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**By:** Mike Hill, Cabinet Member, Customer & Communities  
Amanda Honey, Corporate Director, Customer & Communities

**To:** Communities Cabinet Committee

**Date:** 14 November 2012

**Subject:** **Folkestone Museum Collections**

**Classification:** Unrestricted

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**Recommendation :** Members of the Cabinet Committee are asked to consider, make comments and recommendations on the Cabinet Member decision to gift the Folkestone Museum Collections, including the Master Collection, to Folkestone Town Council on condition the Town Council can evidence a sustainable funding model and provide premises to the required standard for a museum including environmental conditions and security.

## 1. Introduction

- 1.1 Since 2007 KCC has supported Folkestone Town Council's vision to set up and run a museum to house the Folkestone Museum Collection, including the Master Collection, in the Old Town Hall [Appendix A].
- 1.2 In November 2012 Folkestone Town Council will submit a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund to enable the refurbishment of the Old Town Hall and re-location of the museum collections, including the Master Collection to more accessible premises. Whilst KCC supports this bid, it has consistently advised Folkestone Town Council of the need for a sustainable plan for the setting up and running of a museum facility in Folkestone.
- 1.3 The Heritage Lottery Fund has advised '*successful Heritage Grant applicants are expected to own the heritage items which are the subject of the application. In order to minimise risk the 1<sup>st</sup> round application will need to have as much assurance as possible that KCC will be making the collection available to Folkestone Town Council, alongside providing long term support*'. This is the reason behind Cabinet Member decision.
- 1.4 There is significant local support for the museum collection [Appendix B] to be gifted to Folkestone Town Council to be housed in the refurbished Old Town Hall. This is evidenced in the feasibility report '*the museum project, even in its embryonic stage has gained written support from over 60 groups and stakeholder individuals including the local MP Damian Collins, as well as County Councillors, Local Councillors, local business leaders and community champions*'. [background document]

- 1.5 Museums have to meet national standards to gain accreditation from Arts Council England. These standards include a requirement for a care and conservation policy, a forward plan and 3 years of relevant accounts [background document]. The need to achieve accreditation is included in KCC's requirements to gift the collections to Folkestone Town Council.

## **2. Rationale**

- 2.1 Folkestone remains one of Kent's most disadvantaged towns. The vision for the Old Town Hall as the Heart of Folkestone will provide a new opportunity to bring people together and raise confidence, skills and self-esteem. KCC will be able to contribute to this vision by gifting the Collections.
- 2.2 The management of museums is not core business or a statutory service and KCC no longer provides a museums advisory service. Gifting the Collections to Folkestone Town Council would be a positive move allowing them to be more widely accessible to the whole community.

## **3. Relevant priority outcomes**

- 3.1 Folkestone Town Council's vision provides a unique opportunity to enable the Folkestone Collections to be made more widely accessible. Furthermore, the decision supports:
- the localism agenda - we recognise the people of Folkestone have wanted to manage their own museum since 2007.
  - Kent's strategic priorities set out in Bold Steps :
    - to help the Kent economy grow
    - to put the citizen in control
    - to tackle disadvantage
  - Unlocking Kent's Potential - including town centre regeneration and tourism. The Feasibility Report suggests that in a year, a significant proportion of the 400,000 overnight visitors to the town would visit the museum - the consultants estimate this could translate into an estimated 12,000 visits to the museum.
  - KCC's vision for Kent archives and local history service – 'Understanding our Past, Changing our Future', recognises history has the power to change lives and can help us to build stronger communities.
  - KCC's Equalities Policy - by making the collections more widely accessible to all sections of the community.

## **4. Consultation and communication**

- 4.1 Consultation was undertaken between May and August 2012 with 205 individuals and organisations. The Feasibility Study evidenced *'strong support for a new local museum for Folkestone at the Old Town Hall'*.

## **5 Financial implications**

- 5.1 This will be achieved within existing budgets

## **6. Legal implications**

- 6.1 A legal agreement will be drawn up to include:

- handover arrangements
- conditions, including the requirement for Folkestone Town Council to achieve accreditation and for KCC to provide a small amount of funding on a diminishing scale to ensure the museum is sustainable. This will also ensure KCC retains a duty of care while supporting Folkestone Town Council and its partners to realise their vision
- interim collections management policy
- longer term strategic support from KCC

## **7. Equality Impact Assessment**

- 7.1 This initiative is entirely driven by the need to make the collections more widely accessible to the entire local community and to visitors. An Equality Impact Assessment is attached

## **8. Sustainability implications**

- 8.1 Folkestone Town Council will be required to demonstrate a sustainable model in order to achieve Heritage Lottery Funding or other investment via an Environmental Impact Assessment. The achievement of accreditation will provide further evidence that Folkestone Town Council can provide the necessary environmental conditions and security for the storage and display of museum objects.

## **9. Alternatives and options**

- 9.1 The status quo would mean that the bulk of the collections would remain in store and largely inaccessible to the public. In addition, the Museums Association Code of Ethics states that museums should *'refuse to undertake disposal principally for financial reasons except in exceptional circumstances'*.

## **10. Risk Management**

- 10.1 Any risks can be mitigated through a legal agreement which will enable KCC to retain a duty of care for 5 years from the date of gifting, by which time the museum should be sustainable. During this 5-year period, KCC would step in at any time if it felt the collections were at risk. Heritage Lottery Fund and other funders will monitor the project to ensure it delivers its stated objectives. In addition the Arts Council England has the power to withdraw accreditation if standards fall.

## **11. RECOMMENDATION**

- 11.1 Members of the Cabinet Committee are asked to consider, make comments and recommendations on the Cabinet Member decision to gift the Folkestone Museum Collections, including the Master Collection, to Folkestone Town Council on condition that it can evidence a sustainable funding model and provide premises to the required standard for a museum including environmental conditions and security.

Contact Officer: Gill Bromley  
 Community Cohesion and Heritage Manager  
 Telephone Number: 01622 605202  
 Email: [gill.bromley@kent.gov.uk](mailto:gill.bromley@kent.gov.uk)

## **BACKGROUND DOCUMENTS**

1. Feasibility Study by Evident Consulting Ltd and Heritage Resource Agency
2. Arts Council England Museum accreditation scheme see <http://www.artscouncil.org.uk/what-we-do/supporting-museums/accreditation-scheme/>.

## **Appendix A: Background information from 1974**

**1974:** Folkestone Library Museum and Gallery transferred from Folkestone Borough Council to KCC

**1996:** KCC received £116k Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) investment to modernise Folkestone museum as part of a wider redevelopment of the library.

**1998:** HLF granted an additional £199k towards the construction of the external lift and associated access improvements, re-displaying of collections and enhanced environmental conditions.

**2004:** Folkestone Town Council formed

**2004** KCC Select Committee Topic Review recommended that Kent should divest itself of ownership of its museums by inviting talks with District Councils and interested groups

**2007:** KCC requested that Folkestone museum be de-registered because of diminishing funds and recognising that it was not a statutory service. A campaign to save the museum began and discussions were held with individuals and organisations including FTC. KCC sought to reassure councillors *'of our desire to work positively with them to support their ambitions to improve public access to information and artefacts illustrating the history of Folkestone communities and the area' .... 'we would be happy to discuss future responsibility for other parts of the collections and possible transfer of items from these collections to any appropriate local body, either existing or yet to be established'.*

**2008:** Folkestone Heritage Working Group (HWG) established to act in an advisory capacity to FTC.

**2009:** KCC gifted a painting from the collection, *The Landing of the Belgian Refugees, August 1914* by Fredo Franzoni, to FTC

**2011:** In January 2011 KCC confirmed that it was *'happy to hold discussions about ownership of the collection'* and set out conditions for transfer of the collections including the need for:

- a sustainable plan for the museum
- environmental and security conditions to meet the required standards
- a written agreement
- the HWG and other potential partners being involved
- KCC to provide support and advice where relevant, but no financial contribution to the setting up and running costs of a museum

**2012:** KCC has worked intensively with FTC to support the realisation of their vision. KCC has also contributed European Treasures Revealed funds to match FTC funding to appoint consultants to conduct the feasibility study. In March 2012 KCC provided a statement to FTC that we *'support plans which would relocate some of the museum collection from the library to the Old Town Hall...'*

## **Appendix B**

### **Museum Collections**

The **Folkestone collection** includes:

**Around 10,000 items** including archaeology, social, military and civil history relating to Folkestone and the surrounding Shepway district council area. Until the Second World War Folkestone Museum was a regionally important centre for collecting geology and natural history specimens and many of the original fossils, geological and natural history objects, including eggs, butterflies and shells, remain in the collection today. Folkestone's archaeological past is represented by artefacts such as those from the Roman Villa on the East Cliff and the Anglo Saxon skeleton, whilst various objects and documents record the maritime history and development of the town as a seaside resort. The collection is currently housed at Folkestone Library with the vast majority of the collection stored in a basement and not on public access.

**Master collection** of 15<sup>th</sup> – 19<sup>th</sup> century prints and drawings; Christies have recently valued the Master Collection, for insurance purposes, at between £971,090 and £1,463,560. It is currently stored at Kings Hill and is not accessible to the public.