

MEDIA RELEASE

BRISTOL MUSEUM CUTS WILL DO MASSIVE DAMAGE TO CITY, SAYS CHARITY

Council plans to cut museum budgets in the coming years are a “false economy” which will damage Bristol’s post-pandemic recovery, says an independent charity.

Council members vote on Tuesday, 15th February on proposed budget cuts that include a swingeing £436,000 cut for the Museums & Archives Service, which represents more than 10 per cent of the funding for Bristol’s museums, galleries and archives.

While the Council claims there will be “no impact on front line services” the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives (FBMGA) says the cuts would dramatically reduce the museums & archives’ ability to function.

The Friends Group says of the city’s Museum services:

- They are important for the city's mental health and wellbeing, not only culturally, but simply as safe spaces for people concerned about venturing out post-Covid.
- Damage to museums is damage to the education of local children at a time when a balanced and informed knowledge of Bristol's past is more important than ever.
- At a time when families across the city are facing serious financial stress, the city’s museums offer family-friendly outings free of charge.

Chair of the independent charity group, Sue Thurlow, said: “The cuts will inevitably reduce the ability of the museums to put on big and successful exhibitions which bring visitors from the local area and beyond, such as the current Grayson Perry’s Art Club and the annual Wildlife Photographer of the Year.

“The museums and galleries are vital to Bristol's post-pandemic recovery, bringing people back into the city and attracting high-spending visitors to Bristol.

“We fully understand the need to make budget savings at a time when many of our citizens are facing real financial hardship, and that councillors are facing really difficult choices in allocating scarce resources, but cuts to museums and galleries are a false economy which will affect the range and quality of services they can offer.

“The Council must reconsider these planned cuts because the damage caused to the museums and archives will be felt across the city and beyond for years to come.”

ENDS

9th February 2022

Issued by the Friends of Bristol Museums, Galleries and Archives by Empica. For further information contact Neil Fraser on 01275 394400 or 07910 096343.

NOTES TO EDITORS

BRISTOL'S MUSEUMS

The museums and archives operate across seven visitor sites, all of which have no general admission fee.

- The Edwardian Bristol Museum & Art Gallery has galleries over three floors with a diverse range of objects, from Jurassic marine reptiles to magnificent art.
- M Shed is located on Bristol's historic dockside. It retains the character of its original use as a 1950s transit shed, while telling Bristol's long and varied history through the objects and people who shaped the city.
- Blaise Museum is housed in an 18th century mansion built for Bristol merchant and banker John Harford. The dairy and conservatory were designed by John Nash, and today, highlights include the picture room and the costume collection.
- The Red Lodge Museum, built in 1580 as a lodge for the Great House that once stood on the site of the present Bristol Beacon (previously Colston Hall), is furnished in Elizabethan, Stuart and Georgian styles. Interesting features include the Great Oak Room, with its original Elizabethan plasterwork ceiling and wall panelling, and the Elizabethan-style knot garden.
- The Georgian House Museum, built in 1790 for wealthy slave owner and sugar merchant John Pinney, and for a time home to the enslaved African Pero, is displayed as it might have looked in the 18th century to give visitors an insight into life above and below stairs.
- Bristol Archives, established in 1924, looks after the city's historic archives, such as those relating to its churches, families such as the Smyth's of Ashton Court, and former major employers J S Fry & Sons among others. Visitors can access over 800 years of Bristol history and enjoy regular exhibitions, workshops, and screenings from the Film Archive.
- Kings Weston Roman Villa was discovered during construction of the Lawrence Weston housing estate and is a late 3rd century villa, complete with bath suite, mosaic floors and Roman central heating.

MUSEUM ACHIEVEMENTS

Bristol's M Shed museum has played a leading role in the History Commission's work on the Colston Statue. They retrieved it, conserved it, designed, built, housed and staffed the temporary display and led on the consultation, which with over 14,000 responses was the most successful in the City's history.

- Recent years have seen hugely successful exhibitions of national importance, such as *Pliosaurus: Face to Face With a Jurassic Beast*; *Masters of Japanese Prints*; *Do You Believe in Magic? Death, the Human Experience*, *Leonardo da Vinci: A Life in Drawing*, and *Chocolate*.
- The museum and archives look after more than two million objects and pieces of archive material, including over 1,300 paintings, 200 sculptures, 500,000 photos 2,000 archive films and over 1 million geology and biology specimens collected since the late 18th century. Records in the Archives date back to 12th century.
- In addition to the objects and archive records stored inside the buildings the service IS responsible for the external working exhibits at M Shed – 2 steam railway

locomotives (plus wagons), three boats, a steam crane and four electric cranes (which are the only working heritage dockside cranes in the UK - nowhere else can the public visit the cabs of cranes like these and take part in their operation)

- In 2018/19 (pre-pandemic) the museums hosted almost 50,000 student and pupil visits and more than 400 community events were organised across the sites. Bristol Museum & Art Gallery alone welcomed 450,000 visitors, 30 per cent from outside the city.
- The museums host Art Shed, a fortnightly arts and health project that provides workshops for people experiencing anxiety and depression. Participants enjoy being creative with a variety of art forms and museum collections and evaluation of participants show a marked decrease in feelings of negativity and an overall increase in well-being.
- The museum reaches out to under-represented groups. For example, to celebrate the 50th anniversary of the St Paul's Carnival they worked with the community to create a commemorative exhibition at M Shed.

THE FRIENDS OF BRISTOL MUSEUMS, GALLERIES AND ARCHIVES (FBMGA)

FBMGA (www.friendsofbmga.org.uk) is a charity formed from two older organisations, the Friends of Bristol Art Gallery, founded in 1947, and Bristol Magpies, founded in 1977.

FBMGA is independent of the museums and the Council and its aim, as defined in its constitution is: "The education of the public by promoting, supporting, assisting and improving Bristol Museums, Galleries & Archives through the activity of a group of supporters."

Over the years the charity has raised more than £2 million to help fund acquisitions, conservation and display, education and interpretation in Bristol's museums, galleries and archives.

BRISTOL CITY COUNCIL PROPOSED BUDGET CUTS

Papers for Full Council on February 15:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=142&MId=8802&Ver=4> .

The 3rd item down is Agenda Reports Pack:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/mgChooseDocPack.aspx?ID=8802> .

Within that is Public Reports Pack:

<https://democracy.bristol.gov.uk/documents/g8802/Public%20reports%20pack%2015th-Feb-2022%2014.00%20Full%20Council.pdf?T=10> .

On page 244 are the proposals for "GR028: Review of the Museums and Archive Service in order to deliver the Corporate Strategy and to deliver savings." That shows annual savings in 2023-4 of £83k, and further annual savings in 2024-5 of £353k, a total of £436k.

The "10% cut" claim is based on an assumed annual budget of approximately £3.5m.