

CYNGOR SIR POWYS COUNTY COUNCIL

**Portfolio Holder delegated decision by
County Councillor Graham Brown Portfolio Holder for Commissioning
and Procurement
County Councillor Darren Mayor Portfolio Holder for Property, Buildings
and Housing**

29 Dec 2015

**REPORT AUTHOR: Catherine Richards, Principal Lead Museums, Archives
and Information Management**

SUBJECT: Newtown Textile Museum

REPORT FOR: Decision

1.0 Summary and Proposal

- 1.1 Powys County Council proposes to transfer Newtown Textile Museum, by Community Asset Transfer (freehold), to the Montgomery Community Regeneration Association (MCRA). The MCRA, acting as the umbrella organisation, has formed a Newtown Heritage Sub-Committee to directly run the Museum.
- 1.2 The MCRA has completed an Expression of Interest form and has met the criteria for a Community Asset Transfer (CAT) from Powys County Council to a Third-Sector Organisation which are:
- To encourage people in take part in economic and community life
 - To develop capacity in and connections between public, private, voluntary and community sectors in order to support economic and social development
 - To safeguard buildings for community use
- 1.3 The MCRA has a long and well-established history, having been founded in 1919. They have experience of owning and running two buildings of note in Newtown, namely Plas Dolerw and the Oriel Davies Gallery. In addition the Newtown Heritage Sub-Committee has secured grant funding for 12 months towards running costs, and will enlist volunteer support to hopefully get the Museum up and running by the summer of 2016.
- 1.4 Newtown Textile Museum collections would transfer to the MCRA through a loans agreement with Powys County Council.

2.0 Background

- 2.1 Powys County Council holds the property on trust for the Newtown Textile Museum charity. The charity is no longer a registered charity, and was wound up / removed on 31 December 2003. Powys County Council hold the property on trust for the original proprietors (H.P.M. Lewis, E.G. Lewis and G.P. Roberts) who acquired the property on 4 October 1966. As the original proprietors then vested the property (effectively sold for no consideration) in the trust, Powys County Council are holding the property as the trustees.
- 2.2 The building housing Newtown Textile Museum is a typical example of an early 19th century weaving shop; consisting of six back-to-back cottages on the ground and first floors, and two rooms on the second and third floors running the full length of the building. When in use each of the cottages would have housed one family; whose members would have worked on the weaving floors above either as handloom weavers or with associated work.
- 2.3 In 1962 the late Major Peter Lewis of Newtown formed a committee to purchase and preserve this building and to create a record of the history of the woollen industry in Newtown. The building was renovated and a museum was created on the top two floors of the building, which opened in 1967.
- 2.4 In 1990 responsibility for the museum and its collections was transferred to Powys County Council. At the time of transfer the building itself was unsound, while neither the conditions of the collection, the displays nor the galleries were meeting the professional standards of a modern museum.
- 2.5 In 1995 and again in 2003/04 Powys County Council carried out a renovation and restoration programme both to the exterior of the building and to the collections and exhibitions. This work was part-funded by the Museums and Galleries Commission, The Council of Museums of Wales, Cadw and The Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 2.6 The main entrance is on Commercial Street and once inside the visitor is invited on a journey through the history of the woollen industry in Newtown from the handloom era during the early 19th century, through the stagnation and social unrest of the 1830's and 40's to the regeneration of the industry in the 1850's due to some extent to the business enterprises of Pryce Jones. The displays include a recreated weaver's cottage and working area from the 1830's. The exhibition finishes with the final decline of the woollen industry in the 20th century and displays on related industries in the town.
- 2.7 There is only physical access for visitors in wheelchairs or otherwise physically impaired to the ground floor, however there is an interactive audio-visual tour of the museum in the reception area on this floor.
- 2.8 Newtown Textile Museum has always only been open to the public during the summer months (June to August) for around 15 hours per week, although schools and groups have been able to book visits all year round.

Due to the size of the building and related health & safety issues the museum has to be manned by two people during the public opening hours.

- 2.9 As part of Powys Museum Service' efficiency savings for 2014/15 the staffing budget was withdrawn, and it was decided to run the museum using volunteers with training and support being provided from staff at Powysland Museum. Volunteer recruitment was sadly disappointing.
- 2.10 The museum has an annual visitor numbers of less than 1000 people (819 in 2014/15) and most of these are school groups and participants in holiday activities.
- 2.11 Further significant pressures on revenue budgets mean that the Council cannot continue to fund the running of Newtown Textile Museum.

3.0 One Powys Plan

- 3.1 The proposed transfer would retain the property for community use and serve the wider area interests of local economy and regeneration. The proposed transfer of Newtown Textile Museum to the MCRA will ensure the sustainability of the museum for the long-term.
- 3.2 The risk to the Council is that it does not have the financial resources to continue to maintain the building, or maintain the museum's Accreditation status. A Community Asset Transfer is the only option if this facility is to continue.

4.0 Options considered/available

- 4.1 **Option 1:** Reject the Expression of Interest and sell the premises. Under the Trust document the proceeds of the sale of the would have to be used *"for the purpose of a public museum for the exhibition of local antiquities and other objects of historical antiquarian or educational interest and in particular (but not exclusively) those associated with the textile industry for the benefit and use of the inhabitants of the town of Newtown and the surrounding district and of visitors to the said town and district ("the area of benefit")"*.

Option 2: Accept the Expression of Interest from the MCRA and move to implement the freehold Community Asset Transfer of Newtown Textile Museum.

5.0 Preferred Choice

- 5.1 The preferred option is Option 2. Newtown Textile Museum will become a community asset managed by a well-established community organisation, bringing long term social and economic benefits to Newtown and the local area.
- 5.2 Option 2 supports Powys County Council's Community Delivery objectives

where the aim is to help more communities and community groups or town councils explore their options so the Council can sustain as many local services as possible – even if the Council can no longer afford to run or maintain them.

6.0 Sustainability and Environmental Issues/Equalities/Crime and Disorder/Welsh Language/Other Policies, etc

6.1 The preferred option is considered to be the best option to sustain the future of Newtown Textile Museum and its existing use as a community asset. The proposal has no adverse effects in relation to crime/Welsh language etc.

7.0 Local Members

7.1 Local Newtown Members are Cllr Russell Ian George, Cllr Joy Jones, Cllr Gemma Jane Bowker, Cllr Peter Harris, and Cllr Bob Mills. They have been advised of the proposals.

8.0 Support Services (Legal, Finance, Corporate Property, HR, ICT, BPU)

8.1 Property

Richard Williams, Property Services: I support the proposal which will see the continued the use of the building for its current purpose. The property is Grade 2 listed which would encumber its market value and saleability if sold. The terms of the transfer must include the transfer of all liabilities to the occupier.

8.2 Legal

No further comment

8.3 Finance

The Capital and Financial Planning Accountant supports this asset transfer. There will be no loss on disposal because the asset is not valued in the asset register.

9.0 Corporate Communications:

9.1 This report is of public interest and the transfer of the museum through the community asset transfer should be publicised through a pro-active news release and use of social media.

10.0 Statutory Officers

11.1 The Strategic Director Resources (S151 Officer) notes the comments made by finance.

11.2 The Solicitor to the Council (Monitoring Officer)

The Monitoring Officer has no comment to make

12.0 Members' Interests

The Monitoring Officer is not aware of any specific interests that may arise in relation to this report. If Members have an interest they should declare it at the start of the meeting and complete the relevant notification form.

Recommendation:	Reason for Recommendation:
Transfer Newtown Textile Museum by Community Asset Transfer (freehold) to the Montgomery Community Regeneration Association (MCRA)	Newtown Textile Museum will become a community asset managed by a well-established community organisation, bringing long term social and economic benefits to Newtown and the local area.

Relevant Policy (ies):	Corporate Asset Policy		
Within Policy:	Y	Within Budget:	Y

Relevant Local Member(s):	Cllr Russell Ian George, Cllr Joy Jones, Cllr Gemma Jane Bowker, Cllr Peter Harris, and Cllr Bob Mills
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Person(s) To Implement Decision:	Catherine Richards
Date By When Decision To Be Implemented:	Immediately

Contact Officer Name:	Tel:	Fax:	Email:
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