shows that satisfaction with museums grew considerably after the formation of the joint service. Recent developments have led to an upward satisfaction trend over the last two years.



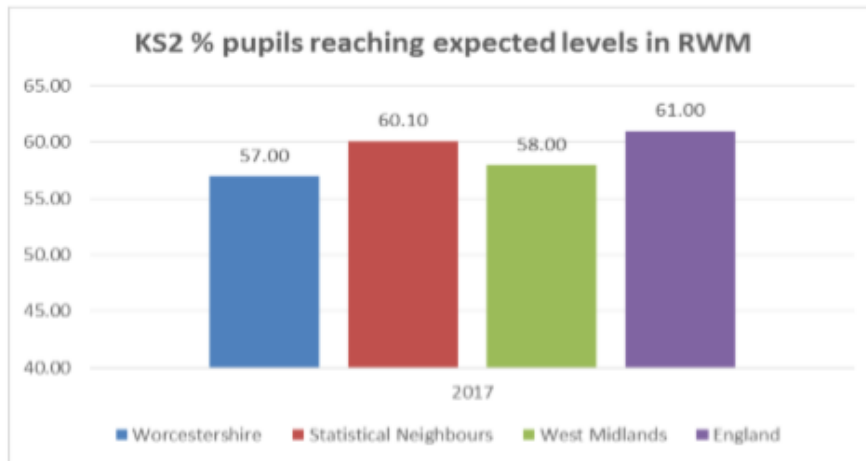
2018-19 Museums Worcestershire funding profile

shows that its two partner local authorities *together* contribute about 67% of operating funds, against an individual local authority average of 75% for other civic museum services.

Both authorities benefit from the impact an efficient joint service can achieve.

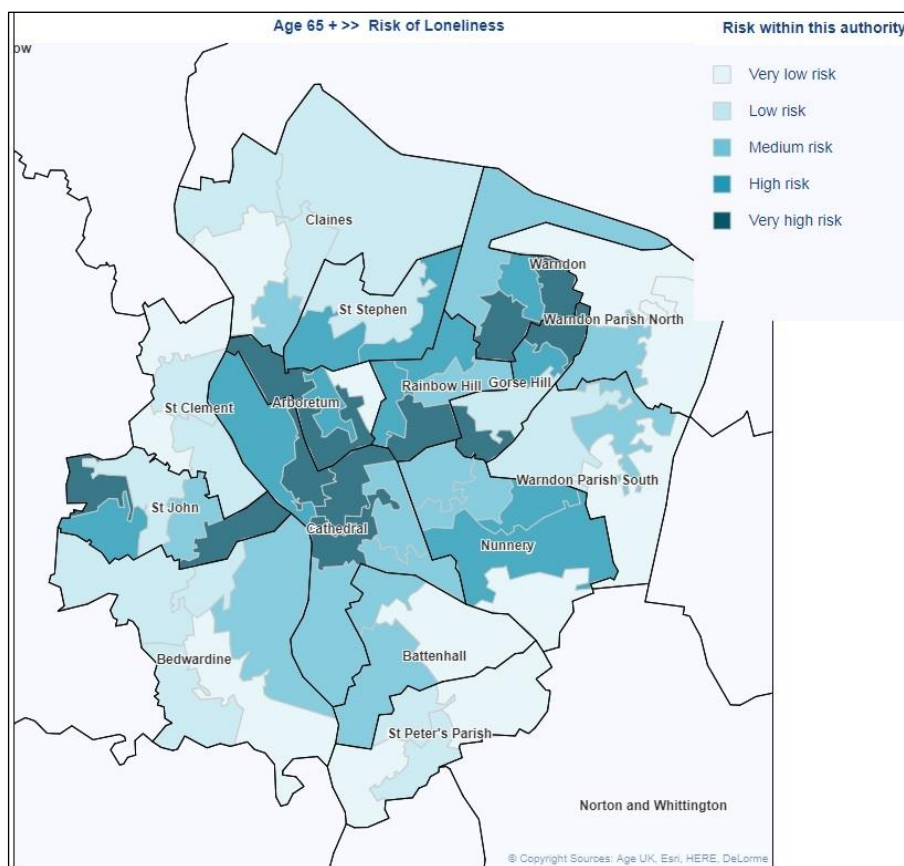
Funding for Museums Worcestershire from Worcester City Council and Worcestershire County Council will, in 2020, be about half the budget that was spent by the two authorities on museums in 2009, before the formation of the joint service.

Over approximately the same period across all UK museums, on average funding is anticipated to reduce by 20%. For local authority and national museums, on average funding will reduce by 40%.



2017 Worcestershire educational outcomes summary

shows that children at primary school in Worcestershire are underachieving compared to their peers regionally and nationally in reading, writing and maths.



2018 Age Concern risk of loneliness research

shows that older people who live very locally to Worcester's museums have a very high risk of loneliness.

This data illustrates the need that exists within the museums' core audiences and the potential the service has to make a significant difference in its community.