

## EXETER CITY COUNCIL

### SCRUTINY COMMITTEE - COMMUNITY 4 SEPTEMBER 2012

#### ROYAL ALBERT MEMORIAL MUSEUM & ART GALLERY PERFORMANCE REVIEW 15 DECEMBER 2011 TO 31 JULY 2012

## 1 PURPOSE OF REPORT

- 1.1 This report reviews for Members' information the seven month period of service delivery following the re-opening of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum & Art Gallery (RAMM) post its capital redevelopment. Its intention is to cover the full spectrum of Museum operations in order to provide a whole view of the service, the interconnections between different aspects of its work and to describe how these feed into public outputs. Though starting from a very positive position, it also describes some of the constraints, pressures and challenges facing the service in coming years.

## 2 BACKGROUND

- 2.1 RAMM reopened on 15 December 2011 following a four year period for redevelopment which included conservation and refurbishment of the Grade II listed building, a new extension and redisplay of the collections.
- 2.2 The problems created by the building's historic fabric that lead to the over run of project costs and timescale will be covered in other Council committee reports. Defects are being rectified and negotiations leading to the closing of the final account are still ongoing with the result that detailed figures are not yet available. However it is important to note that the cost over run is entirely linked to the building envelope and not the Museum itself or the collections it houses. This aspect of the project remained within its original budget.
- 2.3 Levels of public expectation and excitement were very high by the time the Museum opened its doors in mid December. The many dimensions of its public engagement were clearly demonstrated in its opening week which included eleven opening events in six days for combinations of different interest groups. The opening event itself took place on 15 December and was undertaken by the Leader of the Council along with Frank Potter and three year old Maisie Searle (existing and new Museum visitors selected by the Express & Echo).
- 2.4 An overwhelmingly positive public reaction lead to some very high visitor numbers, the highest 3152 on 17 February, A more even pattern has since been established with numbers predictably rising during school holidays and wet weather. At the end of July total visitor numbers reached 236,170. This compares to annual figures of approximately 250,000, a peak reached in the final year before closure.
- 2.5 External evaluation conducted with visitors in the opening weeks showed that
- overall satisfaction with the new Museum was very high with 84% scoring it as very good or excellent.
  - 95% of visitors agreed that RAMM made a vital contribution to the life of the city, 75% expressing this as a strong view.

- the top three words used by the public to describe RAMM were 'High Quality', 'Educational' and 'Family Friendly'.
- 2.6 The same data group were used to analyse the geographical draw and the demographic profile of our visitors. This used Acorn Segmentation Methodology described in section 6.3 of this report. This found that the social demographic profile of visitors to RAMM, corresponded almost exactly to that of its principal catchment area (Devon), as derived from census data.
- 2.7 Further evaluation has been commissioned for later in the year to provide comparisons of visitor response and trends over a longer time period. Research will also look at 'dwell time' (how long visitors stay), a key performance indicator for funder The Heritage Lottery Fund, used to assess the quality of the visitor experience. Other research will examine the economic impact and benefits delivered to the local economy. The social and cultural impact of the investment in the Museum is the subject of a PhD thesis by a student based at the University's Business School.

### **3 AWARDS**

- 3.1 The critical significance of the Council's vision was commended by judges of the Art Fund's Museum of the Year Prize, one writing 'RAMM stands as a shining example of a museum that is cared for by the public realm and cherished as a civic good at the heart of municipal life'. Last year's winner was the British Museum and others include the Ulster Museum, Belfast and the SS Great Britain, Bristol.
- 3.2 The winner of the prize was announced simultaneously on BBC Radio 4 and at a ceremony hosted at the British Museum on 19 June. RAMM came ahead of a field that included many national as well as regional museum projects. The other shortlisted organisations were the Scottish National Portrait Gallery, The Hepworth in Wakefield (currently Stirling Prize nominated) and Watts Gallery in Guildford.
- 3.3 The Art Fund's selection criteria were that the winning project should:
- demonstrate excellence, originality and imagination
  - promote wider public appreciation of museums and galleries
  - show the support of visitors and users
  - include imaginative use of artists and designers
  - is likely to provide a lasting legacy
- 3.4 The judges made their decision following individual and panel visits, together with that of a 'mystery' shopper judge. The Art Fund Prize is an important national accolade, a success that underscores the city's role as a regional capital and contributes to several of the Council's key purposes – most importantly the vibrancy of Exeter's cultural and hence quality of life, expressed in 'provide great things for me to see, do and visit'.
- 3.5 The quality of the Museum project was also recognised by an award given jointly to RAMM and its fit out contractor Benbow, based in Newton Abbot. Their work constructing showcase and exhibition furniture was part of the Museum rather than building project. The winning Award for Non Retail Project was made by the National Association of Shop Fitters. The Judges wrote 'The refurbishment of this beautiful Victorian museum in order to make its collections more accessible, understandable and enjoyable is a great success and a joy to experience... the younger visitors are

always the acid test in these types of museum, and I didn't see one that wasn't entirely captivated by the experience they were having in the space'.

3.6 In May RAMM together with St Nicholas Priory was assessed for accreditation under the Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme managed by Visit England. The assessment process looks for excellence in customer service and considers all aspects of visitor experience. VAQAS Accreditation was given to RAMM with the assessor recognising:

- standards of information and interpretation in all the Galleries are excellent, the collections are displayed to a very high standard and the use of audio visual presentations ensures visitor's attention is held throughout.
- the In Fine Feather is an excellent Gallery, very popular with visitors. The display of birds is comprehensive, all are easily identified and some sounds are available. Background birdsong adds to the atmosphere.
- the redevelopment of the Royal Albert Memorial Museum has been very successful as has been shown by the number of visitors in the first four months.
- large numbers of artefacts are displayed to a very high standard and the mounting of high quality exhibitions will ensure that visitors will return on a regular basis.

3.7 During its public closure RAMM was only permitted "Provisional status" under the Museum Accreditation scheme administered by Government's Museums, Libraries and Archives Council. Accreditation is the UK standard for museums and galleries. It defines good practice, identifies agreed standards and provides a baseline quality standard against which museums can be measured, developed and improved. Accreditation is a requirement for institutions receiving public funding. With responsibilities now transferred to the Arts Council of England (ACE) and the re-opening, RAMM underwent a full inspection which concentrated on three principal areas:

- Organisational health (governance, forward planning, financial stability)
- Collections (development, documentation, care, security)
- Users and their experience (quality, user focus and learning)

3.8 Full Accreditation has been awarded which lasts 2 years. RAMM was one of the first museums in the UK to receive an award under the recently revised scheme.

#### **4 MAJOR PARTNER MUSEUM FUNDING**

4.1 RAMM has through its participation in the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council Renaissance Programme received £6,131,840 investment over the past ten years. This has helped deliver a whole host of service improvements and public outputs as well as contributing directly to RAMM's capital development, through staffing resource, collections management, conservation and digital development.

4.2 In Autumn 2011 sector responsibilities for museums and libraries passed to the Arts Council for England (ACE), who reviewed and remodelled the scheme to align with their new 10 year strategic framework 'Culture, knowledge and understanding: great museums and libraries for everyone'. This is based around the ACE's five strategic goals:

- excellence is thriving and celebrated in museums and libraries
- more people experience and are inspired by museums and libraries
- museums and libraries are sustainable, resilient and innovative
- the leadership and workforce are diverse and highly skilled

- every child and young person has opportunity to experience the richness of museums and libraries.
- 4.3 A new application process was launched which was open to all UK museums. RAMM submitted a successful partnership bid with the Plymouth City Museum & Art Gallery with the result that the peninsula's two principal cities have been selected as part of the ACE's Major Grants Programme. The RAMM/Plymouth partnership is one of only 15 other major partners (leading UK museums) who will receive national funding over the three year period to 2015, status that underscores RAMM's national significance. For RAMM this means £1,748,291 investment (2012-15). The City Council's revenue commitment to the Museum was a very persuasive factor.
- 4.4 The award announced in March 2012 is aimed at driving the development and delivery of excellence in museums; reaching out to more people; supporting innovation and museum resilience. The funding is entirely for revenue/operational based activity that is set against an agreed Programme of Activities. Progress against this programme is monitored by ACE through quarterly meetings and funding drawdowns, plus annual reviews and monitoring of key performance indicators.
- 4.5 The Programme of Activities was designed to deliver against key purposes and actions in the City Council's Corporate Plan, thereby ensuring there is strong integration between this externally funded programme of work and local priorities. Principal areas of activity for RAMM are around three areas:
- growing audiences in terms of numbers and the range of people the services reach.
  - developing the knowledge base around the collections, their conservation and use of public activities.
  - the developing partnership with Plymouth and diversifying and growing the income streams that can help support services in the future.
- 4.6 It is anticipated that there will be another open application process for the next round of museum funding towards the end of the 2014/15 financial year and the City Council will need to be in a position to make a strong bid, alone or as part of a wider partnership.

## **5 STAFFING**

- 5.1 RAMM's workforce was restructured in 2010-11 and new job descriptions implemented in April 2011. The process also took into account the responsibilities and skills needed to respond to the challenges and opportunities of coming years, as well as rebalancing the Museum for its re-opening. The externally funded staff were critical to delivery of the capital project. Indeed the sustained effort required by the whole Museum team, over a very long project culminating in a period of intensive installation and launch activity should be commended. The Museum of the Year Award is due recognition of this collective effort.
- 5.2 The restructuring exercise divided staff into 'core funded roles' and others into a category defined by project and external funding. Approximately 37% of staff are funded through external (non-ECC) funding.
- 5.3 The limited basic staffing of core roles provided in the substantive structure provides the Museum with essential capacity alone and little if any of the resources needed to deliver the ambitious and innovative services that have come to characterise RAMM. This emphasises not only the importance of the current partnership with the ACE, but

also the need to develop a competitive and sustainable position to meet as yet unknown funding challenges in coming years.

## **6 AUDIENCE DEVELOPMENT**

- 6.1 The purpose within ECC's Corporate Plan of "Provide great things for me to see, do and visit", has as a key action "offer an inspiring programme of events, activities and exhibitions at the museum, enriching the cultural lives of all who live, visit and work in the city". The Museum's challenge is to link this to the action to "promote the city as a retail, visitor and cultural destination" and the purpose "help me run a successful business in Exeter", as a clear demonstration of the connection between the city's quality of life and economic development. Within the plan an overarching principle is that "we must envisage that everyone in the city has equal access to our services and that the diverse needs and backgrounds of our residents are respected and valued".
- 6.2 City Council objectives expressed in the Corporate Plan correspond with ACE's priority for cultural activity to reach the lives of more people. For RAMM, the programming of its exhibitions and events are key to delivering consistently high visitor numbers, its key performance measure, and the Museum has built up a strong background of experience in this area.

### **Planning for Audiences**

- 6.3 In shaping an audience development strategy which seeks to maintain existing users as well as securing first time visitors, RAMM uses a planning tool called Acorn Segmentation, widely used in the commercial world. Acorn Segmentation studies undertaken before RAMM's closure indicated that the socio-economic profile of Museum visitors almost exactly matched that of the base population (as derived from census data). This finding is unusual for museums and is a result of the planned audience development undertaken by RAMM. The exercise has been repeated for the re-opened Museum and found a similar visiting pattern. Acorn Segmentation allows the team to identify potential areas of audience growth and to shape and balance the exhibitions and events programme accordingly. This provides a guiding rationale offering a wide range of experiences which help make the Museum more accessible to more people, ensuring RAMM serves all parts of the community and not just existing cultural consumers.
- 6.4 Active museums like RAMM provide important civic space, where a mix of people, of all backgrounds, ages and needs, can come together to share a common experience. This is quite rare and very valuable in a time where communities are increasingly fragmented and often struggle to find a collective sense of identity. RAMM's new facilities have been designed to offer increased flexibility, enabling the museum to provide a venue and backdrop for a wide range of events ranging from community occasions to conferences and meetings. These have included:
- Folk.Us (Peninsular College of Medicine & Dentistry), a social and mentoring evening for Carers
  - Culture Café (with Age UK), social events for older people
  - Exeter College Students, BTEC dance performances inspired by Museum collections
  - University Research and Knowledge Council Conference, evening reception at RAMM for visiting delegates

## **Exhibitions**

- 6.5 RAMM's temporary exhibition programme is a major contribution to the mixture of experiences which attract a wide range of audiences. The busy schedule of exhibitions and displays, together with the range of topics, interpretation, partners and related events, enables RAMM to keep attracting its regular visitors from within and well outside the city, while also involving new ones.
- 6.6 RAMM's temporary exhibition programme aims to:
- provide a mixture of accessible, high quality exhibitions and displays throughout the year. These exhibitions need to balance RAMM's role as a museum and art gallery, its responsibilities to its own collections; and its role in national, regional and local settings
  - cater for different types of visitors across the year's programme
  - provide a diverse programme of participation and learning opportunities both inside and outside the Museum, for example: talks, tours and debates; family activities; special projects, activities and events with partners and community groups; on line and digital interaction
  - raise the profile of Exeter, the City Council and RAMM by attracting to the South West significant loans and exhibitions from prestigious national partners, for example, the British Museum, Royal Collection, National Portrait Gallery
  - stimulate new and repeat visits to RAMM and to the city contributing to Exeter's offer to day visitors and short stay tourists
  - contribute significantly to Exeter's offer as a tourist destination
  - create longer term strategic partnerships which enhance the reputation of RAMM, the City Council and Exeter by developing new and innovative exhibitions that attract external funding and national acclaim
  - maximize the use of resources by programming a range of touring, self generated, one-off collaborative shows which support RAMM's audience development strategy.
- 6.7 The aims of the programme show a clear link to aspirations set out in ECC's Corporate Plan. Viewed across several years the balance within the programme will vary depending on the availability of opportunities, resources and staffing capacity. Preparation, negotiation, partnerships and the need to secure funding usually means programming runs two years ahead of present. Submitted proposals always exceed the number of available exhibition slots, necessitating careful decisions set in the context of the audience development strategy.

## **Learning Activities**

- 6.8 As well as being places of shared experiences, inspiration and enjoyment, museums are places of learning. This is reflected in RAMM's strap line 'Home to a Million Thoughts'. Whether you are 6 or 66 there are opportunities to learn at RAMM – informally through the new displays, temporary exhibitions, events and activities and more formally through partnerships with organisations such as the University, University of the Third Age and WEA.
- 6.9 Schools continue to be a significant part of RAMM's audience, averaging 1200 visits per month. These include self guided visits and visits from language schools. Other schools use their visit to RAMM to deliver specific elements of the National Curriculum. Learning resources are available on-line to support these topic themed

visits which are teacher led. Additionally the Museum is creating new learning packages around Personal Learning and Thinking Skills (PTLS), visits that give pupils memorable sessions exploring themes running across RAMM.

- 6.10 Families have and continue to be an important part of RAMM's visitor profile. Acorn Segmentation studies undertaken in the years before the Museum's closure led RAMM to make families a key feature of its audience development strategy. This work is continuing now that RAMM is re-opened, the research suggesting that while the Museum is already very popular with this group there still remains opportunity for further significant growth. A Family Learning Officer role forms part of the core Museum structure and is responsible for organising all of the Family Activity Days involving 'making and doing' at weekends and during school holidays. These are a very popular and much appreciated community aspect of RAMM's work.

### **Digital Services**

- 6.11 Digital channels are an important vehicle for unlocking the learning potential of museum collections. The knowledge represented by these collections is a valuable public resource, making the Museum's role as an on-line 'publisher and disseminator of information' an important development area.
- 6.12 Within the museum sector this is recognised as the next new territory waiting to be explored in terms of audience development. Digital services allow the Museum to simultaneously grow audiences on the other side of the globe, raising awareness of the city and at the same time make much more available to local communities and individuals.
- 6.13 This is a new and rapidly changing area of development with which RAMM made much progress in the period of its closure, when it helped provide access to collections and promote the re-opening. The Museum's website [www.exeter.gov.uk/ramm](http://www.exeter.gov.uk/ramm) is the hub for a range of digital activities which include collections on-line, elearning, web based projects, and social media. All of this work was funded through Renaissance funding and digital development will continue as part of RAMM's MPM programme.
- 6.14 Ghostwriter, RAMM's first digital art commission by award-winning Blast Theory, received an honourable mention from the judges of the prestigious American Association of Museums MUSE Awards. Presented to institutions or independent producers which use digital media to enhance the museum experience and engage audiences, the MUSE awards celebrate community, innovation, creativity, and education. RAMM was effectively fourth place in the Audio Tours and Podcasts section.

## **7 COLLECTIONS**

- 7.1 With RAMM successfully reopened, the focus of the Collections Team is concentrated on the collections review process. This commenced in Spring 2011 and will, when completed, provide an in depth assessment of the collections strengths, weaknesses, gaps and potential. It will provide a platform for planning further collections based development, research activity, partnerships and temporary exhibition projects. Most importantly its findings will also inform the Collections Development Policy which will shape the future growth/character of RAMM's holdings. The subject was described in more detail at the Scrutiny Community Committee of 29 May 2012 and a date for presenting the new policy to Committee

was set for December 2013. This work is funded through MLA/ACE Renaissance programmes.

- 7.2 As content specialists, the Collections Team are also closely involved in the planning and delivery of the temporary exhibition programme. This includes a number of long term projects which draw on the Museum's stored collections.

### **Conservation**

- 7.3 Specialist conservation facilities and staff at RAMM enable it to prepare reserve collections for display and public engagement. Without this facility costs would be prohibitively expensive and diminish public use of the collections. Conservators and technical staff also support the exhibitions programme, allowing it to meet the requirements of lenders. Caring for RAMM's own collections is central to their work and they have since opening been overseeing their movement into 'More in Store' (the public access study centre/store) within the Museum building.
- 7.4 The Collections Team are currently managing contractors' installation of new racking at The Ark, in space that previously served as temporary laboratories during RAMM's closure. Once finished, a substantial amount of this team's effort will be involved in decanting collections from Rougemont House and re-housing in the Ark. This is expected to take until the end of October/beginning of November. Rougemont House will then require stripping out (fittings etc) after which the Council's Estates section will manage the commercial sale of the property.

## **8 PARTNERSHIPS**

- 8.1 Partnerships are central to RAMM's working. These strengthen the cultural network of which RAMM is part, creating mutual benefits; maximising the use of resources (physical and financial); and helping the Museum engage new audiences including 'hard to reach' ones. A few selected examples of partnerships that formed part of the opening programme include:
- Devon & Cornwall Police/DCC Social Services/RAMM based Intervention Project to address the needs of Young People at Risk of Offending
  - Compton Verney (Arts Trust), Warwickshire. Partner for 'Into the Light' Exhibition
  - University of Exeter 'Great Exhibitions, Great Debates' seminar (focussing on RAMM's re-opening)
  - Cavern Club. Electroswing dance evening celebrating opening of V&A Selling Dreams exhibitions
  - Northcott Theatre, and Show of Strength Theatre Company 'Gripping Yarns'. Creative writing and commissioned playlets based on RAMM's collections

### **Partnerships with Higher Education**

- 8.2 Partnerships are forged at all levels, take many forms and vary in duration. For example the on-going and deepening relationship with the University of Exeter is an example where academic partnerships enable the Museum to extend and deepen its collections based research, leading to enhanced knowledge, understanding and use of the collections. In return the 'platform' provided by RAMM through its exhibitions and events programme enables the University's research to reach new areas of public life.



- 8.3 Current collaborations include:
- **Sex & History** (leading to 2013 exhibition and regional programme of work), Department of Classics and Department of History
  - **Victorian Medievalism** (leading to 2013 exhibition), Department of English, Victorian Studies
  - **'The Social & Cultural Impact of RAMM's Redevelopment'**, Business School (Doctoral current study)
  - **Stories in Stone**, Department of Archaeology with Goldsmiths College (includes work around new digital media)
  - **History of Politics in the South West**, Department of History (research area based on collections)
  - **Elizabethan South West** (exhibition with potential collaboration around research)
  - **REACT Programme** (UK Knowledge Exchange Hub for the Creative Economy), Doctoral student based with RAMM (explores and develops digital interpretations of heritage)
  - Partnerships around the University's new College of Humanities, **Visual Culture courses** (placements and case studies)
  - Ongoing dialogue with a range of departments about **future research/exhibition projects**
- 8.4 The Museum also supports the University's 'employability' programme, hosting a number of students in work experience situations, and furthermore provides the conduit to many other placements in smaller museums around the County. These are in addition to the subject student placements also offered by RAMM.
- 8.5 Additionally RAMM has links to the University of Plymouth through the **RAMMbassadors** programme and a number of European Universities through extended work placements in our Conservation Laboratories. Laboratory practice in 'real time' supervised by an experienced and qualified conservator forms part of the students' courses and assessment and in return objects from the Museum's collections receive treatment gratis.

### **National Partnerships**

- 8.6 Securing, growing and developing its national partnerships is essential if RAMM is to fulfil its potential as a cultural flagship for the city. Bringing major touring exhibitions to Exeter highlights its role as a regional capital, brings national profile and reinforces the economic development messages around the quality of life to be enjoyed in the city. RAMM has a longstanding partnership with the British Museum, with which it has collaborated to produce 'Warriors of the Plains', 22 September to 13 January. Other collaborations include The National Portrait Gallery BP Portrait Award (9 February 2013 to 19 May 2013) and Natural History Museum, Wildlife Photographer of the Year (Spring 2013). RAMM's national recognition as Museum of the Year 2012 offers an important opportunity to open up discussions with new partners in the coming months. This task will be supported by the Freelance Creative Programmer appointed through MPM funding.

### **Local Partnerships**

- 8.7 More locally RAMM's work with hard to reach audiences are grounded in partnerships, where staff work with other agencies such as AGE UK, Children's Carers, Aftermath PTSD (soldiers support group) or Magic Carpet. The Museum brings to these partnerships, content handling sessions, reminiscence activities or workshops and a 'safe' neutral social space. Though numbers of participants are usually small and require targeted resources, this area of work contributes to

community cohesion, the aspiration that its services are available to all, and are potentially life changing for individuals. In the future there is the opportunity to draw in commissioning funding from the NHS, adult/social care provision to fund and support this area of work with very specific audiences. Applications to deliver commissioned services by RAMM are likely to be made in partnership with other groups.

## **9 COMMUNITY ENGAGEMENT**

### **Creative Apprentices**

- 9.1 RAMM will be hosting two Creative Apprentices as part of the Council's employment and training initiative.

### **Community Linkages**

- 9.2 Throughout RAMM's redevelopment staff and volunteers visited many community groups to give presentations. This is a popular aspect of RAMM's community engagement that has continued since reopening. Now the building is open RAMM also offers tours of the Museum for booked parties. The groups and societies who have taken up RAMM's offer include Probus clubs, local history groups, parish councils and Rotary clubs throughout Devon.

### **RAMM Development Appeal Trust**

- 9.3 More direct community support is provided by the Royal Albert Memorial Museum Development Appeal Trust. A registered charity set up in 1994, it exists to assist the Museum's development and has raised significant funds £170,000 to support the capital development project through its own fundraising and through approaches to grant giving trusts and foundations. Its Trustees are drawn from the local business community and include ECC Member representation.
- 9.4 The RAMM Development Appeal Trust led the initiative to set up a membership Business Club to support the Museum. Its launch coincided with RAMM's reopening. There are nine inaugural members who receive a package of benefits depending on their choice of gold, silver or bronze membership. Additionally there are also four 'sponsors in kind' who have provided free of charge goods or services to the Museum. The Business Club is still in its earliest stages of development but has already proved very effective in promoting RAMM's integration and use by local businesses for meetings, corporate hospitality and networking events.

Events held at RAMM have included:

- Exeter Chamber of Commerce Lunch
- Michelmores Breakfast Club
- Royal Institute of British Architects South West AGM
- as well as many of the Business Club's own events.

### **The Friends of Exeter Museums & Art Gallery**

- 9.5 The Friends of Exeter Museums & Art Gallery (FEMAG) have continued in their active support of RAMM. For obvious reasons there was a slight fall in membership during the Museum's closure but this has been more than replaced by an extremely successful recruitment campaign that coincided with RAMM's re-opening. This has seen membership rise to an all time high of 891 (was 574 in March 2011).

- 9.6 FEMAG continues its important role in helping to develop the Museum collections. It has commissioned architectural sculptor Geoffrey Preston ('A Symphony of Curves' Exhibition, 18 August to 14 October 2012) to produce a large scale piece of decorative plasterwork which will ultimately be shown in the Making History Galleries. FEMAG is also supporting the acquisition of a 19th-century watercolour by Samuel Palmer, its funding once again acting as critical local leverage for national grant aid.

### **Volunteers**

- 9.7 A large number of volunteers support RAMM's work and service delivery. RAMM currently has 145 enthusiastic volunteers who add value to all aspects of Museum life, encouraging involvement and enriching the overall experience of many of RAMM's audiences. Volunteers support RAMM in many ways allowing the Museum to widen its reach and achieve more. Some of RAMM's volunteers go on to secure jobs in the museum sector; some stay with RAMM for many years.

## **10 ISSUES**

- 10.1 Re-opening after a four year major capital development cannot be rehearsed. The reality of the public response, its impact and implications are difficult to predict and regardless of pre-planning the Museum has very often found itself responding to a new situation.

### **Visitor Numbers**

- 10.2 Fantastic visitor numbers mean large volumes of people and this has created a lot of pressure on staff and the building. The latter has required much higher levels of cleaning and maintenance than predicted. Cleanliness and presentation are critically important to the visitor experience, public perceptions of the Council's investment in the facility and for its reputation. Accordingly officers will be reviewing current arrangements and considering how they need adapting to meet the additional need.
- 10.3 The Museum's new public opening hours are Tuesday to Sunday with other staff retaining the Monday to Friday working pattern. This means the building is effectively a seven day week operation with Monday still requiring a security presence and staffing to allow cleaning, maintenance, display changes and contractors' work, and rest days. Sunday openings were introduced at the public's request, now averaging 878 visitors.
- 10.4 More evening events (in RAMM's programme and through corporate hire) have also placed greater demands on the Visitor Services (front of house) team.
- 10.5 Overall, the Museum building is open to the public for considerably more hours per week than previously. Supervisory capacity in the form of the roles that have overall responsibilities for day-to-day site security/front of house operations has already been increased and managers are now reviewing staffing levels with the benefit of several months experience of the new building behind them.

### **External Deadlines**

- 10.6 A rolling series of application deadlines in the last seven months - Art Fund Prize, Major Partner Museum Programme, Visitor Attraction Quality Assurance Scheme Accreditation, Museum Accreditation, Designation Challenge Funding - have also created a series of pressure points for senior Museum staff. Each application

requires a considerable amount of preparation, planning, writing and producing supporting documents. Whilst RAMM's success rate has been exceptional, it is important to note that each award or funding allocation has to be earned, in the case of the latter, in a competitive environment. Successful bids lever in significant funds to the city but with them the Council accepts responsibilities for delivery, transparency, accounting, evidencing and reporting outputs. The work which delivers so many important and valued public outputs is therefore ongoing. In forward planning future years the Council should consider how it can best position itself to secure similar inward investment via these and other routes.

### **Budget Setting**

- 10.7 Budget planning for the re-opened Museum took place during its period of closure. A zero based budget exercise was undertaken to build up operational budget lines that reflected anticipated need and expenditure with little flexibility for unexpected items/needs that have arisen in the new building. Necessary adjustments will need to be made in the next budget cycle to better reflect the practical experience gained from occupancy of the new building.

### **System Management**

- 10.8 Maintenance and management of the new Museum fabric, technical, mechanical and electrical installations has required that a member of Museum staff learn about systems procedures, basic troubleshooting, record keeping and dealing with the onsite visits of specialist contractors. The complexity and demands of this work were underestimated and the role is currently being redesigned to better reflect its skill requirements and responsibilities. RAMM's Building Services Officer is supported by staff from the Contracts Unit but many of the Museum's technical issues occur on a 24/7 basis which is not covered by Civic Centre teams which have their own workloads. Many of the new systems have had 'bedding-in' problems which have demanded regular attention from contractors, maintenance engineers and Museum staff.

### **Defects Period**

- 10.9 A 'defects rectification' phase is a normal part of a contract and runs once the project has been handed over to the client. In RAMM's case this has overlapped with the opening months, necessitating visits from contractors and other suppliers. Fitting their work into the schedule and requirements of an operating museum has often been difficult. The majority of defects have now been dealt with but some significant items remain outstanding and will generate more work and disruption.

### **Garden Entrance Landscaping**

- 10.10 Landscaping at the Garden Entrance was always scheduled for completion after the Museum's reopening. This work has been funded in part through the Heritage Lottery Fund, in part by a grant from Viridor and managed outside the main contract by the City Council. Original delivery timescales have for various reasons slipped and Viridor have been updated. The completion date is anticipated to be Autumn 2012.

## **11 INCOME GENERATION**

- 11.1 Identifying and exploring opportunities for income generation is a developing area for RAMM and supported through the Major Partner Museums' Programme of Activity.

By increasing and diversifying income streams it is hoped to diminish the burden on public funding. Key considerations are that:

- opening up commercial potential needs to be achieved without compromising the principal purpose of the Museum
- staff will need to develop new skills and abilities
- investment will be needed to start up some income generating initiatives (some limited funds through MPM) and then reinvestment of 'profits' to continue their growth

- 11.2 The income target for corporate hospitality hire is £12,000 for this financial year. Between January and June £5825 gross was generated (exclusive of overhead costs).
- 11.3 Museum shops are an area of high risk for local authorities as they are very difficult to make profitable. Selecting, purchasing and managing stock flows is one area of work and the larger successful museum operations tend to employ experienced personnel with commercial backgrounds to undertake this work. Staffing overheads also cut into profitability. The option of establishing a shop will be re-examined in the next few months in the context of financial productivity of space in comparison to corporate hire.
- 11.4 To date in order to meet visitor expectations of 'taking a souvenir home' limited retail sales via the Garden Entrance has been pursued and is gradually being expanded. This has created staffing issues as the receptionist has to split her attention between enquiries/telephone/bookings and retail sales.
- 11.5 Income projections for the café are £24,000 (under Rent). For the moment (December-May period) £8826.68 has been raised.
- 11.6 A local company is currently operating a temporary 'pop-up' café, intended to cover the period while tendering is carried out for a permanent café operator. The first tender process did not result in a satisfactory appointment. The benefit of several months experience and data since opening should now enable the Museum to attract a wider field of interested parties.

## **12 FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS**

- 12.1 In its opening months RAMM's launch programme and some aspects of service delivery were supported by the Heritage Lottery Fund's grant associated with the capital development project. This for instance funded the specially curated 'Into the Light' show which opened RAMM's temporary exhibitions programme.
- 12.2 Other projects, larger exhibitions and development work undertaken by the Museum are, in the main, funded through external sources, using smaller amounts of ECC revenue funding. Together these enable the Council to deliver an exciting and aspirational cultural offer which matches the ambition and investment made in the Museum building. Since funders generally wish to see 'real' contributions to projects, these are drawn from the overall revenue budget of the RAMM. A sum of about £195,710 has therefore been for these projects and will include expenditure for materials, display expenses, exhibitions, stationery, equipment, and marketing.
- 12.3 The remainder of the City Council's £2.07m expenditure on RAMM is spent on rates, utilities, maintenance, City Council recharges and salaries. In accounting terms this represents the true cost of RAMM and brings the Museum a size and significance

that justifies its inclusion as an ACE Major Partner Museum. The evidence of the local authority's commitment to RAMM was an important factor in the assessment for the ACE funding, which will bring in an average of £582,764 additional revenue spend per year for the next three years.

Exeter City Council Budget (2012-13)			Arts Council of England Budget (annual average over period 2012-15)		
Exeter City Council Financial Commitment (Museum)	£1,877,240	E.g. Rates, Utilities, Recharges, Salaries.			
F044 Operational Budget (Museum)	£195,710	E.g. Materials, Display, Exhibitions, Uniforms, Equipment.	ACE Operational Budget	£582,764	Based on agreed Programme of Activities.
<b>ECC Gross Total*</b>	<b>£2,072,950</b>		<b>ACE Gross Total</b>	<b>£582,764</b>	

\* Excluding £62,600 income targets to be met by RAMM.

### 13 CONCLUSIONS

These are summarised as follows:

- The Council's capital investment in the Museum has been well received by the visiting public and achieved national profile and recognition.
- As a member of a national cohort of Major Partner Museums, RAMM and the City Council have been recognised for their exemplary track record, development potential and leadership role.
- Funding received as part of the programme represents an excellent return on the City Council's revenue investment.
- The alignment of the MPM Programme of Activities makes a substantial contribution to delivery of Corporate objectives.
- Partnerships at all levels optimise the impact of RAMM's work and use of resources.
- Engagement with many different segments of the local community ensures a high level of local integration and grass roots support both for the Museum and its parent body.
- In a world of increasing competition for scarce resources the City Council needs to take account in its forward planning of its need to position itself to ensure that it is able to access through RAMM, similar sources of external funding in 2015.

## **14 RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the Committee note and comment upon the contents of this Report.

### **Richard Ball – Assistant Director Economy**

S:PA/LP/ Committee/912SCC9  
21.8.12

**Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 (as amended)**  
**Background papers used in compiling this report:**