

EXETER CITY COUNCIL

SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - ECONOMY 10 NOVEMBER 2011

WINDING DOWN OF EXETER ARCHAEOLOGY (THE AFU)

1. PURPOSE OF REPORT

1.1 To advise Members regarding:

- A. The measures being taken to manage Exeter Archaeology's (EA) archive during the run up to, and following, the final closure of the Service in March 2012 (as requested by Scrutiny Committee and Executive last March);
- B. Progress in fulfilling EA's remaining current, recent commercial commitments and completing chargeable work;
- C. Progress and strategy for dealing with EA's backlog of commitments.

2. BACKGROUND

2.1 Members will recall the arrangements for the closure process that were agreed last March at Scrutiny Economy Committee and Executive. These included:

- The retention of a skeleton staff of five until the end of March 2012, based at the Custom House, to undertake and complete as much of the above as they are able to, within the limits of the available funding and time;
- Overall monitoring of progress and strategic issues by the Archaeology Officer (Planning Services) on behalf of the Director Economy & Development;
- Reporting on progress to Scrutiny Economy Committee.

2.2 It is also relevant to note the financial provision that was agreed by Executive back in November 2009, for dealing with A & C above. This included:

- **Archives:** £45,500 per annum for 2010/11 and 2011/12 for staff costs for dealing with and depositing archive material (retained finds and records of remains that have since been destroyed) in the appropriate museums and other places with public access (A above);
- **Storage charges (“box money”) levied by Museums:** £22,500 per annum for 2010/11 and for 2011/12 (A above);
- **Work on backlog:** £40,000 per annum for 2010/11 and for 2011/12 (C above).

2.3 In addition, there is a budget of £26,000 for 2011/12 for economy and tourism projects, as reported to this Committee last January.

- 2.4 There is also some remaining funding for commercial projects, such as Princesshay and St Loyes (B above).

3. A - PROGRESS ON ARCHIVES

- 3.1 The EA archives are in several forms:

- i. **Finds and records from excavations of remains and sites that have since been destroyed.** These are usually the only record of the latter, and span a 40 year period of activity by EA/the AFU throughout the South West. With the building records below, these form the bulk of the material still held by EA, despite a concerted attempt by the last management to deposit as much as possible in the appropriate museums. It is important to note however that these archives do not contain all material and every find that was recovered from a site; a large proportion of the unimportant and uninformative material was discarded when it was dug up, and further weeding out takes place after the analysis of the results is complete and before deposition in a Museum. This process is likely to be even more rigorous in future, as the RAMM and others become ever more selective in what they consider worth keeping. When the finds and archives reach the museum, some are put on display (as in the new RAMM galleries), whilst others are kept back for later display on rotation, and/or stored for future scientific and other research.
- ii. **Records of historic buildings and surveys.** These are similar, but do not include finds. They may be deposited in Museums, or potentially also in Record Offices. Both options are being pursued.
- iii. **Historic maps and other source material.** Arrangements for passing this material to the county record office and/or the relevant historic environment record are being pursued.
- iv. **Project reports.** EA currently holds a library of top copies of these, numbering some 2270 in total. For many projects, such reports, represent the only reasonably detailed account of the discoveries. Generally only a very limited number of copies were produced, were sent to their clients and usually to the relevant historic environment record, and only occasionally to the local studies library. To get these and the discoveries that they describe out to a wider audience, a bid for external funding to digitise around 1200 of the most useful reports and put them in a national online library has been made in partnership with the University of York. The result of this bid is expected shortly. If successful, it is proposed to administer the budget through Planning Services and commission the work freelance from ex-employees of EA who have the relevant expertise and knowledge of the material. Most of the work would be undertaken in 2012/13, and would not therefore conflict with the completion of outstanding chargeable work. Following digitisation, the top copies of the reports would be offered to record offices and historic environment records.
- v. **Project documentation.** This includes commercial and financial documents. Apart from material less than six years old (which Legal Services advise is kept for the time being) or relating to outstanding issues, this is being discarded.

- 3.2 The bulk of the material held in the Custom House falls into categories i & ii above. Since September 2009, when EA held a total of approx 1100-1200 separate archives in these categories, some 450 have been deposited in appropriate museums, leaving a total of about 650-750 in the Custom House (as of September 2011). Of these, around 350-400 fall within the RAMM's collection area, whilst the remainder (approx 300-350) are due to go to other regional museums in the south west and, in a few cases, to English Heritage and possibly the relevant Cathedral authorities and/or record office.
- 3.3 It is clear that it will not be physically possible for the Finds and Archives Officer to sort out and deposit all of the remaining archives by the end of March 2012, even assuming she stays in post until then and does not obtain another job in the meantime.

Financial position.

- 3.4 As a result of the reduction in staff numbers and the prioritisation of commercial work in order to retrieve the maximum possible income from that source during the closure, not all the grant agreed by Executive in 2009 for staff time to sort out and deposit the archives, and for "box money" for museums, will be spent by the end of March 2012.
- 3.5 In order to progress the completion of the work agreed in November 2009, principally the deposition of the non RAMM archives, an option would be to use some of the unspent grant (which was intended to fund staff time) to fund the Finds and Archives Officer post for a further year until the end of March 2013. No further extension of this post beyond that time would be proposed and any remaining archives that are left at the end of this period will be dealt with in consultation with the RAMM.
- 3.6 It is proposed to use any grant monies remaining after this to assist with any shortfall in C below and to use any remaining after that to assist the RAMM to deal with the RAMM destined archives left after March 2013.

4. B - PROGRESS ON COMMERCIAL COMMITMENTS

In November 2009 EA had some 250 outstanding commercial commitments on their books. By the time of the closure last June this had been reduced to some 48 chargeable commercial commitments awaiting completion. Since then, the remaining 5 skeleton staff has finished a further 23, and a further 12 are due for completion well before March next year. Of the remaining 13, some should be finished by the end of March, and the remainder will be completed on a freelance basis by former members of staff.

5. C - PROGRESS ON BACKLOG

- 5.1 This includes dealing with outstanding legal, financial and reputational obligations as reported previously to Executive and to this Committee. Good progress has been made and a creative approach has been adopted with considerable success, bringing in outside expertise and working in partnership with Exeter and other universities for example. This has resulted in some valuable input from present and recently retired university staff at nominal or reduced cost, enabling the Council's funding to be stretched as far as possible.

- 5.2 The backlog projects are designed to be as cost effective as possible, preferably meeting several obligations in one go, and to result in publications that are self contained and of as much public interest as possible. Highlights include four books – on Exeter’s Elizabethan records (book launch planned for next March), the medieval Exe Bridge (substantially complete), the Underground Passages and water supply (to be done by Southampton University, 2011-12), and Exeter’s medieval monasteries, including the city owned St Nicholas Priory and the remains of the Blackfriars found under Princesshay. These cover several scheduled monuments and related legal obligations.
- 5.3 Two of these projects – the Elizabethan records and the Underground Passages will feature in Michael Wood’s new series “The Making of England” (working title) to be broadcast on BBC 2 just before the Olympics next year. This will help serve to bring Exeter and its heritage much more into the public eye on a national level and raise the profile of the city generally.
- 5.4 Despite considerable progress on what is a large task it will not be possible to complete them all before March next year. When the proposal was made and agreed in November 2009 complete closure was not envisaged and was on the basis that there would be 15 AFU staff to work on these projects over the next two and a half years. Whereas, since June there have only been five staff and their main priority has been to complete chargeable commercial commitments and thus recoup as much external income as possible for the Council. The timescales and existing commitments of the external universities and personnel being used also extend beyond next March and they have to programme in the Exeter work around their other commitments. Therefore, whilst most of the available funding has been committed it will not all be spent by next March.
- 5.5 It is therefore proposed that the remaining funding from all sources (including the grant agreed by Executive in 2009, this year’s Economy & Tourism grant, and remaining funding attached to Princesshay) is carried over into 2012/13, and is administered after March 2012 through the Planning Services Unit by the Archaeology Officer on behalf of the Director. It should be noted that no additional funds from the Council are involved, although, as always, any opportunities for obtaining external help will be actively explored (as with the digitisation project see 3.1 (iv) above).

6. FINANCIAL SUMMARY

- 6.1 The report to Executive and Scrutiny Economy Committee in March 2011 projected the staged cost of closure to be £287,621. The revised cost of closure is now anticipated to be in the region of £268,421 based on the income and expenditure figures for the service at 30 September 2011 and on estimated income levels for the remainder of the year.
- 6.2 It should be noted however that this figure cannot be exact and may well change due to the following:
- One or more staff may leave before the end of March if they find other jobs (thus saving some costs, but also meaning that there will be less people to do the work and thus obtain or use the anticipated income);

- The remaining commercial income may suffer from a proportion of bad debt through clients going into administration;
 - The difficulties of estimating exactly what the final external and internal income figures will be at the end of the year.
- 6.3 The projected variation of around £19,200 in the estimated costs of closure given above is due to these factors and that the current projected figures now include estimated commercial income, but do not now include a large part of the internal grant income which is needed to pay external costs and to be carried over to next year to pay for existing commitments when these are completed.

7. PROPOSAL

- 7.1 In summary, to ensure that as much as possible of the outstanding work and commitments are completed and that the remaining budgets are used in the most cost effective manner to achieve this it is proposed to:
- carry over any unspent funds into 2012/13 to deal with existing commitments and towards the completion of outstanding work;
 - fund – out of the existing grant - the Finds and Archives Officer post for a further year to help achieve this;
 - administer this process via the Archaeology Officer in the Planning Services Unit, on behalf of the Director Economy & Development.

8. RECOMMENDATION

- 8.1 That Members note the report including the considerable progress made by the former and remaining EA staff in reducing the outstanding commitments and maximising the retrieval of income from their commercial clients; the contribution to the city's national profile and reputation that will be made by the publication of many of the important discoveries made during the 40 year life of the AFU/EA (as evidenced in the forthcoming media coverage); and agree the proposals set out in section 7 for the conclusion of this work.

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ECONOMY AND DEVELOPMENT DIRECTORATE

Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)

Background papers used in compiling this report:

None