

Agenda Item 5

Cllr Nick Worth, Executive Member for Culture (CllrN.Worth@lincolnshire.gov.uk)
Andy Gutherson (Andy.Gutherson@lincolnshire.gov.uk)
Lincolnshire County Council

29 August 2019

Dear Cllr. Worth,

Future of the Heritage Service proposals

I am writing on behalf of Arts Council England to offer our formal response to Lincolnshire County Council's proposals for the Future of the Heritage Service. This follows the decision of the Public Protection and Communities Scrutiny Committee to approve recommendations made by the Executive Director in July 2019.

Arts Council England is a strong supporter of arts and culture in Lincoln and Lincolnshire. We will invest £3,416,064 in Lincoln in 2018/22 and £5,543,699 in Lincolnshire. Of this, £285,644 is invested in the visual arts programme of The Collection and the Usher Gallery. We have a strong interest in working with partners and stakeholders nationally and regionally to grow and add value to the cultural offer and support its positive impact in many areas of Lincolnshire life from economic development to health and well-being.

We are aware of the challenging position Lincolnshire County Council finds itself in in relation to decreasing public funding and we understand that these proposals seek to enable the Heritage Service to meet these challenges. We have welcomed opportunities to talk to you and your colleagues about these proposals, as well as further dialogue and email correspondence with Andy Gutherson and Will Mason. We have also reviewed the recommendations and liaised with our sector colleagues at the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Art Fund, Historic England and the Contemporary Art Society.

We have concluded that there are still significant concerns about the Future of the Heritage Service proposals, specifically in relation to the recommendations made in July.

We think it would be useful to make you aware of these concerns and to explore what further action can be taken by Lincolnshire County Council to address them.

Key concerns

Our main concerns are as follows:

Recommendation 3: The recommendation approving Lincolnshire County Council giving two years notice to the City of Lincoln Council to terminate the collections management agreement dated 31 January 2001 and the return of the collections owned by the City of Lincoln Council to the City of Lincoln Council.

We are concerned that a successful and longstanding partnership between Lincolnshire County Council and City of Lincoln Council in relation to managing and storing these collections still appears to be at risk. City of Lincoln Council has made us aware that they do not have either the expertise or the resources to manage and store these collections. We are concerned that there may be negative implications for the care, management, storage and public access to these collections as a result of the termination of this agreement. There is potential for existing roles and responsibilities, in particular the leading role of Lincolnshire County Council, to be significantly changed, with access to appropriate expertise and resources reduced.

We understand from our meeting with your colleagues that the proposed change to existing arrangements is intended to be just a review of the existing arrangements in light of a changing external environment (including the potential future changes to the operation of the Usher Gallery) and that there is no intention to substantially alter the current agreement or the important role of Lincolnshire County Council, which is valued by both parties. We were pleased to receive assurances from Andy Gutherson that Lincolnshire County Council is open to the creation of new partnership agreements. We would also welcome further assurances *that Lincolnshire County Council will continue to take a leading role with the management and storage of these collections.* We would like to see the recommendations amended accordingly or to receive written assurances on this.

Recommendation 5: The recommendation approving Lincolnshire County Council to continue to explore with the City of Lincoln Council and third parties the potential for third party operation of the Usher Gallery in whole or in part as an art gallery with this being conditional on there being a sustainable business case for third party operation of the Usher Gallery building or part of it as an art gallery to the satisfaction of the Council not later than 31 October 2019; and

there being demonstrable progress towards the securing of all necessary funding and the obtaining of all necessary consents and the conclusion of any necessary contracts and other legal documentation to the satisfaction of the Council not later than 31 December 2019.

As stated previously, in our response to the formal consultation in April 2019, we welcome ambitions to further strengthen the artistic and cultural offer and increase audiences at The Collection and the Usher Gallery. We are concerned, however, that *your proposals to change the Usher Gallery space into a public space with a different function* for the Council (such as a registry office) may have negative implications, including reducing the already limited number of public art gallery spaces within the County.

We welcome the Council's willingness to explore alternative options for the operation of the Usher Gallery as a public art gallery. We are however concerned that the *timetable outlined is short and may be unrealistic* for options to be thoroughly explored. We understand from our meeting and further email contact with your colleagues that the proposed timetable does not preclude the possibility of change as long as sufficient evidence has been secured to satisfy reasonable expectation of success. We consider that exercising flexibility in relation to this timetable is essential to allow third parties sufficient time to achieve a successful outcome, including a sustainable future business model for the Usher Gallery. We are pleased to note Lincolnshire County Council's commitment to providing support for the development of a viable third-party option for the operation of the Usher Gallery but would welcome our concerns above being addressed in writing.

A further concern for us in relation to the Heritage Service proposals is the apparent absence of reference to the contemporary visual arts programme that we invest in through our NPO funding. We understand from our meeting with your colleagues that this investment is greatly valued and that this programme would continue to play a prominent part in the Heritage Service's future plans. We would welcome further clarity on the position of this programme in relation to overall plans.

As noted previously in our letter of 18 April 2019, re the Council's proposals to widen community ownership of museums and heritage sites within Lincolnshire and potentially transfer some assets to community ownership: we advise that you consult with East Midlands Museum Development on any changes to Accredited

Museums or any transfers of museum collections and, if relevant, with our colleagues in the Accreditation team.

We would expect any changes to Accredited Museums within Lincolnshire to strengthen the cultural offer, increase public engagement with collections, strengthen the ability of museums to meet our Accreditation standard and to be sustainable. We advise that you *continue* to consult with East Midlands Museum Development on any changes to Accredited Museums or any transfers of museum collections. If relevant, we would also encourage dialogue with our colleagues in the Accreditation team, as well as the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other appropriate stakeholders including ourselves. We are happy where appropriate to talk to relevant third parties about funding opportunities or to sign post to toolkits and resources. We think it is useful to be clear however that our role is a supporting and advisory one with the County Council leading on any activity.

We have appreciated the opportunity to discuss these proposals. We are requesting that the recommendations be amended to reflect the Council's intention to continue to work in partnership with the City on the management of the City's collections. In particular we would like to see a future collections agreement that entails an effective joint approach with a continuing lead role for Lincolnshire County Council.

We would also welcome confirmation of your intention to ensure a realistic timeline for the establishment of any third-party alternative to operate the Usher Gallery.

We would ask you to take these considerations into account and to continue to keep us informed of next steps. As ever we are open to discussions with councillors and officers on these matters.

Yours sincerely,

Rebecca Blackman

Director Engagement & Audiences and Midlands (Nottingham base)
Arts Council England