

Councillor Abi Brown,
Leader of the Council,
Stoke-on-Trent City Council,
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RE: Proposed cuts to Gladstone Pottery Museum

Dear Cllr. Brown,

We have recently been made aware of Stoke-on-Trent City Council's budget proposals for 2022/23 and the proposal to cut the overall budget of the City's museums with the aim of saving £112k annually. We wish to highlight the immense value of Stoke-on-Trent's world-renowned heritage, and of the Potteries Museum and Art Gallery and Gladstone Pottery Museum as key destinations celebrating that heritage. We would be grateful for further information and assurances that the impacts of these cuts have been properly considered and that they are not the thin end of the wedge for the City's museums and their nationally significant collections and other important functions.

We have seen the Council's statement responding to widespread public criticism following the announcement of these cuts. We welcome the Council's positive statements made about its wider commitment to the City's internationally significant heritage and note the engagement with other initiatives designed to enhance the city's townscape heritage. However, the lack of published rationale for the proposed cuts to the museum service does not bear out this commitment.

We recognise that budgetary pressures on the local authority are serious, and that difficult decisions have to be made across the Council's whole range of services. Where these cuts must fall on cultural services, we would expect to see evidence that the impacts have been understood, clearly acknowledged, and a strong case made for why those cuts represent the least possible harm to the City's cultural heritage offer. We do not believe that the budget *Business Cases* document does this.

CIfA's view is that cuts to museum 'back-room' staff are very often misguided. While these parts of museum budgets might appear to accommodate cuts with less impact, that perception underestimates the valuable roles and range of expertise of curators and other museum professionals. Cuts to curatorial posts would reduce the range of specialist knowledge, and the ability of the museums to manage their collections, conduct and facilitate research into collections, develop exciting exhibits, liaise over loans and acquisitions, and much more to

provide huge public benefits from culture, heritage, tourism, and civic pride. We are also concerned that reducing opening hours would reduce visitor numbers, depressing the measures of the value of the museums, and encouraging further cuts.

We have witnessed these damaging patterns before and we urge you to re-examine the judgement in the Council's 'business case' that this proposal represents a 'minimal impact'. At present, the business case for the proposed cuts does not show any cost/benefit analysis of the museum's opening to the public, nor of the impact of staff reductions on the service's ability to function and generate value.

We also recommend that the Council gives thought to the potential impact on the Museum's ACE Accreditation. The museum could be in breach of the Accreditation Standard which in turn could prevent the museum from seeking ACE funding and possibly impact any recent funding which was contingent upon Museum Accreditation.

We would welcome

- confirmation that the PMAG's management of the Staffordshire Hoard exhibits and collection, its wider archaeological collections, and the associated archaeological expertise among the museum's staff will not be adversely affected by the cuts and that the Council retains a long-term commitment to this nationally significant collection
- an explanation as to how the loss of both the Senior and Assistant Curators of Ceramics would not jeopardise the designated status of the ceramics collection and the ability of the museum to celebrate the world-renowned heritage of the Staffordshire Potteries
- confirmation that the museum's collecting functions (where archaeological archives are deposited following the conclusion of archaeological work which is undertaken during development and required by the planning system) will not be impacted
- reassurance that any cuts agreed by the Council following consultation will be part of a long-term plan for sustaining of the museums service and continued delivery of a quality public service as its core objectives,

As we emerge from the Pandemic, increased domestic tourism and appreciation for the heritage on our doorstep is a cause for optimism and we urge the Council to use the opportunity of the budget consultation to reflect on the case for these cuts, looking at the potential impact not only on the Council's reputation, but on the quality of its heritage offer.

Yours sincerely,



Rob Lennox

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Senior Advocacy Coordinator, ClfA

CC: Councillor Lorraine Beardmore - cabinet member for leisure, culture and public health
Councillor Daniel Jellyman - cabinet member for regeneration, infrastructure and heritage

About the Chartered Institute for Archaeologists

The Chartered Institute for Archaeologists (CIfA) is the leading professional body representing archaeologists working in the UK and overseas. We promote high professional standards and strong ethics in archaeological practice, to maximise the benefits that archaeologists bring to society, and provide a self-regulatory quality assurance framework for the sector and those it serves.

CIfA has over 4,000 members and more than 80 registered practices across the United Kingdom. Its members work in all branches of the discipline: heritage management, planning advice, excavation, finds and environmental study, buildings recording, underwater and aerial archaeology, museums, conservation, survey, research and development, teaching and liaison with the community, industry and the commercial and financial sectors.