

Executive Summary

What We're Going to Do

We will create two new history centres with activities, events and outreach that will engage with 65,000 people over four years.

We are going to make the heritage of our historic county accessible and relevant to the lives of the many communities we serve. We see a transformational role for this project - as have the people we have spoken with. Our 'Big Four' projects will enable us to have significant social impacts. Working with Wild Rumpus we can set up environmental projects which build on local historic biodiversity through the creative re-imaginings of folk customs. Partnering with CHAWREC we can enable new generations of migrants and refugees to record and share their stories with a wider audience. Alongside LUNG theatre we can support women who have lived through mental health crises find recognition and voice from the records of institutionalised women. With Mako Create we can help young people develop new skills while generating new records of our county's changing industrial and social history.

Our events programme will be shaped by advisory groups and delivered in conjunction with local partners. It will draw on local researchers and practitioners and offer them the opportunity to share their knowledge and skillsets with a wider community, drawing further people towards our service and our collections. Digital outreach will facilitate a wider level of engagement with more diverse audiences than previously possible, while creative practitioners will help us to make sure that engaging with archives is not seen as the preserve of a select few. Plays about anarchic local music scenes; family-friendly cook-alongs drawing on historic recipes; pop-ups in pubs where people can find out whether their grandparents were once known as troublemakers; these are all important ways of connecting people with archives by meeting them where they are, and not expecting their first engagement with us to be a visit to the searchroom. We will expand our learning activities to ensure that they are as accessible as possible for different learning styles and levels, and for different types of school. A blend of loan packs, digital resources and sessions, and on-site visits will enable us to cater for schools whether they are in isolated rural locations or on our doorstep. Building on best practice and working in conjunction with experienced consultants and educators will allow us to ensure these materials are suitable for SEND students, enabling greater access and choice for more pupils and educators.

Why we are doing it

At the beginning of our development phase we confirmed the needs and opportunities this project addresses:

- the current archives building is not fit for purpose in terms of access and storage
- challenges with the current digital offer and in terms of digital preservation
- lack of awareness and understanding of archives and the service in Cheshire
- current audiences and collections are not representative of Cheshire
- travel across Cheshire is perceived as a barrier to many
- there is a strong interest in family and local history and in using archives for learning
- there is a strong interest in digital and interactive content
- there is the potential to work collaboratively with partners
- Covid-19 has presented unique challenges to residents and communities
- the Councils have declared Climate Emergencies

What we have learnt

We have delivered 13 pilot activities and met with 659 people through consultation events and activities.

Throughout the development phase we have met a wide range of groups, individuals, and organisations representing a broad cross-section of Cheshire's many communities. Sometimes these encounters were through a focus group, or a one-on-one meeting. Sometimes it took place in a pilot event- a pop-up at a pub or a historic cook-a-long. We've met artists, retired people, school students, refugees, activists, administrators, educators, and shoppers.

While there were many different ideas and interests shared with us, we found many things in common- a real passion for local histories and personal connections to the area, a curiosity about our collections and the work that we do, and an appetite to find out more in new and creative ways. What's more, our consultations and pilot events have shown that transformative and long-lasting legacies can be created through this project.

Through focus groups we found out that teachers find our collections engaging and visually exciting, and can be easily made valuable to their students. We discovered that CHAWREC wants to use our documents to help refugees not only learn a new language, but develop a connection to their new homes. We learned that our history centres can be valuable, accessible sites for local disabled communities to express and discover their own histories. We found out that our performance spaces could be transformative spaces for young people to explore their own connections to individuals of bygone generations. We found people looking for an understanding of the present through learning more about those who have experienced and overcome difficulties before them.

What will it cost?

Five new staff roles: £838,498

Training for staff and volunteers £6,500

Travel and expenses for staff and volunteers £10,000

Events and activities costs £94,120

Workshops and art installation at the new history centres £170,000

What will this achieve?

230 volunteering opportunities

Greater number and wider range of people engage with the service - 65,000 people use, visit or participate at the new history centres

People learn something through the archives and enjoy themselves

Increased awareness and changed perceptions to archives/local history by participants and Councils

Increased sense of belonging and increased health & wellbeing of participants and reduced isolation

Staff, volunteers, and partners develop and exchange skills

Heritage better identified and in better condition. The archives are safeguarded & better explained

New building achieves low carbon impact