

PLYMOUTH CITY COUNCIL

Subject: Plymouth History Centre
Committee: Cabinet
Date: 3 September 2013
Cabinet Member: Councillor Peter Smith
CMT Member: Anthony Payne (Director for Place)
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Ref: 01224-10
Key Decision: Yes
Part: I

Purpose of the report:

The development of a 'History Centre' project is one of Plymouth City Council's Pledges. We want to translate this into a major cultural statement and a complete step change for the Plymouth cultural sector. This report initiates the project and seeks to empower officers to progress the vision and undertake a major Heritage Lottery Fund application.

Therefore, the purpose of this report is to seek:

- Commitment to the concept of a major cultural facility on North Hill / Tavistock Place.
 - Approval for officers to submit a stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) for this project for up to £12.5m to enable this concept to be developed fully.
 - Commitment, in the form of £3.5m match funding from the Investment Fund, (subject to an HLF stage 2 bid and subsequent Cabinet report in 2014) to support the HLF application.
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The Brilliant Co-operative Council Corporate Plan 2013/14 -2016/17:

PIONEERING PLYMOUTH

The project will transform the management and provision of an outstanding arts and heritage offer for residents and visitors alike. The proposals for the building, the public realm and the attraction's interior will aim to achieve an extremely high quality. The proposals will be of national significance, and this is reflected in the bid to the National Lottery major national programme, supported by the National Archives.

GROWING PLYMOUTH

The proposals are aimed at stimulating and meeting the demand for a growing visitor economy in Plymouth. The proposals are targeting a growth in the visitor numbers from 80,000-100,000 per year to 200,000-250,000 per year. The proposals are targeting an improved education offer for all schools in the city and will contribute to the city's reputation as a city worth investing in.

CARING PLYMOUTH

This project will create a safe place for children, young people and adults. The proposals will address existing shortcomings that are a barrier for some groups from entering a number of buildings that currently house the collections. For the first time there will be non-discriminatory access to Plymouth's heritage.

CONFIDENT PLYMOUTH

We will create a new and brilliant service that will be a regional showcase for the delivery of cultural services, and in doing so, give confidence to external agencies such as the Arts Council and The National Archives. It will act as a positive showcase of the Plymouth brand in the public realm. The proposals will be carefully crafted to appeal to a global market as well as a personal experience for local visitors.

Implications for Medium Term Financial Plan and Resource Implications: Including finance, human, IT and land:

Capital

The Project would be expected to be delivered during the 2015/16 and 2016/17 year with an expected total capital investment of £20.5m.

The Council will bid into the Heritage Lottery's national programme that considers bids of in excess of £5m, and initial discussions with the regional director of the HLF have indicated that a sum of £10-13m is not unrealistic. For this to be achieved however there needs to be a significant demonstration that the council is backing the proposals with match funding appropriate to the scale and ambition of the project. Looking at successful Lottery proposals over the past few years it is clear that a match commitment of between 30-40% is necessary. Initial scoping of the project suggests that it may be achievable around £20.5m which suggests that a cash match commitment of £4.5m would be needed.

There is a current commitment of £2m in the council's capital programme of which £1.5m will be eligible as match funding. Funding opportunities (at maximum) from the Arts Council, CLORE Foundation and the Wolfson Fund may lead to grants of £1m each, giving a total match of £4.5m.

This paper asks Cabinet to consider making a further commitment of £3.5m match funding from the council's Investment Fund to support a new History centre, making a total of £8m or a minimum of a third of the total capital cost of the proposals. This would demonstrate a significant and similar match to other national successful proposals.

It should be understood that there is limited financial impact for the council to make a stage 1 application to the Heritage Lottery Fund. The use of the Council's Investment Fund is a theoretical commitment that demonstrates the applicant's commitments to the scale of the ambition. A successful stage 1 bid will release development funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund to develop the detailed stage 2 bid. Draw down on capital match funding would only be realised after completing the detailed stage 2 application and once the project commences its delivery phase. This is estimated to be from May 2015.

Revenue

Whilst the proposals represent a significant growth in visitor numbers and the quality of their experience, the plans will be carefully crafted to make sizable efficiencies on the current service, particularly on the back of house. The current service is located in ten buildings across the city, and this proposal will consolidate the existing staffing structure into one Arts & Heritage service in one location. In addition the proposals are being crafted to target the commercial opportunities of the visitor economy, and the following revenue generation is being modelled.

- Increased visitor spend on merchandise and cafe
- Hire of premises for functions
- Rental income from partner organisations that will use dedicated space within the building
- Loan of touring Plymouth unique exhibitions
- Maximising income potential from collections
- Sponsorship

The full potential of the income generation opportunities will be scoped throughout the development phase but it is anticipated that the revenue income and expenditure will break even and there will not be a pressure on PCC. Should the project be aborted for any reason, the development costs to support this project would become a revenue pressure. The scale of this pressure is estimated between £400,000 and £500,000.

Other Implications: e.g. Child Poverty, Community Safety, Health and Safety and Risk Management:

The council strategic risk register contains an important reputational risk which was flagged as critical this time last year. The reduction of this risk has only been achieved by the diligent execution of the proposals that are set out in this report. In July the National Archives visited Plymouth to assess the council's progress and they judged the work done to present this proposal as excellent. On this basis they have provided more time to enable the council to pursue these proposals. However they made it clear that this was as long as the council continued to make progress in the current direction.

The proposals to expand the museum and art galleries into a major visitor attraction is connected into the council's aspiration to relocate the Central Library to the city centre and in the longer term its colocation with the First Stop. This facility is likely to be about the size of two shop units and the financial analysis of the project proposal takes this into account. It should be understood therefore that the success of this bid also puts the council a step closer to the delivery of its strategic customer focus agenda.

Equality and Diversity:

An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has been considered but the conclusion is that it is unnecessary at this stage. However, as part of the development phase of the project (i.e. after the HLF stage 1 approval) an EIA will be undertaken to ensure that the building does not disadvantage any sector of the community and to make suggestions as to how the associated community outreach work can be aligned to support those who are often economically marginalized.

Recommendations and Reasons for recommended action:

It is recommended that Cabinet, having considered the benefits set out in this report:

- approve the proposals for a major cultural facility in the cultural quarter in North Hill and Tavistock Place and authorise officers to submit a Heritage Lottery bid application in November 2013 for this project for up to £12.5m;
- approve the allocation of up to £3.5m of the Investment Fund to provide match funding for the grant application, subject to an HLF stage 2 bid and subsequent Cabinet report in 2014.

Accepting these recommendations will offer the security that the Heritage Lottery Fund will demand in demonstrating the council's commitment to match funding and will allow officers to undertake the necessary consultation to establish public support for the proposals.

Alternative options considered and rejected:

There have been over the years many options considered, including proposals dating back to 1998 when the council was first established. Various site options and configurations including a 'do nothing' option have been considered. Most recently there have been a series of studies that have looked at proposals on up to 10 different sites across the city. In addition to this further options appraisals have been undertaken on different proposals around the preferred site which has led to the selection of the current proposal. The current option selected not only avoids any reputational and financial risk of letting the collections degenerate further, but also provides significant opportunities in terms of leveraging in considerable grant funding.

Published work / information:

[Plymouth Visitor Plan](#)

[Plymouth Economic Strategy](#)

[Plymouth Plan for Jobs](#)

[Investment fund cabinet paper \(February 2013\)](#)

[City of Culture bid proposals](#)

Background paper:

Title	Part I	Part II	Exemption Paragraph Number						
			1	2	3	4	5	6	7
None									

Sign off:

Fin	PlaceF EDCI 314 007	Leg	18166 /ALT	Mon Off	1820 4/D VS	HR		Assets		IT		Strat Proc	
Originating SMT Member David Draffan													
Has the Cabinet Member(s) agreed the content of the report? Yes													

1.0 PROJECT OVERVIEW

This project is about the entire transformation of the Arts and Heritage Service, incorporating a major refurbishment and refit of the existing City Museum and Library buildings to provide an entirely new and exciting visitor experience.

The project will result in the following:

- A complete transformation of the way heritage is managed and accessed in the city
- A building 3 times the size of the existing museum with increased public space from 64% to 86%
- 100% of heritage assets available to access
- Support from The Heritage Lottery Fund and The National Archives resulting in the reputation of the council being protected with heritage assets and resources kept in the city
- A major cultural catalyst for the city's visitor economy
- 200% increase in visitors to the existing museum
- 500+ new jobs
- External funding brought in of at least £15.5 million
- Significantly increased commercial income – more than four times its current baseline on current estimates
- Half of the budget being spent on the visitor experience.

2.0 PROJECT DRIVERS

2.1 The desire to make Plymouth a more attractive cultural destination

The Visitor Plan has identified that Plymouth, at present, does not offer a critical mass of cultural sites and experiences to make it a thriving tourist destination. In addition, at present, only 5% of the fascinating collections are currently on display. Therefore, there is a huge amount of untapped resource that can be reconfigured and re-presented within a new, exciting and vibrant facility that can capture the imagination and curiosity of locals and tourists alike. Our ambition is to provide access to collections in unprecedented ways and this, added to the draw of other improved city cultural sites, such as the Theatre Royal and National Marine Aquarium, will make Plymouth a far more attractive prospect for visitors

2.2 The protection of some of the city's most at risk and valuable heritage assets

Plymouth City Council owns and manages several important collections across the city in sub-standard buildings and it has been an aspiration to resolve this and improve public access to historic records and artefacts for some time. Therefore, the project involves building new purpose-built storage facilities that are secure and environmentally controlled to properly protect the heritage. There would be significant reputational – and monetary – loss if the National Archives were to remove important parts of the collections. This threat creates a strong case for support from the Heritage Lottery Fund.

This project also seeks to protect some other key collections at risk within the city not presently until local authority control, namely the film collections of the South West Film and Television Archive and the photographs at the South West Image Bank.

3.0 VISION

This project will use our heritage and collections in a completely different way to engage with citizens and visitors. It will typify excellence, engage visitors using the latest technology and will help reposition us on a national stage.

Therefore, we want to look to the future to become:

- An award-winning visitor attraction
- A facility incorporating cutting-edge technologies to explore the past, present and future
- The biggest research facility in the South West
- A living entity that develops and changes
- An inspiration for all.

The support from HLF will enable us to take these concepts and through consultation and working with individuals who have delivered successful visitor experiences, we will have a detailed solution for November 2014.

Please see appendix A for a future vision of a visitor experience.

4.0 THE WIDER CONTEXT

4.1 The Visitor Offer

The project is a key part of the overall jigsaw that is 'Telling Stories': this is a separate project and is subject to separate project funding and project management, but it is important to see how this project fits into our wider plans for the city as a visitor destination.

The newly transformed service needs to be seen as the central hub of 'Telling Stories' – it will be the first port of call for all visitors wanting to find out more about the city of Plymouth and its heritage. Visitors will leave the building and pick up the visitor trail that is 'Telling Stories'. They will move around the city by using mobile technology, public art or physical signposts that provide additional information about Plymouth's past at key locations around the city. Some examples will include:

- Elizabethan Plymouth and the Mayflower story: the Elizabethan House will be the focus for bringing 16th and early 17th century Plymouth history to life.
- Feeding the navy: the Royal William Yard will reveal the back story of what the navy needed before it set sail on its many voyages through the names of the buildings themselves and through digital technology.
- Plymouth blitz and the Abercrombie plan: the city centre itself will be used to convey the impact of the blitz on Plymouth and its rebirth through the Abercrombie plan.

Discussions are already underway between Destination Plymouth and the Arts and Heritage service to map out ideas for 'Telling Stories', and to create a pilot project with funding from the recently launched Cultural Tourism programme by Visit England and the Arts Council. The deadline for initial proposals in the first round is the end of September.

4.2 The Cultural Quarter

The development of this scheme is also a key part of the realisation of a cultural quarter or precinct, and the vision around the North Hill and the University of Plymouth as outlined in the Mackay Plan. By creating a major cultural attraction in a location between the university's Peninsula Arts and the College of Art's visual arts gallery, the new facility will be the cultural glue for the North side of the city centre. It will build on the redevelopment of the College of Art site on Charles Street and the growth of the cultural offer on the university campus, and help to signpost visitors down to the Theatre Royal and the burgeoning cultural development.

4.3 The Virtual Offer

We know that people's perceptions of what they can do online is increasing all the time. 51% of adults now have a smartphone which means they can access the internet at all times. This figure will no doubt be almost 100% by 2017/18 and, as such the pre- and post-visit experience in the virtual domain will be hugely important. The ambition to be the biggest and best research facility in the South West will mean that collections and collections information will need to be accessible online in a variety of ways and we will need to be able to help people define their visits before they arrive.

There will also be scope for expanding the commercial offer we already have in terms of image sales and rights. People will expect to be able to order prints and reproductions of collections they have seen online and onsite.

5.0 PARTNERSHIPS

5.1 MOD and the Naval Heritage

Plymouth's association with the sea and its naval and maritime connections are critical to the vision of the project and following a number of discussions there is outline agreement between the project team and the MOD that key areas of the naval base collections will be included in the new displays alongside other existing collections. Objects from the Devonport Collection will be threaded into the displays so that visitors to the building will get a real sense of the importance of the sea and its naval heritage to Plymouth. A number of the Plymouth figureheads will be included in the displays both as exhibits in their own right and also as markers or signposts to guide visitors round the building. To keep the building fresh and new these collections will rotate.

5.2 Higher/Further Education

The proximity of two of the major education establishments in the city to the proposed site creates some very exciting partnership opportunities. Plymouth University are very excited by the possibilities for using historic collections for developing courses and teaching modules. This September a new maritime and naval lecturer will be developing a course based mainly on local source material. Having this material all in one place and on the doorstep is seen as a great advantage. In September a 3-year doctorate student will begin work on one of the museum's most important collections, and this project will help to extend these opportunities.

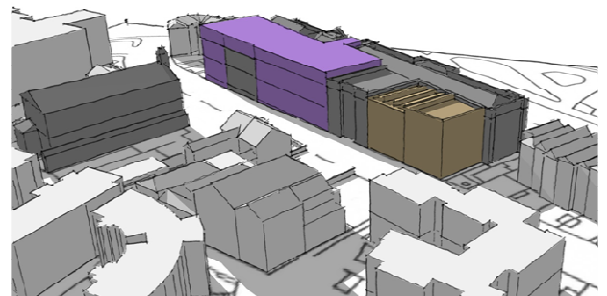
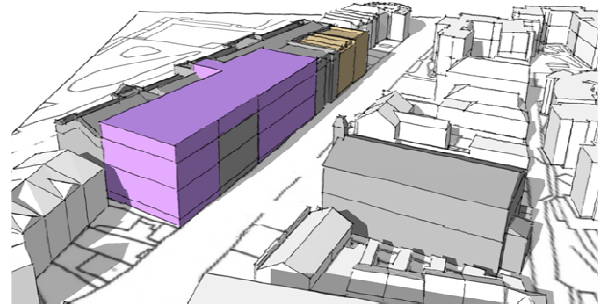
The College of Art are also very engaged with the developments thus far and are keen to explore opportunities for developing the public realm through artists' commissions and potential artists' studios/shops in the locality. There have also been some interesting conversations around how together we can ensure the collections within this building can grow and develop to support the researchers and artists of the future.

5.3 The Registry Office

Dialogues have commenced with the registration team to explore opportunities for how historic birth, marriage and death registers could be incorporated within the new facility to provide a more holistic experience for those tracing their family history.

6.0 LOCATION

Careful consideration has been given to the location of proposals. Studies of various sites across the city centre have been considered, including the Civic Centre, Burrington Way, Derry's and Colin Campbell Court, before it was narrowed down to Tavistock Place. In this location the heritage value of the existing buildings and the urban context of Tavistock Place have all been carefully considered to ensure that the location can respond to the significance of the proposal. Such proposals, first envisaged in the Mackay Plan, will transform Tavistock Place to a significant public space connecting the lower end of Tavistock Place with the recent alterations around the College of Art and the pedestrian links to Drake's



Circus. East-west connections will also be opened up to enhance the permeability of the street to benefit the connections of this quarter of the city with the University. Proposed traffic alterations will reduce vehicle access giving priority to pedestrian, cyclists and bus and coach drop off making the street a destination location. We are working closely with Highways to explore the wider possibilities for access and transport links.

The advantages to this location are as follows:

- The facility builds on the existing museum and galleries as an important civic presence in this part the city.
- It delivers a major intervention to securing the cultural impact in what is labelled the cultural quarter of the city.
- It secures a major public facility within the growing University and College of Art campuses and allows for synergy to conjoin facilities.
- It offers the opportunity to make interventions to join up and complete public realm to create a key public space.
- It offers the opportunity to breathe life and investment into key historic buildings of the city.

Analysis shows that there is sufficient site area to meet the technical challenges of a high quality building. These proposals are connected into the Council's aspiration to relocate the lending and customer focused elements of the Central Library and this relocation (subject to the successful funding applications) also puts the Council a step closer to the delivery of its strategic customer focus agenda.

It is envisaged that a national architectural competition will be used to select the design solutions for what will potential be a signatory piece of architecture.

7.0 THE BRIEF

This scheme brings together services that are currently dispersed across the city, including:

- the Plymouth and West Devon Record Office, inappropriately housed at Clare Place in Cattedown,
- the City Museum and Art Gallery collections,
- the South West Film & Television Archive, currently temporarily located in the Royal William Yard,
- key elements of the naval base collections, currently stored by the MOD in South Yard and
- local and reference history collections of the Central Library.

The colocation of heritage and arts collections will make Plymouth a centre of excellence for heritage study alongside a contemporary visitor attraction. A comparison of the breakdown of existing spaces currently contained in twelve separate buildings across the city with the proposed spaces is set out below.

However the headline messages for the project as follows:

- Just under half the total budget is being spent on creating the visitor experience.
- The building will be three times the size of the existing museum
- The public space will be 86% overall as opposed to 64% at present
- The hidden spaces will become accessible.

Indicative analysis suggests:

Existing spaces (m ²)			Proposed space allocation (m ²)	
Gross		Public	Gross	Public
Museum	2344	1494 (63.7%)	7022	6117 (86%)
Record Office	881	77 (8.7%)	-	-
SWFTA	590	10 (1.7%)	-	-
Museum stores	1000	0 (0%)	-	-

A breakdown of all proposed areas and an estimate of their costs as a percentage of the total project cost are set out below with the headline message as follows:

Proposed area	Space allocation (m²)	Cost (% of total costs)	Assumptions
Freely accessible public spaces (not including commercial)	3432	£9.02 (44%)	This includes all galleries, displays, event space, orientation, study centre, film screening spaces and open stores.
Commercial space	270	£0.62m (3%)	Significantly increased shop and café plus functions area.
Spaces with managed access	2415	£8.81m (43%)	The environment of these areas will be highly controlled to protect the unique historic assets.
Ancillary, plant and back of house	905	£2.05m (10%)	Creation of BREEAM Outstanding building Provision of high-spec M and E to meet PD5454
Totals	7022	£20.5m	

8.0 AUDIENCES

The main ethos of this project is about increased access and engagement. Current visitor numbers to the museum average between 80,000 and 100,000 depending on the type and nature of the exhibition programme. However visitor research also suggests that there is a high percentage of repeat visits within that total figure, making the number of unique visits to the museum closer to 30,000 to 35,000 a year.

We intend to retain the current loyal base of visitors, but to significantly draw in the tourist market, quadrupling the existing figure, as well as a broader demographic of residents in Plymouth and the travel to work area. Our aspiration to have the best research centre in the South West gives us scope to increase our researchers by a multiple of 5.

A comparison with like visitor attractions suggests that a target of 300,000 is not unreasonable:

- Bristol's MShed attracted 500,000 in its first 6 months of opening
- The National Marine Aquarium attracts c300,000 visitors per year
- The National Waterfront Museum in Swansea attracted 271,452 visitors in 2012-13, a 6% increase on the previous year.

9.0 OPERATING MODEL: SUGGESTED COSTS & INCOME OPPORTUNITIES

It is still too early to present a full business case – this will be developed during the development stage of the Heritage Lottery bid. However, we have had some conversations with other visitor attractions such as the National Marine Aquarium and we feel there are considerable opportunities for improving the income streams and existing lines given that we are creating an attraction with three times the amount of space and visitor numbers.

Although it is very early days, clearly this facility is going to be considerably larger than the existing museum, resulting in some increase in running costs. However, the increased floor area and visitor experience will offer opportunities in terms of income generation that will balance this and as the business case develops it will become clearer whether this will become a break-even model or even a surplus.

10.0 IMPACT ON THE ECONOMY

Creating an additional visitor attraction to the city will have a significant impact on the city's visitor economy: the proposals are consistent with the Visitor Plan, which highlights the need for additional cultural infrastructure to increase the dwell time for visitors in the city, and the economic strategy, which indicates that the city must develop its visitor economy to sustain growth. Using Cambridge modelling, the table below shows the impact of the proposals for the expansion of the museum into a visitor destination on the permanent and temporary construction jobs in the city based on £20.5m capital expenditure:

	Construction industry jobs	Visitors (per annum)	Permanent supported jobs
Current	0	100,000	93 gross (73 direct)
Potential	229 gross 148 direct)	200,000	187 gross (146 direct)
Potential (stretch target)	229 gross (148 direct)	300,000	279 gross (219 direct)

It is proposed to use a substantial sum from the council's Investment Fund for Jobs to set against this proposal given the importance of this project to the city and its economy. Based on the analysis above this investment works out at a rate of £6890/ job, and it would lever in external funding into the city a rate of just under four and a half times its value – in return for £3.5m it would attract £15.5m.

11.0 CAPITAL FUNDING PACKAGE

It is too early to consider the capital costs in detail but broad estimates suggest that the proposals could be achieved for an estimated £20.5m. This figure includes £1.5m invested in the public realm to establish the location of Tavistock Place and a further £1.5m on resetting the museum interactive display and public spaces. Provision in this figure has also been made to relocate elements of the central library in accordance with the Library Plan so that the library building asset can be used as match funding to the Heritage Lottery.

Further consideration has been given to the different funding packages that will contribute to the overall funding envelope and they are set out in the table below.

Funding body	Anticipated contribution
Heritage Lottery Fund	£12.5m
Arts Council England	£1m
CLORE Foundation	£1m
Wolfson Foundation	£1m
Plymouth City Council Capital Programme	£1.5m
Plymouth City Council Investment fund	£3.5m
Total funding	£20.5m
Potential sponsorship funding	£2m

12.0 TIMELINE

29 Nov 13	HLF stage 1 submission
30 Apr 14	HLF stage 1 announcement
May 14 – Nov 14	HLF Development phase
28 Nov 14	HLF stage 2 submission
30 Apr 15	HLF stage 2 announcement
Apr 15 – Apr 17	2 year build programme
Apr 17 – Dec 17	Set up
01 Jan 18	New building opens

13.0 CONCLUSIONS

Therefore, it is recommended that Cabinet, having considered the benefits set out in this report:

- Formally support the proposals for a major cultural facility in the cultural quarter in North Hill and Tavistock Place and approve officers to submit a Heritage Lottery bid application in November 2013.
- Support the allocation of up to £3.5m of the Investment Fund to provide match funding for the grant application.

Accepting these recommendations will demonstrate the Council's commitment towards developing:

- An award-winning visitor attraction, three times the size of the existing museum, with three times the visitors
- A facility incorporating cutting-edge technologies to explore the past, present and future
- The biggest research facility in the South West, with access to 100% of the heritage assets

With the added benefits of:

- Attracting external funding of at least £15.5m
- Supporting 500+ jobs
- Significantly increased commercial income – more than four times its current baseline on current estimates
- Reputation protected and heritage assets kept in the city

The support from HLF will enable us to take these concepts and through consultation and working with individuals who have delivered successful visitor experiences, we will have a detailed solution for November 2014.

Appendix A: A vision of the future – 25 April 2020

It's Wednesday morning and large numbers of visitors are arriving in the main foyer of Plymouth's brand new visitor attraction. Their immediate impressions are of colour, movement and activity – the walls are backdrops for continually running film footage of Plymouth through the decades. There is a huge floor-to-ceiling installation commissioned by an internationally recognised artist. There are collections everywhere. Orientation maps of the building are visible but visitors are immediately welcomed by greeters to help them find what they want and to guide them towards their destinations.

Some move off towards the busy café that spills out onto the pavement of Tavistock Place to grab a coffee and cake and to plan out how they will get the most out of their visit today. Elsewhere in the café a business meeting is taking place over a couple of Americanos and their iPads using the building's free wifi. A couple of mums with their five children have just taken advantage of a healthy snack deal for their children with their lattes before they take part in one of the toddlers' workshops – they've had them booked for ages, as they routinely get booked up in spite of the cost per workshop.

Other visitors are still standing mesmerised in the main foyer in front of the large art installation. Inspired by the concept of a cabinet of curiosities and using Plymouth's historic collections, one of the greeters encourages the group to explore the work – one, an American, opens a drawer and finds a list of the Mayflower pilgrims that stayed overnight in Plymouth before leaving for the US on the 8th September 1620. She's keen to know more as she believes one of her ancestors was on board the Mayflower, so the greeter points out a tall figurehead that is a way marker for a major display on the naval and maritime history of Plymouth. He also suggests that she might be interested to follow up her exploration of the gallery with a visit to the study centre in a different part of the building, which might have more information on her family history.

As she and her group move into the maritime gallery a class of school children from Devonport High School for Boys has just arrived with the arts & heritage education officer to explore the role that Plymouth played in the slave trade. There is no separate learning centre for schools as all the displays have been built to allow teaching to take place within them. Fortunately the displays are very flexible allowing visitors to pick and choose what they want to see, so other visitors including the American visitors can enjoy different stories at their own pace without fighting for space. There's a good mix of collections using film footage and oral histories to bring to life what it was like to live and work in the dockyard as well as innovative technology, including a 'talking head' of an old Plymouth sea captain – one of the museum portraits has been brought to life and visitors cluster around it to listen to him talk about life in 17th century Plymouth.

As suggested by the greeter, the American visitors move in the direction of the study centre, passing through a wide double storey high pathway. As they walk they are able to look through different viewing points into the core of the archives store – they are astounded by its size, and make a note to book a tour on a subsequent visit.

On arriving at the study centre, they see a number of individuals and small groups engrossed in a variety of activities – a few university students are sat round a small screen looking at archival film footage for their dissertation. Others are browsing through the history publications. The American visitors walk up to a small desk and tell the member of staff that they'd like to find out more about their family history. After a few quick questions, they are sat down in a more managed area of the study centre. Nearby are four researchers from the British Museum studying the 18th century volumes of prints and drawings from the internationally important Cottonian collection. All around

them are family historians, academics and individuals pursuing their own areas of interest looking at original manuscripts, archaeological finds or even natural history specimens.

The American visitors spend a couple of hours browsing through the original archives brought to them by the member of staff. Although they can't prove their ancestor stayed in Plymouth, they are given a number of leads to pursue back in the States. They decide to make their way back towards the main entrance and into the large shop before leaving the building. They find a great range of souvenirs, many of them unique to Plymouth – and to the new visitor attraction. They buy a miniature version of the solid silver Winstanley Salt made locally by one of the up and coming craftsmen that have moved to Plymouth to join an increasingly vibrant creative economy in the city. They're also tempted by a couple of pieces of porcelain made by some graduates of the College of Art, whose work is also on display at the college's viewing gallery.

Before leaving they pick up further information on the 'Telling Stories' trail, much of which can be downloaded onto their mobile phones, and decide to enjoy it that very afternoon. Outside on Tavistock Place as they move slowly towards Drake's Circus Shopping Centre enjoying the external public art works, they agree that they completely underestimated the amount of time needed to do it justice and they will need to come back again very soon.