

AGENDA MANAGEMENT SHEET

Name of Committee

Cabinet

Date of Committee

2 November 2006

Report Title

**Chedham's Yard, Wellesbourne:
Investment and Regeneration**

Summary

Chedham's Yard, a historic forge and wheelwright's yard in Wellesbourne, won the national final of the BBC programme 'Restoration Village' in September. As a result, the project will secure £1 million investment from the Heritage Lottery Fund, subject to satisfying the necessary requirements.

The project is promoted by the local community, with support from (among others) staff from the Warwickshire Museum Service. This is a further example of the Museum Service's role in supporting and enabling engagement by local communities with their local heritage.

The report outlines the potential benefits for Wellesbourne, and more widely for Warwickshire, and sets out the approach officers propose to take to supporting the local community with their project.

For further information please contact:

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No.

Would the recommended decision be contrary to the Budget and Policy Framework?

Background papers

None

CONSULTATION ALREADY UNDERTAKEN:-

Details to be specified

Other Committees

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Local Member(s)

Not applicable

Other Elected Members

Councillor F McCarney – “I am happy to support the proposals.”

Councillor R Dodd

Councillor Mrs J Compton – “I approve the report and consider WCC should offer all assistance to the project.”

Cabinet Member

Councillor C Hayfield

Chief Executive

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Legal

Alison Hallworth - approved

Finance

Paul Walsh - approved

Other Chief Officers

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District Councils

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Health Authority

.....

Police

.....

Other Bodies/Individuals

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FINAL DECISION YES

SUGGESTED NEXT STEPS:

Details to be specified

Further consideration by this Committee

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To Council

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To Cabinet

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To an O & S Committee

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To an Area Committee

.....

Further Consultation

.....

Agenda No

Cabinet - 2 November 2006

Chedham's Yard, Wellesbourne: Investment and Regeneration

Report of the Strategic Director, Adult, Health & Community Services

Recommendation

Cabinet is asked to endorse the approach proposed.

1 Chedham's Yard

Chedham's Yard is the workshop of a professional wheelwright and blacksmith, Bill Chedham, who laid down his tools in the 1960s, since when the site has remained largely untouched, leaving behind a perfectly preserved portrait of his working life and conditions. The yard was in the hands of the same family for over 100 years; in 1992 it was bought by Wellesbourne Parish Council to preserve it.

While the site is not currently listed, English Heritage says: 'Although the building is conventional and unassuming in its construction and form, it is this quality that makes it archetypal of workshop provision in rural industries in the 19th century.'

Wellesbourne Parish Council's vision for the sustainable future of the site contains the following deliverables:

- To preserve as far as practicable, the existing atmosphere of the Yard.
- To maintain the Yard within the context of Wellesbourne and its environs.
- To create a living, working environment.
- To enable members of the wider community access to understand and enjoy the work of an historical craft.
- To include the Yard in the broader tourist aspect of Wellesbourne, which would require development of walking routes and significant promotion of the existing areas of interest within the village and its surrounds in addition to work on the Yard itself.

The current proposals are to develop the site into an Active Heritage centre 'telling the story of how the forge and the wheelwright played a central part in the village, bringing to life the skills and stories of the generations that worked in the buildings and the yard in a way that will engage and educate the visitor. The site will also provide the home for a number of small businesses with a strong heritage, educational and interpretive element. The future visitors to Chedham's Yard will be a combination of locals learning about their own history, school visits, guided tours by groups and general tourists from outside of the area attracted to this unique venue. The renovated Chedham's Yard provides public access to the site, to the collections, to the history of the site and enable visitors to enjoy the work of an historical craft.'

2 What Winning Means

Winning 'Restoration' is a tremendous triumph and a big boost to local morale and enthusiasm, but in many ways it is the beginning rather than the end of the process. One million pounds has been pledged, but there is a lot of work needed to unlock it – detailed plans and proposals to satisfy the stringent requirements of the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) will be needed. Provided that the project can satisfy these requirements, with which HLF will provide some support, the sum of £1 million will be forthcoming to implement their proposals - effectively this is a fast track application to the lottery, with success ensured if all criteria are properly met (ie bypassing the competitive bidding element). The process is nonetheless likely to take 12-24 months, and maybe longer to implement fully. It is likely that the lead will be taken by a (to be formed) Building Preservation Trust, supported by the Friends organisation.

3 The Role of WCC So Far

The Parish Council first approached the Warwickshire Museum Service in 2003 for advice on how to secure the future of Chedham's Yard. We have provided advice and guidance on various issues including conservation plan and feasibility studies, recording and safeguarding of the artefacts and historic buildings, funding opportunities, formation of Friends Group, educational possibilities, and developing productive media contacts etc. This work forms part of our wider role in supporting and enabling communities to engage with their own heritage.

The Tourism team in Economy & Environment Directorate have secured the interest of Advantage West Midlands as a potential additional funder for the project. They have also been active in promoting the site and the open days to visitors on the EnjoyWarwickshire.com website.

4 Supporting Community Heritage across Warwickshire

The approach taken to Chedham's Yard is a good example of the broader way in which the Warwickshire Museum Service has been working since the Best Value Review of the Museum Strategy was undertaken in 2002. One outcome was the development of a service more county-wide in coverage, through a network of partnerships with locally based bodies. As a result, a number of initiatives have been launched to encourage and assist communities to engage with, and celebrate, their own heritage.

With funding through a regional programme financed by the Department of Culture Media and Sport under the banner 'Renaissance in the Regions', we have been able to appoint a part-time Community Museums Officer (Glynis Powell) who works with smaller independent and voluntary museums and heritage groups across the county. This post actively reaches a range of both professional and voluntary museums and heritage groups across the county with a circulation network of over 40 groups. Glynis offers both direct long-term support to groups, as in the case of Wellesbourne, and provides broader signposting and brokering in organisational, training, marketing and museum aspects; the programme also provides a small grants programme.

The range of activities and visitors involved in projects of the network means that this post is well placed to promote and broker relationships with other County services including, for example libraries, through social service support to community transport and special education.

While the level of support naturally varies and attempts to respond to the professional and social need of the client, Glynis intends Chedhams Yard to remain a priority in her part-time workload in order to ensure the continuing success of the project.

A parallel initiative is 'Extracting Warwickshire's Past: Neighbourhood Outreach Strategy', a project funded by the Aggregates Levy Sustainability Fund, via English Heritage. The funding began in January 2006 and will continue until the end of February 2007. It has been designed to promote public understanding and appreciation of the archaeology and heritage within areas affected by aggregate extraction. A series of outreach pilot projects have been delivered and received favourably by their target audience. By the end of the project a strategy document will be prepared which will outline the results of our work. This will subsequently be used to help inform our Neighbourhood priorities over the next three years. The project aims to encourage local groups and individuals, and to help them develop the skills, to investigate and learn about their local heritage – and then to become active guardians of it.

In partnership with the Warwickshire Geological Conservation Group, Warwickshire Museum's Keeper of Geology is currently contributing to a forthcoming book celebrating Warwickshire's landscapes and rich geological heritage. Working with the same group, the Keeper of Geology is providing expertise for an ALSF-funded scheme in the east of the county, raising public awareness of Ice Age history, environments and ancient climate change.

On the Natural History side, the Local Biodiversity Action Plan process, the RINGs newsletter and the Big Tree Hunt of Warwickshire, Coventry & Solihull all help to promote the natural heritage to local groups and communities and encourage direct participation.

5 Further Opportunities and Links with Education and Craft Skills

Success on 'Restoration' is a good springboard. Advantage West Midlands have already expressed a provisional interest in becoming involved as this project should have economic benefits for both developing the area's tourism product and developing a skills base in traditional crafts.

Part of the vision for Chedhams is for the promotion of heritage craft skills. The tools and paraphernalia left behind, together with the memories of Bill Chedham himself, provide an opportunity to record and preserve working techniques of rural crafts which might otherwise be lost forever. The original leather bellows and the early horizontal sawing bench are potentially of national significance as examples of 19th century technology.

These skills were vital to the community – this was the craftsman who kept the horses and wagons of the local farmers and gentry in working order. It is hoped that, when restored, the site will feature a working blacksmith, and provide facilities for school visits as well as links with the nearby agricultural college at Moreton Morrell, part of Warwickshire College. Blacksmiths from Moreton Morrell are already involved in the project.

6 Wider Tourism, Heritage and Economic Opportunities

The investment in Chedham's will bring benefits not just to this project. Although the site is not suitable for a major tourist attraction, Chedham's will be an important asset to the locality. Wellesbourne Watermill is on the outskirts of the village and is a complementary attraction. Consideration should be given to joint ticketing arrangements. Although the county has a number of craft centres Chedham's will be unique in having a combination of rural skills being demonstrated. The publicity from "Restoration" is of huge benefit as it has been free and national. Other such attractions would be unlikely to be able to afford similar coverage. This should boost visitor numbers at the outset. It will however, be important to maintain that interest over the longer term.

It is planned that the site will also provide the home for a number of small businesses linked to heritage and education, which will be interwoven into the interpretation of the historical base of the centre. The businesses will focus on the retail of products made on site by the traditional methods of the wheelwright and blacksmith and by other local producers of crafts and trades.

Further benefits should flow from the success of Chedham's – for local businesses, in attracting tourists, and through the expertise which will be shared through the Warwickshire Museums and Heritage Network. Staff will be facilitating links with other WCC and non-WCC contacts.

7 Conclusion

It is proposed that staff of Warwickshire Museum Service, together with colleagues from Tourism and Economic Development (EED) and elsewhere in the County Council as appropriate, will

- continue to provide support and advice to the Friends of Chedham's Yard, whilst ensuring that the project remains community-led.
- assist and facilitate forging of links with other potential partners such as Advantage West Midlands.
- actively encourage sharing of experience gained with other community-based heritage groups through the Museums and Heritage Network and other means.
- seek to maximise the tourism benefit for the County by linking this with the wider visitor offer whilst considering the impacts on the community of Wellesbourne.

GRAEME BETTS
Strategic Director, Adult, Health & Community Services

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10 October 2006