

## INFORMATION SHEET

### Chippenham Town Council

<https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/chippenham-museum> (History Museum)

Melissa Barnett – Head of Museum and Heritage (Museum) -

[mbarnett@chippenham.gov.uk](mailto:mbarnett@chippenham.gov.uk)

### CHIPPENHAM MUSEUM (FORMERLY CHIPPENHAM MUSEUM & HERITAGE CENTRE)

#### • The story of how it came about.

Timeline from inception to physical delivery

The new Chippenham Museum & Heritage Centre opened its doors to the public for the first time on 23 March 2000

The opening, in the former Magistrates building in the town's Market Place, was the culmination of nearly a decade of hard work and effort led by Chippenham Town Council and all involved.

The idea of a museum was first put forward in the Victorian era, but it wasn't until 1963 that a group of local historians and volunteers, supported by the then Borough Council, moved into the medieval Yelde Hall and launched an appeal for items. There were soon over 5000 exhibits and issues with preservation, storage, and display.

Chippenham Town Council took over responsibility as the museum authority for running the museum in 1986 with the support of volunteers and an honorary curator.

The Town Council is constituted under the Local Government Act 1972 as enacted by the North Wiltshire (Parishes) Order 1984. The provision and running of a museum/heritage centre is in keeping with the 1972 Act and in particular sections 144 and 145.

So successful was this museum that new larger premises had to be found. The Town Council with the assistance of the Heritage Lottery Fund, Wiltshire Council, North Wiltshire District Council, charities, and donations, funded its relocation to two Georgian Grade II listed town houses in the Market Place. These were said to have been built on the site of King Alfred's hunting lodge. Preservation of these buildings and also the Grade I listed Yelde Hall were part of the planning.

Timeline of Museum Provision in Chippenham

- 1865: Exhibitions on the history of the town displayed in the New Town Hall.
- 1951: Temporary Festival museum opened in the Yelde Hall to celebrate the Festival of Britain.
- 1963: The Yelde Hall Museum opened in the Old Town Hall. This was established and managed by Chippenham Borough Council with an Honorary Curator.

- 1974: Local Authority reorganisation meant the museum buildings and collection became the property of North Wiltshire District Council.
- 1984: Chippenham Town Council was established and took over responsibility as the museum authority for running the museum.
- 1998: Chippenham Town Council purchased 9-11 Market Place from Wiltshire County Council and commenced the first phase of museum development.
- 2000: The new Chippenham Museum and Heritage Centre opened its doors to the public at 10 Market Place and employed a full time Curator.
- 2003: The first-floor public galleries, education wing and attic storage was opened to the public.
- 2006: The Yelde Hall became the town's Tourist Information Centre. The old council chamber and lock up within the building was fitted out as an historic chamber with mannequins & audio.
- 2012: April - The TIC moved to new premises and The Yelde Hall was returned to the museum service.
- 2018: New temporary exhibition gallery and improved frontage and shop

- **Who led the creation of the venue?**

The museum project is a Chippenham Town Council initiative and was created with the support of the community, Wiltshire Council, and local charities.

How was the focus of what the venue delivers determined?

The town council involved many professional groups, consultants, and community groups in the initial planning process. A project management team, which included museum and heritage professionals from Wiltshire Council & the then SW Area Museums Council, informed a Council led working party which reported to the Strategy and Resources Committee of Chippenham Town Council. All were informed by visitor surveys and statistics and by the needs of the collection itself.

Start-up funding – s106 / fundraised / grants, etc? Funding

In 1998 Chippenham town Council applied to the Heritage Lottery Fund for £421k for a project costing £921k. Partnership funding was provided by the then North Wiltshire District Council, Wiltshire County Council and English Heritage charitable trusts and commercial sponsorship.

Further Heritage Lottery funding in 2000 of £250k (with partners providing 37.5% of project costs) allowed the museum to extend onto the first floor as well as creating storage for the museum's growing collection. Research facilities and an education service for local schools were also set up with funding from the Town Council, the Chippenham Borough Lands Charity, and the Rotary Club. Professional staffing was for the first time provided with the provision of a Curator post and a 3-year contract for an Education Officer funded by Chippenham Borough Land Charity. (This later became a permanent position funded by

CTC). By 2010 as the service developed an Assistant Curator and Admin Officer post were added.

In 2018 the addition of a gallery space, funded by Arts Council England, allowed bigger, better temporary exhibitions and the launch of a new annual project ARTSPACE Chippenham Museum with the aim of showcasing the best of local and contemporary art. Improved access and a museum shop was also developed.

A complete staff reorganisation was initiated in 2018 (details below)

### • **About the venue itself**

*Capabilities / diversity of use / limitations / uniqueness / location within the town*

Statement of purpose

The Museum and Heritage Centre aims to preserve, interpret, and enhance geological and environmental specimens, archaeological artefacts, and items of social and historical significance from Chippenham and its immediate area for the inspiration, learning and enjoyment of all.

There:

- are 35,000 catalogued objects
- are 8 galleries on 2 floors which show the museum's permanent collection
- is a programme of exhibitions (permanent, temporary, and touring), lectures, tours, walks, workshops, events, and access to reserved collection
- an education and outreach service for the benefit of the Chippenham community and the outlying areas.
- is a museum shop which is now also online?
- is a research and enquiry service
- are rooms that can be hired.
- an active and vibrant social media presence.

Open 7 days a week / or not

The Museum is open 6 days a week (closed Sunday) from 10.00am – 4.00pm. It is open Bank Holidays. It is available to hire during the evening or is open out of hours for special events and activities. Entry is free.

Usage / audience or visitor numbers – how do people travel / reach of venue

There are 30k users of the service annually. The visitors are mainly local but there are a good number of tourists and visitors to the town recorded. The museum is centred in a good location in the centre of town in an area that may be developed as a heritage quarter. It is near to the bus station and the railway station is a 10-minute walk away. There is limited free parking in the town and the town is not yet coach friendly.

- **What's great about it / not so great – would avoid if doing it again.**

Great!

The museum offers free entry and educational support to schools in the town. It is run and supported by Chippenham Town Council and by 70 volunteers and 100 Friends of the museum. In January 2020, the museum was successful in renewing its accredited status under the Arts Council England's administered scheme, a hall mark in recognition of the museum's high professional standards and the work of its hardworking museum staff and volunteers.

Not so great!

Marketing and promotion of the town and museum in a joined-up way has always been an issue and this does affect the number of visitors and interest in what we can offer.

Space. There are many more stories that can be told, and a number of our facilities are now in need of updating and improvement.

Would avoid if doing again.

The museum has developed in a measured way over the years using grants and sponsorship and is well funded by the Town Council. There is little that I would change as there has been continuous and improved development- when time and budget has allowed- by a very supportive governance. • Governance of the venue (business model/ management)

Owner of venue – outright ownership / peppercorn lease / etc.?

The building is owned by Chippenham Town Council

Community owned / Council owned / stakeholder representation, etc?

Entirely Council owned

How are decisions made – what freedoms or not, are there?

The Head of Museums & Heritage reports directly to the Director of Community Services and through to the Arts, Culture and Leisure (ACL) Committee.

All museum services are provided to an agreed Service Delivery Plan and Corporate Plan. Day to day decisions is made by the Head of Heritage and Museums Service or in discussion with the Director of Community Services.

- The corporate priorities are listed below:

Corporate Priority 1 – Provide facilities and services which support and develop a well-connected town, which promotes health and well-being.

Corporate Priority 2 – An active role in the future development of Chippenham through collaboration with partners and stakeholders.

Corporate Priority 4 – To promote Chippenham as a destination Market Town based on our rich heritage, history, and culture.

Corporate Priority 5 – Effective and efficient use of resources.

- Annual running practices and costs

The budget is set as part of the Council's budget setting process. The Museum service has a budget of £239,000 for staffing and general running costs. There are capital funds for unplanned maintenance.

There is other centrally provided support from CTC such as training costs and marketing that are not shown in the museum budget.

Support is also provided by the Arts Council England SW Museum Development Programme, which was launched in 2012. This facilitates partnerships beyond Wiltshire and provides a cost-effective mechanism for keeping in touch with national and regional museums through a quarterly forum. It also provides specialist advice and training which is usually free.

The museum subscribes to the Wiltshire Conservation & Museums Advisory Service, which is based at the Wiltshire and Swindon History Centre (also located in Chippenham). This provides access to advice from conservation professionals, including regular reviews of the collection, analysis of environmental conditions (vital for long term preservation), as well as discounts on materials and conservation work. Other specialist collections work is sourced as necessary.

Staffing levels – employed staff / volunteers – what works best/issues.

Grade Head of Heritage and Museum Services 31-34 Collections & Exhibitions Officer 24-28 Engagement Officer 19-22 Visitor Services Officer 19-22 Museum Assistant – entry level 4-6 Cleaner 2

There are 70 volunteers and 100 Friends of the Museum

- Building repairs / maintenance / environmental credentials

The Museum is Grade II listed. Capital repairs are sorted centrally. General maintenance costs budgeted annually. The museum has an environmental policy and has recently taken part in an energy survey,

- Marketing / promotions needed.

Website, leaflets, branding are all provided centrally by CTC. Day to day media and website updates from service. Membership of tourism groups very important

- Other

*Your unique experience*

There are many legal implications to managing and running a museum and caring for the collections. It is very important to set up a museum following the correct advice and after a lot of thought. There are museum development officers in most areas, and these can be accessed via the County Councils. There are also county museum groups for support and joint projects.

There are many different types of museums and as many governing bodies. Town Council run museums are not that common however in my experience they are often the best facilitators as they know what their town and area need and are in a position to make things work!

- **What of the future – expansion / reduction / change?**

Hopefully the future will allow more of our collections to be on show with better and improved facilities for our visitors together with better planned marketing and promotion for the service as part of the town's offer.