

RIBBLE VALLEY BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT TO COMMUNITY COMMITTEE

Agenda Item No. 9

meeting date: 18 JANUARY 2011
title: PARANORMAL ACTIVITIES AT CLITHEROE CASTLE MUSEUM
submitted by: JOHN C HEAP, DIRECTOR OF COMMUNITY SERVICES
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1 PURPOSE

1.1 To ask members to consider a request to hold paranormal activities at the museum.

1.2 Relevance to the Council's ambitions and priorities:

- **Council Ambitions** – This report contributes to making sure that the council provides efficient services, to protect and enhance the existing environmental quality of our area and improving access for all.
- **Community Objectives** – This report relates to the following priorities outlined in the community strategy: encouraging access for all, community cohesion, culture and tourism.
- **Corporate Priorities** – To provide services for people where they live, improve access to services, promote the exceptional environment of area and lifestyle.
- **Other Considerations** – None

2 BACKGROUND

2.1 In early December, we were approached by Frank Watson (the Council's Market Superintendent) who is involved in an organisation called 'A Haunting Experience'.

2.2 The proposal was for the organisation to directly hire the museum for paranormal evenings, outside the current arrangements between ourselves and Lancashire Museums Service (LMS).

2.3 There have been examples in the past where such activities took place, but these were on an informal basis and relied on museums staff to work the unsocial hours.

3 CURRENT SITUATION

3.1 The overall management of the museum is carried out through a licence/SLA with Lancashire Museums Service.

3.2 Under the agreement, LMS take full responsibility for the operation of the museum, including programming, site security, staffing and collections management. Marketing is carried out jointly with ourselves.

3.3 Although not specifically identified as a museum activity, LMS have accommodated a number of paranormal evenings when they had staff who were willing to work the unsocial hours. Four such events were accommodated during the last quarter.

4 **OPTIONS**

4.1 The reason for the direct approach to the Council, rather than LMS, is that Frank feels that LMS are currently unable to accommodate the demand being created for such activities and so, by booking the museum directly with us, such demand could be met and a healthy income could be delivered, based on a 50/50 income share arrangement.

4.2 In terms of demand, it has been suggested that up to two events per month could be accommodated.

4.3 In terms of accessing the site, alternative security arrangements would have to be put in place, eg by RVBC opening and closing the premises. Frank has suggested that, as a RVBC employee, he could fulfil this function, although he would not be directly employed by the Council for the event.

4.4 LMS are very uncomfortable with any such arrangement as, under the current arrangement, they are fully responsible for what goes on, and feel the risks of such independent use would be too high.

4.5 If we were to insist on such independent use then, in reality, it would require a change to the current agreement, the terms of which have only recently been finalised, and only in principle at this stage. To implement a change such as proposed, would not only prolong the process further, but would undoubtedly be rejected by LMS.

4.6 On a completely different note, it could be viewed that such activity is inappropriate for the museum, and not something that should be actively promoted.

4.7 The arrangement would also give exclusive rights to the premises that would not be available to other companies/organisations who are currently offering similar services and have previously booked the premises through LMS.

4.8 Given all the issues, there are probably 4 options available for members to consider;

(1) that such activity is not appropriate for the venue and ask LMS to accept no future bookings.

(2) To accommodate the proposal from 'A Haunting Experience' which could provide a good income stream but would be at odds with the views of LMS.

(3) Keep the current status quo, whereby LMS continue with their current operation.

(4) Agree a more formal arrangement with LMS that would put any future bookings on a more commercial footing, both in terms of the number of bookings to be accommodated, and the associated fees and charges. This would, hopefully, be able to accommodate some of the requirements of 'A Haunting Experience' whilst not providing exclusivity.

5 **RISK ASSESSMENT**

Approval of this report may have the following implications:

- **Resources** – such activities are currently charged at the individual adult admission rate, plus any staff costs. 'A Haunting Experience' have suggested that, through their arrangement, income would be much higher but this does not include any staffing costs incurred by ourselves.
- **Technical, Environmental and Legal** – The proposal would mean re-visiting the current arrangements with LMS.
- **Reputational** – such activity is not universally accepted as any promotion could have an adverse reaction.
- **Political** – there is a balance between the need to generate additional income to reduce the revenue subsidy for the site, and the appropriate use of the site.

6 **RECOMMENDED THAT COMMITTEE**

Notes the contents of the report and determines which of the options is most appropriate.

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For further information, please contact Chris Hughes 01200 414479