

**Leicestershire County Council's
Proposed Changes to Snibston Museum
– Perceptions of Volunteers**

**Report on Qualitative Research
June 2014**

Contents

Executive Summary	2
1. Volunteers' Perceptions of the Present Museum	6
2. Volunteers' Understanding of the Council's Proposal	13
3. Volunteers' Views on the Council's Proposal	17

Appendices

1. Background and Research Methodology	22
2. The Financial Context and LCC's 2013 Budget Consultations	25
3. Participants' Verbatim 'Key Messages' to the Council	28
4. Participants' Verbatim Feedback on the Discussion Groups	30

Executive Summary

1. The Cabinet agreed, in April 2014, to a programme of consultation about the Council's proposal – made in the context of the need for financial savings – to replace the present Snibston Discovery Museum with a new mining museum.

The new museum would be located beside the historic pithead buildings and would reflect the history of coal mining in Leicestershire. The current Museum's main gallery would be abolished and the area made available for development. Other facilities on the site – the Century Theatre, the mineral railway, the country park and a play area – would be retained.

The Council published a leaflet on the proposals¹ and undertook a consultation programme with residents, stakeholders and schools. It also wished to understand the views of the Museum's volunteers and therefore commissioned an independent social researcher to hold three discussion groups with volunteers, to understand:

- their perceptions of Snibston and what they value about their current volunteering opportunities (chapter 1);
- their views on the changes being proposed (chapters 2 and 3); and
- other issues the Council should consider (chapter 3).

There are some 85 volunteers currently working with the Museum across a range of amenities including the main gallery building, exhibit stores, the fashion display and stores, the mining railway, the country park, and in general administration, both public-facing and back-office. A total of 25 volunteers took part in the three discussion groups. Two groups were with a cross section of volunteers from across the Museum's various facilities, also broadly reflecting their main demographic characteristics. The third group was with volunteers with learning difficulties or disabilities.

As is the nature of social research, this report deals with participants' *perceptions* rather than necessarily *facts*, although to participants these perceptions *are* facts.

2. Participants were a very distinctive group of people. They work at Snibston because they want to. It is unlikely that many participants would be working at Snibston if they did not gain personal satisfaction and enjoyment.

Participants' pre-discussion questionnaires indicate that they gained a great deal of satisfaction from their role. Almost all had formulated a clear opposition to the Council's proposal before the discussion groups, citing lack of detail, the impact on them personally, and the wider impact of the Museum socially and economically. Participants' post-discussion questionnaires show that their opposition was unchanged as a result of taking part in the discussion groups, which provided the opportunity for them to articulate the reasons for their views².

¹ 'Have Your Say on Proposed Changes to Snibston Museum', Leicestershire County Council, April 2014
http://www.leics.gov.uk/future_snibston_consultation_document.pdf

² Participants' 'key messages to the Council' in their post-discussion questionnaire are set out at Appendix 3.

3. Most participants claimed to know a fair amount about the proposed changes, particularly relating to the areas in which they volunteered – enough, at any rate, to have created uncertainties and concerns which they felt made it difficult to assess the impact of the proposal on volunteering.

In particular, participants felt that there was a lack of adequate detail in the information provided and that some aspects of the proposal were insufficiently clear to enable reasonable judgements to be made. This was one of a number of reasons for participants' general scepticism of the Council's motives in putting forward its proposal, and of its consultation which, it was considered, should have included some alternative options for consideration. Indeed, it was widely felt among participants that the Council's proposal was a '*done deal*'.

4. Otherwise, participants' views on the proposal were driven by the factors which had motivated them to volunteer in the first place – their personal satisfaction, enjoyment and development, along with social and economic aspirations.

Overall, participants considered that the motivations and aspirations which had led them to volunteering, and the factors which in many cases had made that a highly successful experience, would not be met under the proposal. Key concerns were:

- *Personal development*: there would be a loss of the learning opportunities from working in specialised areas with expert staff and volunteers; of opportunities for obtaining work experience in professional, administrative or public-facing areas; and of gaining the 'life changing' self-confidence required to get into, or return to, work, perhaps following health or emotional episodes;
- *Educational*: volunteers could lose education opportunities which, it was argued, could mirror the loss of opportunities for visitors including schools;
- *Opportunity*: there could be a loss of opportunity for all volunteers, particularly for those with special needs, including those with learning difficulties or disabilities. Such volunteers currently develop their skills and self-confidence at the Museum, and gain personal satisfaction from making a valued contribution to the Museum. This loss of opportunity could adversely affect volunteers' well-being and employment prospects, and risk losing the significant gains which volunteers felt they had gained while at the Museum.
- *Amenity*: volunteers would lose the interaction with staff, other volunteers and the public, and consequently the personal enjoyment which arises from volunteering within that environment.

And there were a number of broader concerns which would also impact on the volunteers:

- *Viability*: the current Museum would, it was feared, suffer a loss of critical mass and diversity arising from the proposal, which could result in an immediate decline in volunteering opportunities and, potentially, an even greater reduction in the future should, as was widely feared, the new Museum did not succeed;
- *Heritage*: there would be a loss of local social and economic heritage, including local garment making, toy manufacturing and transport, with consequently reduced (or removed) opportunities for experienced volunteers who bring their expertise to the service free of charge;
- *Economic*: local participants feared the impact of the proposal would result in reduced visitor numbers. This could hurt the local economy which has already suffered from the loss of

amenities and high deprivation. This would compound the impact of reduced training and employment opportunities at the Museum for local people.

5. Participants felt that Snibston is not ‘just’ a museum.

Participants felt a close affinity to the Museum, which was valued on a number of different levels – for the benefits that it provided volunteers personally, in terms of satisfaction and personal development, and for a range of social and economic reasons. There was a pervasive feeling that the Museum should not be seen in isolation: that it is not ‘just’ a museum. Participants felt that it met a wide range of needs which stretched over the Council’s wider responsibilities, including social care, education, youth services and environmental services, together with yet wider issues such as anti-social behaviour and mental health – factors which, they considered, were not necessarily easy to quantify when considering individual service budgets.

Participants also felt overall that the Museum related closely to the local community, in terms of the economy as well as in leisure and entertainment terms, which they considered to be of particular significance given relative deprivation in the area, coupled with perceived declining local facilities and services.

6. Participants were generally opposed to the Council’s proposal and felt disengaged from the process of deciding the Museum’s future.

There were few expressions of support for the Council’s proposal, despite an acknowledgement that celebrating the area’s mining heritage would be a good thing and that some felt that there was at least an arguable case for a museum focused on a single story line. Generally, however, participants were critical of the proposal.

- A range of perceptions were generally held about the Council’s motives for putting forward the proposal, relating to the development of the land, the costs and availability of other funds including the National Lottery, the financial viability of the new museum, and the seriousness of the Council’s intent for its future. In other words, participants were generally sceptical of the Council and of councillors. They may, however, have accepted that these may be misconceptions.
- Participants felt that there were some important issues on which the Plan for Change was silent, for example on the future role of the Theatre; the arrangements for storage of exhibits, including mining-related ones; and the future of facilities which do not appear on the map in the Plan for Change, such as the full extent of the present railway track and some of the former mining buildings. Such issues, because they were unclear to participants, have become ‘fears’ about the outcome, held by a group of people who feel something precious to them is under threat. This has helped to compound a negative attitude. Again, participants acknowledged that such fears may be unfounded. However, they felt unable to judge this on the basis of the information available to them.
- Participants were struck that only one option had been put forward for consultation and were concerned that there had been no discussion (of which they were aware) about a range of other possibilities for the Museum, for example in terms of alternative funding and different (including non-Council) management arrangements. Participants may have been prepared to accept that the proposal had been put forward in order to engender a more

detailed consideration of alternatives for the site, but all they could see was one option and no opportunity for discussion of alternatives.

- There was a concern that there was no reference in the Plan for Change to the role of volunteers. This led variously to some participants to suspect that the new museum would be *overly* dependent on volunteers (and concern that the currently effective balance between paid staff and volunteers would be lost) or that there would be *fewer* volunteering opportunities. It did not feel right to participants that, when in the wider world the value of volunteering was being extolled, there had been no discussion about the future of volunteers at Snibston so far as they were aware. It was perceived that the potential loss of a large number of motivated, trained volunteers was a perverse outcome of the proposal.
- Participants generally noted that there was no reference to the future of some specific sections of the volunteering community – to those with particular needs (such as dementia, autism, learning difficulties or disabilities); those who are volunteering after health or emotional difficulties; or those who are seeking the skills to get them into or back into employment.

7. It was not easy for participants to identify factors which might mitigate the effect of the proposal on volunteers, were they to go ahead.

Participants' views may well change in the light of further information. There are a range of issues in this report on which participants would welcome clarification and this may help to provide further constructive feedback on the proposal.

But participants did feel that the new facility should be set up mindful of the kind of impacts set out here, not least securing a balance of professional staff and volunteers so that each can be made as effective as possible; that particular attention should be paid to providing opportunities and expertise to volunteers with special needs; that the range of other social and economic aspirations of volunteers be given due consideration; and that the future of artefacts either currently in store, or no longer required for exhibiting, should be properly considered so that staff and volunteers can secure them for the future.

8. Participants appreciated the opportunity to discuss the proposals.

Participants, in their post-discussion questionnaires, were positive about their opportunity to contribute to the discussion groups, although there was a general sense of pessimism about the final outcome. They typically found the exercise interesting, useful, enjoyable and well-managed. They valued being able to share and discuss each others' views and experiences and, through this report, to enable the Council to take them into account when it is deciding the future of the Museum. Their verbatim feedback is at appendix 4.

1. Volunteers' Perceptions of the Present Museum

Participants took a range of routes to their present volunteering role

Participants generally lived locally to the Museum and had been aware its existence, and its work, before volunteering. Whether participants found their volunteering opportunity at Snibston directly, or indirectly through referrals, this awareness of particular aspects of its work – education, engineering, fashion, mining – drew many of them in, both because it interested them and because they appreciated it and wanted to support it. However, some participants subsequently changed their role, and took on new and demanding responsibilities, for example joining as a generalist volunteer and ending up in a specialist role such as leading a group of volunteers with learning difficulties.

Personal satisfaction and enjoyment may usually be taken as a given

It is unlikely that many volunteers would work at the Museum if they did not gain personal satisfaction and enjoyment, notwithstanding any frustrations some may also feel. Participants spoke of feeling appreciated – by fellow volunteers, the paid staff, the organisation as a whole and the public they serve. The sense of respect they felt was critical to volunteers, knowing it was not tokenistic, and feeling that their opinions and actions were genuinely valued.

'Volunteering provides something which is useful, gives personal satisfaction, and helps other people.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Participants often felt, on a personal level, that their sense of satisfaction from volunteering at the Museum had an impact which went beyond just feeling good about their work. Some spoke of overcoming significant personal challenges, perhaps of an emotional or health nature; of proving something important to themselves socially or economically; of gaining direction in their lives, perhaps away from depression or from petty crime; of utilising their skills for their benefit of others; or of gaining satisfaction arising from the pleasure, direction, inspiration or education which their work gives to others. One volunteer, who when younger was herself at risk of anti-social behaviour, and now runs a group of children who are in a similar position to herself (and now has employment in a similar field), remarked: *'If it were not for Snibston, I would be in Glen Parva [prison] by now'*. She exemplifies a story repeated by many other participants:

'It was absolutely life-changing, coming here. It gave me a new direction in life. It really did. The friendships and the social-ness that I have gained have been invaluable. I can't tell you what a difference it made in my life and to my health.'

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

'It has completely changed my life. After my wife died, I knew very few people. Now I know lots of people, we have terrific fun, there is lots of great banter. We are doing a good job but it is the social side which makes it.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

A common social motivation arose from seeking a 'purpose in life'. Following major life events, such as retirement, or the loss of a partner, some volunteers commented that such a motivation can be

very strong. Volunteering was also able to provide the opportunity to meet people, perhaps for residents new to the area, or because they had until then focused on other things such as work, bringing up their family or looking after parents or other family or friends, after which a sense of isolation could be very powerful.

'Volunteering gives you a purpose in life. It gets you up in the morning. Otherwise you could think that nobody wants you, you've done your bit in life and could quite easily think that you have nothing to do all day. It is nice to feel wanted, that there is something out there that you can do.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Participants brought their background and experience (including in previous volunteering roles) to bear in their roles at Snibston in ways which they had not necessarily expected. For example, a former teacher had the skills to talk to people about specialist exhibits, while a former local senior government officer could organise committees and bring people together. There is a diversity of roles and activities at the Museum so a sense of personal satisfaction can derive from very tangible things such as building something, helping other volunteers' personal development, or a long-term role such as developing systems which will protect the county's heritage for the future. Overall, a key characteristic of a good volunteering experience was felt to be shared interests and goals:

'Personal satisfaction comes without you necessarily looking for it. If you are interested in something, and someone shows some interest back to you, with no big picture around it, suddenly there is a rapport and a conversation. Something grows out of that and the feel-good factor from that is that you are sharing something and a joint camaraderie.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

'In an ideal world, we would all have volunteering to look forward to, as a selfish pleasure. It is a fantastic thing to do, people appreciate your skills and what you do, and also you get something back for it at a time of life when you don't have to do anything, but you can choose to do this.'

Female, aged 56+, general discussion group

Underpinning this feeling of satisfaction is a sense of enjoyment. Participants were volunteers because they wanted to be. They spoke of enjoying using skills and experience which they had feared they would not be able to use again. But some also spoke of the enjoyment gained by using their brain in a totally different area, being *'pushed outside their comfort zone'*, being brought out of their shell and finding skills and attributes previously hidden, or being kept physically active, or involved with other people – all in the context of a sense of personal satisfaction from doing the job well.

'The pleasure is in seeing people enjoy themselves, having a facility which they can come to and get something out of.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

The social interaction, fun and teamwork which participants described does not just make a difference to them in personal terms but also enables the wider objectives of the Museum to be met:

'It's the sort of thing which helps to provide the glue to the team and makes a big difference to its effectiveness.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Achieving social motivations

An important motivation for participants generally was the feeling of helping people, putting something back into the community, or supporting the local area. This was not always an isolated motivation, often related to other more personal aspirations, but it was important for almost all participants. This might be quite a profound issue, such as helping people with learning difficulties. Or it may be simply concerned with helping to provide something which people will enjoy – exhibits or Century Theatre performances which are simply fun.

'What we are doing is helping to build and consolidate the community in all sorts of different ways. If single people, of whatever age, come to certain types of performance [in the Century Theatre], then they know that when they come they are going to meet people who they have met there before.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

A number of comments were made about helping young people who have been in trouble with the law. Some young people had been taken under the wing of volunteers, not necessarily as part of their formal responsibilities but because they have been able to give time to the matter in a way which they felt may not always have been practicable for paid staff. One volunteer described how she is a listener for people who attend her facility who may be having emotional or health problems and it can be very therapeutic for them. Another spoke of running a group of volunteers with learning difficulties.

'When you listen to [name of client group], they've all got problems, either illness-related, or marriage break-up. I felt at first as if I was there just as someone to listen to them.'

Female, aged 56+, general discussion group

'Through the [name of client group] groups I help to run, I am able to pass on my knowledge and it is really nice to see them picking it up. We do all sorts of events – front of house, helping out at the miners' gala.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

Achieving employment-related and other economic motivations

For some participants, one of the most important aspects of their role lay in learning skills and developing the confidence to enter, or re-enter, the job market. This could include obtaining job-related skills (such as getting practical experience of museum work following a qualification or when considering a change of career); gaining practical generic skills like dealing with the public and back-office administrative roles; practical help on job search, drafting CVs or developing their interview skills; interacting with the public and museum users; or psychological help, such as self-confidence. All such examples are in the context of the satisfaction of feeling that they are helping others. This has led to some volunteers obtaining employment elsewhere, utilising the skills developed at Snibston.

'Volunteering at the Museum got me to a place where I was not necessarily learning in the group any more, I was teaching others – younger children. You teach them something and then you see it click in their heads and then they grin at you, and it's dead good'.

Female, aged 18-34, general discussion group

Participants considered that the Museum fulfilled this role particularly well, with much interaction with the public – customer-focus being considered an important attribute by employers – and properly structured work plans for staff and volunteers, centred on what volunteers need in order to get the most out of, and contribute to, the experience. Developing their skills, training (such as photography, conservation, or handling and care of artefacts), obtaining experience of working with the public, and gaining the confidence needed to be ready for future employment, were all particularly important economic motivations for participants of the learning difficulties group, as well as the enjoyment of their experience.

An important part of the volunteer experience was concerned with working with paid staff. Many volunteers spoke of 'sponging up' the knowledge and experience of the qualified experts with whom they were working, for example in the artefact stores. Otherwise, as a participant in the learning difficulties group remarked, it would be like *'the blind leading the blind'*.

'Volunteers have to be quite highly trained in order to handle the artefacts that we have, and the different materials and conditions which the artefacts are in, so they will pick up a lot of knowledge. At Snibston, they are very careful at planning roles so they do not cross into paid staffs' jobs.'

Female, aged 18-34, general discussion group

All the learning difficulties group wanted to find employment and they all saw their opportunity to volunteer at Snibston as a means to that end – developing the skills mentioned at the beginning of this section, proving to future employers that they had the self-discipline needed to meet demanding work requirements over a period of time, and developing the confidence they needed for the job market.

A rather different economic motivation related to participants' perception of the impact of their work on the communities around Coalville. Local participants spoke of declining facilities in the area. They felt that the Museum has an impact on the local economy, not just in terms of helping volunteers' employability, but also by being a local employer and attracting visitors to the area, some of whom may spend money in the town.

Personal development

(a) Participants with learning difficulties

Personal development motivations were certainly not limited to participants with learning difficulties. But the issue resonated with them particularly strongly. They spoke of the doors which Snibston had opened for them: going back to college, finding new volunteering opportunities, developing skills and confidence, developing and reawakening interests which in turn have led to different options, making friends, having a direction, and looking ahead to employment possibilities. They all felt very positive about their experience at Snibston. They engaged with the generalist points previously described in this chapter: for some their experience here had been 'life changing'. But

they were also able to assess their experiences from the perspective of their learning difficulties and they were able to compare their present experience with their former experiences when volunteering elsewhere or when in education.

First, participants in the learning difficulties group appreciated the nature and quality of the exhibits and their relevance for the county and its heritage.

'I get the same sense of excitement from coming here as a volunteer as I did when I was small. Other museums do not have the space for big artefacts. I love that it is keeping alive Coalville's history because we are not just about mining. We have things you cannot see anywhere else – the local brickworks, the local toy factory, the buses which tie in with Midland Red which has not long closed down, and we have George Stephenson and the Rocket. I remember coming here as a school kid and thinking it was terrific.'

Female, aged 18-30, learning difficulties discussion group

Second, all members of this group had previous experience of volunteering in other organisations. Participants felt that the management of volunteers at Snibston had created an environment in which they felt that they contribute, doing something challenging but which does not involve the stress that volunteering had caused elsewhere. Participants spoke of the high level of professional support they receive and contrasted that with other places where little or no support had been available – both in workplaces and in educational establishments – resulting in health and other problems.

'It is very structured here. We know what we are doing. We have got fantastic support. They are very good at dealing with dyspraxia autism and learning difficulties. At the [name of well known charity where participants had also volunteered], they are really not so forgiving and, because of the lack of volunteers, I end up doing too much and getting stressed.'

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

Third, learning difficulty participants strongly valued the ethos of mutual respect in the Museum. In some other organisations in which they had volunteered, they had encountered comments about other volunteers, which they said does not happen at Snibston. They considered that this also came down to the management of the facility and again contrasted this with experiences elsewhere.

'It doesn't matter who you are or what you are, when we come here, we feel on the same level as the paid members of staff. I am one of the team, I am one of the family, it doesn't matter what I have got wrong with me, I feel wanted and valued.'

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties group

Finally, the size and scope of the Museum meant that learning difficulty participants reported that they never get bored, that they move around, change functions and locations, and are kept busy. If one job does not work, there is scope to try another, with the result that participants can land in unexpected roles which stretch them and take them in new directions.

(b) Participants in general

Many of these facets of personal development also applied to other participants: residents who had volunteered with a view to securing the confidence to re-enter the job market, discovering new skills and interests. And it worked the other way round as well. Volunteers brought to their role their own skills and experience which they were able to harness for the development of other volunteers and paid staff: for example, an engineer who is a volunteer on the mineral railway, or a volunteer in the fashion stores who has spent a lifetime in the garment industry.

Acquiring new skills was also important. Sometimes this was relevant in the context of future employment, as discussed above. Sometimes it was more concerned with being stretched and discovering that a volunteer can do and achieve things not previously envisaged by acquiring new skills – making things, helping people.

Just like participants with learning difficulties, other participants also felt that there is a lot of support for volunteers at the Museum. They considered that it made the volunteering process inclusive and effective by providing practical professional help and, for example, various award schemes. Other activities, such as providing meals for volunteers, also added to the experience, helping to create the adhesion which helps keep the team together. Participants considered that this social cohesion helped to give volunteers security and for some a routine and a purpose.

In all of these ways, participants tended to consider that the Museum should not be seen in isolation as a budget head, that it is not ‘just’ a museum

This was articulated in a number of ways.

Participants referred to the Museum’s relevance in meeting a range of needs which stretched over the Council’s wider responsibilities, including social care (citing its work with older people with dementia, and adults and young people with autism and learning needs); education (citing the large number of school groups visiting the Museum each year, most from outside the county); its work with people with learning difficulties and disabilities (a point made just as strongly in the two general discussion groups as in the learning difficulties discussion group); youth services (citing the work with young people at risk of anti-social behaviour); and environmental services (citing the wide range of activities centred on the country park).

Participants also felt overall that the Museum related closely to the local community, in terms of the economy as well as in leisure and entertainment terms, which they considered to be of particular significance given relatively high deprivation and declining local facilities and services.

Finally, there was a pervasive feeling across the three discussion groups among volunteers who work with exhibits that they are saving something for future generations, something which might relate to local history, or to one of the key historic industries of the county, notably garment-making and mining.

It was a recurrent theme in all three discussion groups that such considerations were not easy to quantify when considering service budgets. This chimes with other research showing that the public

does not necessarily see public services in terms of departmental budget heads but rather more holistically, seeing the impact of one service on another³.

'I have a number of adults with learning difficulties in my group. It does go beyond normal aspects of support, especially for volunteers who have mental health issues – projects are geared towards their difficulties. This is to give people a positive experience, rather than to highlight their difficulties.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

'With the Museum and what we've got, which I do believe will be added to, we will have a past. But unless someone keeps this going we are not going to have a past'.

Female, aged 56+, general discussion group

³ cf. reports to the Council on qualitative research budget workshops in 2009/10, 2010/11 and 2013/14.

2. Volunteers' Understanding of the Council's Proposal

Participants claimed to know a fair amount about the proposed changes, but few said they knew a great deal

Most participants said in their pre-discussion questionnaires that they knew at least a 'fair amount' about the proposed changes – evidently enough to be have uncertainties and concerns about the future, of which there were a number.

There was some confusion about the proposal's costs

A number of participants were also relatively knowledgeable about the costs of the current Museum, judging on their pre-discussion questionnaire – more than we would expect of the general public which, as a whole, has little concept of the cost of public services⁴. Participants who were interested in the detailed budgets – and there were a number across the three discussion groups – said they were confused about some of the Council's costings, and felt that there was insufficient information to make them intelligible.

Some also queried how the Council reflected the outcome of its 2013 budget consultations in its communications. They understood why residents would identify museums for budget cuts over care services but, as discussed in chapter one, they queried whether it was widely understood how the work of the Museum impacted on social care, education and a range of other public services.

'We must recognise that museums do not impact on the public's consciousness – this is not surprising when they are tucked away out of sight as this one is, with so little capital made from the assets by the current regime.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

'[I would] wish to see proper consideration of all options and cost benefit analysis including local economy, social and cultural.'

Male, aged 56+, pre-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

Participants also tended to consider that relatively small budgets, such as for museums, may not be the best way of finding relatively large budget savings.

Participants' understanding of, and engagement with, the proposal was hindered by a number of factors

(i) A perceived 'lack of clarity and detail'

Such a view made it difficult for participants to feel able to assess fully the impact of the proposal. Many participants had clearly formed this view in advance of the research discussion, as their comments in their pre-discussion questionnaires illustrate:

⁴ *ibid.*

'I know what I think there is to know, from the website, leaflet and LCC's questionnaire, but that is not enough to be able to make a judgement about which way we should be going. The proposals are not explained in detail and are not framed as options. The way the questionnaire is structured is designed to one end – there is one solution being consulted upon. The questions are very difficult to answer because there is no explanation about what they want to do. They tell you what they want you to know, and what the cost is. But there is no assessment of wider costs and benefits, no discussion of other options.'

Male, aged 56+, pre-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

'Insufficient detail to make a rational or reasoned decision.'

Male, aged 56+, pre-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

'Very little information provided by the Council's consultation.'

Male, aged 56+, pre-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

And these views remained following the discussions as comments in post-discussion questionnaires illustrate:

'The proposals are not based on proper assessments.'

Male, aged 56+, post-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

'I don't believe the consultation document clearly spells out what is intended.'

Male, aged 35-55, post-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

'I don't think [the proposals] are clear enough.'

Male, aged 56+, post-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

Some specific uncertainties were raised in the discussions, for example:

- *Century Theatre*: It was said that there is reference in the Plan for Change to the Theatre being retained but not to its function. The only reference to its future role was said to relate to activities for schools and academies. This led to concern that the current theatrical, entertainment and cinema activities may not continue as this had not been explicitly stated.
- *Mining railway*: There is no reference in the proposal to the railway other than to its continuation, but the map on the information leaflet cuts off the railway to the east (and it was suggested that the land had already been sold).
- *Mining exhibits*: Participants were unclear whether there would be enough space in the new museum to house mining exhibits or whether some on display would need to be stored (a concern also expressed about non-mining exhibits), and what the cost implications of this might be because of the sensitive storage requirements required by some of the artefacts.
- *Mining-related buildings*: It was stated that some ex-mining buildings are currently used for groups or storage at the moment but they are not on the plans for the new museum. The

understanding of some participants was that the land was to be sold and that planning permission for housing had already been obtained.

There was also a perceived lack of clarity about future roles for volunteers and staff, and concern that this had not been addressed in the consultation. On the one hand, it was assumed that there would be a loss of volunteering roles, with the consequent loss of the benefits of volunteering discussed in chapter one, although others surmised that there may have to be more roles for volunteers in caring for stocks no longer exhibited. The future relationship between staff and volunteers was also unspecified. Some drew the conclusion that the new Museum would be largely dependent on volunteers to run it, which ran counter to volunteers' perceptions that the strength of the current Museum was the interaction of professional staff and volunteers.

(ii) A general scepticism of the Council's motives and of the present consultations.

There was, throughout the discussions, an overall distrust of the Council's motives. There were a number of strands to this. First, there was a general perception that it was 'done deal'.

Second, there was concern about the viability of the Council's proposal, that a mining museum, whatever its merits, may not be able to compete with mining museums elsewhere in the country, and perceived that the 'unique selling point' of Snibston – its broader local cultural, social and economic context – would be lost. This came back to the concern reported earlier of how thought-though was the proposal:

'The attraction of the current site is its variety, especially for children. But there are also two museums with mining not far away. A single-subject museum would not have the same impact.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

'I could see the new museum collapsing.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Third, it was mentioned, though not necessarily generally perceived by all participants, that a moral issue was at play regarding the basis on which the site is currently owned. Also in this connection, there was confusion about a lottery grant being 'turned down':

'How local people see it is that the whole of the Snibston site was given to LCC by British Coal. The Council has inherited this on behalf of the people. They are the custodians of the site. Crudely speaking, from the moral point of view, you could argue that it is not their site to sell. It was given to the Council because of the contribution which this area made to coal mining.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Fourth, there a concern about the development of the site and who would benefit from it – the feeling that the whole site would be built upon sooner rather than later.

'My view is that [name of councillor] wants the land and he is going to have it whatever we say.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

'The belief is that they will effectively asset-strip the site by selling off what can be sold and they will not put money from that into a new museum. So in a couple of years time there will be a proposal to close the mining museum because no one is using it.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Finally, the Council, it was said, had not involved the Museum's staff and volunteers in coming up with a viable proposal, had not considered how the site could be utilised more fully than at present, and had not proposed any options to the proposal it is putting forward.

'The Council is not making it easy to contribute constructively [to its consultations]. It only has a "Plan A"'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

(iii) A perception that the Council had not sought to maximise the opportunities of the current Museum

There were a number of criticisms of the Council for not fully utilising the present facilities. It was said that marketing and advertising had historically been poor and had recently got worse; that the bureaucracy meant that things were slow to take place (e.g. introducing wifi into the Theatre); there was poor signage from the road, from which the Museum is not visible; and no discussion, of which participants were aware, about how savings could be made on existing provision.

'There is zero marketing, no advertising, and no commercial approach to the Museum. I believe that the way the Council operates – its ethical processes in terms of running museums – is fabulous. The structure is there. The intention is fine in terms of looking after precious things. But there is a stumbling block. It seems to be too much of a quantum leap to think about the current situation of how the assets which the Council owns can be used to generate some money. It is almost as if you are breaking the Holy Grail if you infer that you should be doing something commercially.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

'A lot of it is concerned with marketing. A lot of people are surprised it is still here: you can't see it from the main road any more, all you can see is houses. Several people have said to me that they thought houses had been built on the site. For at least five years now, the advertising has been poor, in terms of where and how they do it, even in something as simple as phone books.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

3. Volunteers' Views on the Council's Proposal

Few participants supported the proposal for change – unsurprisingly given the drivers for their views

Despite regarding themselves for the most part as fairly well informed about the proposal, participants nevertheless considered overall that there were too many uncertainties to enable them to support aspects of the proposal.

Some positive points were made:

First, the focus on mining was welcomed by some. They felt that it was right that the area's mining heritage should be celebrated. A mining-only museum could mean that the ethos, backed up by management, staff and volunteers, would be single-mindedly focused on excellence:

'There would no conflict of interest – there would only be one thing to think about, and that is to achieve perfection, hopefully, with a mining museum.'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group 1

And the learning disabilities group also saw the point of the Council trying to keep the area's industrial heritage alive by keeping the museum open, and felt that there would be volunteering opportunities in the new Museum, notwithstanding the loss of other facilities.

'The mining tours are brilliant – I went on one the other day and there were 38 people on it.'

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

But, as previously discussed, this was a minority view, most considering that the wider context provided by the present Museum was important in understanding the area's mining heritage.

Participants' reactions to the proposal were driven by the factors which motivated them to volunteer in the first place – their personal satisfaction, enjoyment and development, along with social and economic aspirations

Participants' main concerns about the proposal inevitably reflected their personal motivations in volunteering at the Museum, as outlined in chapter one – personal, social or economic. In judging the Council's proposal, participants considered whether their aspirations were more or less likely to be met under the proposal. Although some could see increased needs for volunteers, as discussed earlier, overall participants could find little evidence that their aspirations would be as well met by the Council's proposal as under the current Museum. There were a number of strands to this:

(i) Viability: Participants doubted the viability of the proposal and opposed the loss of the main gallery. Though 'celebrating the area's mining heritage' was, per se, supported (participants pointed to the current tours and annual Snibston miners' gala), they concluded that a single-function museum was unlikely to be as attractive to many users as the present broader-based facility. The loss of significant elements of the local heritage – garment making, toys and other exhibitions – represented a loss to the area's cultural heritage and would be less attractive to visitors including the many schools which currently visit.

'It is the critical mass of the site, its regional importance, which made national headlines. It's tied up with other things: take this away and you take a big chunk of the attraction of the national forest away. You start to have a knock-on effect with a lot of things in this area, which will not have a positive effect on the economy.'

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

'Coalmining would not keep a group of school kids busy from about 10am to 4pm as the current Museum does. How many kids are interested in mining? They will probably be here for around an hour and a half, depending on the tour guide. It is not much of an experience for them.'

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

There was a further concern about the practicality of the proposal. It was said that there would be costs involved in the proposal: the fashion stock cannot easily be sold as much has been gifted. There would be a requirement for more storage space, more volunteering staff, more work to catalogue the stock.

(ii) Heritage: Participants regretted the loss of the local social and economic heritage, including garment making, toy manufacturing and transport, with consequently reduced (or removed) opportunities for volunteers who bring their expertise and expertise to the service free of charge.

'We have the largest collection of costume, going back to the late 1600s, in the country outside the V&A. We are sitting on a gold mine, of valuable items, in great intrinsic value, which show garment-making, textile techniques, with all sorts of commercial value, and it might just as well be buried in a dungeon. Yet this is a county where hosiery and garment-making was critically important – it is part of our heritage going to waste. But this also relates to other aspects of the Museum such as mining and railway exhibits.'

Female, aged 56+, general discussion group

(iii) Skills: Participants assumed that the new museum would effectively remove the need for most volunteers, certainly those with specific skills and interests concerned with non-mining aspects of the Museum. Some participants felt that this seemed to run counter to current national policies of developing voluntary activity, particularly as volunteers at the Museum were often highly trained in what they were doing.

'If you reduce the diversity of the site you reduce the diversity of opportunity.'

Female, aged 56+, general discussion group

'There is a store of volunteers – skilled, undemanding, hardworking, doing what they are told – who are no longer needed. Is there anyone in the Council who has thought about what to do with them and to take advantage of this resource?'

Female, aged 35-55, general discussion group

Participants inevitably opposed the loss of range of aspects for personal satisfaction described in chapter one – the appreciation of the nature and quality of the exhibits and their relevance for the county and its heritage, their sense of contributing to something important, the strong ethos of respect and support for volunteers, the scope for diversity of roles and the enjoyment of working in an environment of shared interests for the wider benefit of other people. And the loss of opportunities for two-way personal development was regretted – learning from professionals and giving to professionals the benefit of their own skills and experience.

Participants did not generally want to think that volunteers were talking the place of paid staff

Most participants needed to think that they were doing something which would not happen if they were not volunteering. Although some thought that, if services were going to be kept for the benefit of the wider population, voluntary staff may take over from paid staff in some services (one said: *‘Whether it is acceptable or not, it is a reality with what is actually happening within our society, as the funds available to provide certain services are depleted’*), most participants felt they worked in partnership with paid staff rather than instead of paid staff. However, some feared that in the new Museum volunteers may take over from paid staff.

‘I would hate, as a volunteer, to think that we are being used to replace paid staff. I would not want to do that.’

Male, aged 56+, general discussion group

Participants felt that museums needed a balance of paid staff for their professional expertise in running a sensitive and complex service and in managing volunteers. This was particularly felt by participants with learning difficulties

Participants thought that in the current Museum, volunteers were intelligently managed. Those in the discussion group with learning difficulties were especially concerned about losing the relationship between volunteers and professional staff as they feared this would adversely affect their professional and personal development.

‘The staff know a lot more [than volunteers] about conservation. We’d be lost without the staff – they guide us. We would not be able to tell the public what some of the objects are – that would not be good for visitors or for us as volunteers because we would feel we are not doing the job as well as we could do.’

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

Indeed, participants with learning difficulties were concerned about the impact on them and of other groups with particular needs.

‘If Snibston went, and I lost my volunteer role, I would be back to where I was before I came here. Once again I would left with nothing. All the progress I have made since being here would be lost.’

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

‘We would not have a chance to interact with the public at all.’

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

'There is a severely disabled group. They need more support than we do. Where would they go? They can't really handle the objects because of the danger to themselves or the objects.'

Female, aged 18-34, learning difficulties discussion group

A key motivation of many participants, and virtually all those with learning difficulties, was the role of the Museum in learning skills, and developing the confidence to enter or re-enter the job market, all in the context of giving practical help to the wider public

The loss of this for participants was strongly felt, both for themselves and for those who follow who could have benefitted in the same way. It was particularly felt by participants with learning difficulties, both for themselves and for other volunteers with special needs. Given the levels of unemployment in some local areas, participants were concerned about the impact on younger people, unemployed, and those particularly looking for skills in public-facing or administrative roles, together with as well as the specialist opportunities provided by the Museum.

Indeed, participants perceived a wider impact on the local community. Local participants spoke of changes in the town, of disappearing facilities, of the fact that the Museum has an impact on the local economy, not just in terms of helping volunteers employability, but also by being a local employer and attracting people into the area, some of whom at least they felt may spend money in the town.

It was not easy for participants to identify mitigating factors for a scenario in which most could find little to favour, where they felt that much was unclear, and where they felt they had been given no alternatives to discuss

Although volunteers participated fully and constructively in all three groups, and said that they welcomed the opportunity to discuss the future of the Museum, discussion were inevitably concerned only with the proposal as it has been put forward for consultation – which participants were always likely to oppose given the nature of their relationship with the Museum. There were no other proposals on the table and little possibility, therefore, of a constructive discussion about how best the Council's objectives could be met.

In their post-discussion questionnaire, participants were asked how opportunities for volunteering could be maximised if the proposal is put into place or what there 'key messages' were for the Council (Appendix 3). This was difficult for participants, some of whom could only say '*scrap the proposals*', to '*think again*', or to ask the Council to consider alternatives:

'Very difficult to see how [opportunities for volunteering can be maximised], with the reduction in opening hours and demand for staff/volunteering positions.'

Male, aged 56+, post-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

'Unsure. Proposals have been vague as to what opportunities are available.'

Male, aged 56+, post-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

Participants' views therefore may well change in the light of further information. They raised a range of issues, identified in this report, on which they would welcome clarification. This may help to provide further constructive feedback on the proposal. It would also help to identify mitigating

factors if they had more than one option in front of them, so they understood where, if anywhere, there may be scope for modification of the proposal.

Participants felt that, were the proposal to proceed, the detail needed to be sensitive to the range of issues described in this report, including:

- Ensuring the balance between paid staff and volunteers was optimised. Too few staff would fail to ensure that the current benefits to volunteers, as described in chapter one, would not be met and the present synergies would be lost. Too few volunteers would have the same impact. A balance of professional staff and volunteers was required so that each can be made as effective as possible.
- Considering in particular the needs of volunteers with special needs and seek alternative ways of providing the kind of wide-ranging, life-changing opportunities which are currently provided by the museum.
- That the range of other social and economic aspirations of volunteers be given due consideration.
- That the future of artefacts either currently in store, or no longer required for exhibiting, should be properly considered so that staff and volunteers can properly secure them for the future.
- Ensuring that the implications for storage and artefact transfer are fully considered and that the present effective partnerships between staff and volunteers are maintained off site to protect the exhibits and provide constructive opportunities for volunteers.

Ultimately the main wish of participants, if change were to take place, would be to broaden out the proposal as it is currently described:

‘[Opportunities for volunteering could be maximised] by broadening the scope of the new museum to include as much as possible as is available at present – acknowledging the vast industry associated with mining: building, technical expertise, domestic arrangements.’

Female, aged 35-55, post-discussion questionnaire, general discussion group

Appendix 1

Background and Research Methodology

LCC's proposal for Snibston

In April 2014, the Council's Cabinet considered a proposal for the future of the Museum and the Council published an information leaflet⁵ which stated:

'We are proposing to refocus the museum at Snibston, which currently includes science, industry and fashion exhibits, into one that is more directly connected to the story of coal mining. Snibston is considered to be one of Britain's most important colliery sites. The proposed museum would tell the story of the Snibston mine, the local people associated with it, and the wider history of coal mining in Leicestershire. Visitors to the new mining museum would access the new displays and the buildings' interior via guided tours following a planned route.'

In summary, the Council proposed to:

- focus on Snibston's mining heritage in a new museum beside the historic pit head building; invest £1.2m in the new museum, but save more than £240,000 a year from the current subsidy for Snibston;
- demolish the existing main gallery and make the site available for building development, with exhibits not required for the new museum being passed to other museums or stored;
- keep the Century Theatre, the railway line and a play area, and invest in improvements to the country park;
- host activities in the Century Theatre.

The Council's consultations on its Snibston proposal

The Cabinet agreed to a programme of consultation in the spring and summer 2014⁶. This included a questionnaire on its website for residents, with paper questionnaires also available at the museum or on request; four meetings for stakeholders, by invitation, with either the Leader of the Council or a chief officer; and a survey of schools, which had recently visited the Museum, on the educational implications of the proposal.

Research objectives

The Council also wished to understand and explore, in more detail, the views of volunteers, who may be particularly affected by the proposal. It therefore commissioned an independent researcher to hold three discussion groups with volunteers.

⁵ 'Have Your Say on Proposed Changes to Snibston Museum', op. cit.

⁶ Leicestershire County Council Cabinet Papers, 1 April 2014, item 10: 'Snibston Proposed Future Offer: Joint Report of the Directors of Adult and Communities and Corporate Resources': <http://politics.leics.gov.uk/documents/s91659/10.%20Snibston%20-%20Proposed%20Future%20Offer.pdf>

The research objectives, within the limitations of three discussion groups, were to help the Council to understand:

- volunteers' perceptions of Snibston and what they value about their current volunteering opportunities;
- their views on the changes being proposed, which elements they support or oppose, and which they have concerns or queries about;
- other issues the Council should consider, how volunteering opportunities could be developed in the proposed new facility, and issues that may require mitigation by the service.

Research methodology

The discussion groups, each lasting an hour and three quarters, took place at the Museum's Century Theatre on 10 June 2014, with a total of 25 volunteers. Two groups were with a cross section of volunteers from across the Museum's various facilities, also broadly reflecting their main demographic characteristics. The third group was with volunteers with learning difficulties or disabilities. Recruitment was undertaken by the Council's Volunteer Development Manager to aim for around eight volunteers at each group.

Discussion followed a semi-structured discussion guide, designed to reflect the research objectives and agreed in advance with the Council. In addition, participants were asked to complete short questionnaires before and after the discussion to capture their most important views.

The profile of Snibston volunteers.

A 2011 report⁷ stated that there were in the region of 85 volunteers registered at the Museum and it is understood that this remains broadly the case. In 2011, volunteers fulfilled 24 different roles including at the Century Theatre, Colliery Heritage Railway, Fashion Gallery, Colliery Guardians project, Collections Facility, Time Team, Snibston Youth and 'What mining means to me'. The report stated: *'Snibston offers unique opportunities tailored to the individual and managed by skilled professionals. The volunteering offer is inclusive and supported by diverse partnership networks. The aim is to improve the health and wellbeing of volunteers and support them to preserve their local heritage.'*

At that time:

- 67% volunteers were male and 33% female;
- 34% were unable to work, 25% were students, 15% unemployed, 14% retired and 12% in work;
- 49% classified themselves as not having a disability and 47% as having a disability;
- 81% were white British, the ethnicity of 16% was not known, with one per cent each being Asian, Chinese or Polish;
- 73% were local, from the LE67 postcode covering the area around Coalville, Ibstock, Markfield and Whitwick.

⁷ 'External Evaluation of Volunteers, Internships, Placements (VIP) Project', Lynn Blackadder, March 2011: http://www.leics.gov.uk/vip_external_evaluation_report_march_2011.pdf

- 36% stated that the main benefit they got from volunteering was personal skills, 33% training and employability, 19% supporting the local community, 9% social aspects, and 2% health and wellbeing.

The profile of discussion group participants

The characteristics of the 25 volunteers who participated in the three groups. were broadly in line with those of volunteers overall. Of participants who provided their profile in the pre-discussion questionnaire:

- eleven were male, eleven female;
- seven were aged up to 34yo, five were aged 35-55, and nine were aged 56+;
- ten had a long-standing illness, disability or infirmity, and nine reported that they did not;
- No participants reported being other than white British.

In addition, the Volunteer Development Manager reported that:

- seven participants were unable to work, two were students, three unemployed, five retired and eight in work;
- two thirds of participants came locally from the LE67 postcode.

Overall, participants' pre-discussion questionnaires show that their views of the County Council were probably broadly typical of residents as a whole.

This research was a qualitative exercise

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is not designed to provide statistically reliable data on what (in this case) volunteers as a whole are thinking. It is illustrative rather than statistically reliable and therefore does not allow conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which something is happening.

Rather, qualitative research is intended to shed light on why people have particular views and how these views relate to the characteristics and the experiences of those concerned. We are dealing with *perceptions* rather than *facts*, although to participants these perceptions *are* facts. This is particularly the case in relation to the research reported here, as many participants were unclear about the implications of the proposal under discussion.

Verbatim quotations have been used only when they exemplify a significant body of view in the group.

Appendix 2

The Financial Context and LCC's 2013/14 Budget Consultations

The financial context

In its spring 2014 consultation document, *'Have Your Say on Proposed Changes to the Snibston Museum'*⁸, the Council set out the financial context to its proposal:

'During 2013, Leicestershire County Council announced that it was facing its biggest ever financial challenge. Our budget decisions were guided by what the public told us were their priorities, in last summer's consultation when residents considered the implications of reducing or protecting different services.

The Council is prioritising services for vulnerable people and making proportionately larger savings in other areas – such as museums. The Council's agreed budget plans include a proposal to save £240,000 from the current subsidy for Snibston – which was originally thought to be £740,000 in 2013/14. However, the subsidy for 2013/14 is now forecast to be £850,000 due to fewer people visiting Snibston. Without changes, the subsidy is expected to rise to £900,000 per year. The current gallery at Snibston requires significant maintenance to the roof and other areas – which would cost £2.2 million over the next five years.

The proposal for a new museum at Snibston would cost around £350,000. Although we have set a target of saving £240,000 per year, our plans could save even more.'

The Council's 2013 budget consultations – the Council's residents' questionnaire

The Council, in its 2013 budget consultation questionnaire⁹, asked residents the following question: *'Universal services are services which we all can use. Regrettably the County Council will need to make reductions in its universal services which are listed below. It's important for the County Council to understand your priorities. To what extent do you think the County Council should make reductions in its universal services listed below?'*

Museums was the tenth most-mentioned service identified by respondents for reduced expenditure out of the 36 services listed, 49% saying that expenditure should be reduced 'to some extent' or 'a great deal', compared with 52% who said that expenditure should be reduced 'not at all' or 'not very much':

⁸ http://www.leics.gov.uk/future_snibston_consultation_document.pdf

⁹ 'Leicestershire's Future – Consultation Results', Leicestershire County Council. October 2013, http://www.leics.gov.uk/leicestershires_future_consultation_report.pdf

Expenditure should 'not be reduced at all'	24%
Expenditure should be reduced 'not very much'	28%
Expenditure should be reduced 'to some extent'	32%
Expenditure should be reduced 'a great deal'	17%

The Council's 2013 budget consultations – qualitative research

The Council also commissioned independent qualitative research, led by this author. Three workshops took place, each lasting three and three quarter hours. A total of 73 participants took part, recruited by a market research company to be a broad cross section – both demographically and attitudinally – of Leicestershire's population. Participants formed nine 'cabinets' to consider the budget situation and 21 service areas. They took a view on what, *prima facie*, they felt the Council should explore further to meet the projected budget shortfall. Senior Council finance officers briefed participants on the financial context and the implications of alternative expenditure scenarios.

Before the discussions, just a quarter of participants considered that, *prima facie*, less money should be spent on the museums service (over half considering expenditure should stay the same). However, following almost four hours of discussion and briefing on the need to make savings, this increased to 64%, becoming the most likely of the 21 services to be contemplated for a budget reduction. Participants generally did not relate to the museums service. Most did not have any experience of it. And they did not associate the service with Leicestershire County Council. As found in previous research, the main driver of participants' views was that museums did not seem to most to be a 'core' County Council activity in the same way as, for example, social care and highways are¹⁰. The report on the workshops¹¹ reflected the discussions on the museums services as follows:

'Despite the fact that one of the workshops took place in one of the Council's museums, the Snibston Discovery Park, participants for the most part did not engage with the museums service. It was among the least identified as 'important' in participants' pre-discussion questionnaires. And it was by some margin least identified in those questionnaires as a candidate for an increase in funding.

The fact that it was barely raised as an issue of concern tells its own story. It was not a top-of-mind priority for participants. It would take residents with knowledge of the service to be able to articulate better (than participants were able or prepared to do) the options for managing the service.

Consequently, when prioritising which services to discuss, only one of the nine cabinets chose to discuss museums. As has been found in previous LCC budget consultation workshops, participants did

¹⁰ 'Leicestershire County Council Budget Consultation 2011/12: Report on General Public Workshops Held on 13, 14 and 16 October 2010' stated: 'There were eloquent defenders of museums, and their value in terms of heritage and education were recognised. However participants did feel that there were communication issues. They felt that the museums should be advertised more and greater publicity should be given to their work with schools': http://www.leics.gov.uk/budget_consultation_2011-12_workshops_report.pdf

¹¹ 'Leicestershire County Council Budget Consultation 2014/15, Report on General Public Workshops Held on 17, 18 and 23 July 2013': http://www.leics.gov.uk/leicestershires_future_residents_focus_group_report.pdf

not see this as a 'core' service. Some felt almost by default that the service did not feel to them as if it should be a council service, which they usually perceived to be one which either everybody could use or is targeted at people with specific needs.

However, on the other hand, no one argued for museums' closure. Rather, participants expected other management arrangements to be put in place. 'Privatisation' was suggested in the sense that it should be possible for another organisation, perhaps a trust, to run it, provided there was continued financial support from the Council to ensure its continuation. Participants generally saw no problem with charges for entry, although they recognised that this itself would make relatively limited inroads into the cost of the service. And they would have no problem in museums utilising community or voluntary support in order to maintain the service.'

Appendix 3**Participants' Verbatim 'Key Messages' to the Council**
(taken from their post-discussion questionnaires)

Q: What ... key messages would you like to pass to the Council about any of the matters we have discussed today?

Group One (learning difficulties and disabilities) (five out of six participants stated views)

'To keep the Museum open for the schools, for people with learning difficulties and for elderly people.'

'It is not [the Council's] to give. We don't want to replace the staff. Who would take the artefacts?'

'Keeping the car parking clear so cars that can park and get out easier.'

'Leave Snibston alone. Build your houses on disused land, like the old factories in the area. Make sure the real people are heard and not just the money talking.'

'Snibston is an easy target but it doesn't necessarily make it the right target. There is hopefully more to society than the bottom monetary line.'

Group Two (eight out of twelve participants stated views)

'Don't close the Museum. It would destroy the town.'

'Improve Snibston as it is, to maximise income.'

'Smoke and mirrors fool no one.'

'Don't change Snibston but try to improve it and build on what's here and try to use more stuff that is in store.'

'Understand the impact of reduced opportunities for the unemployed, 18-25 year olds, and the wider community.'

'That our views are heard and that the volunteers carry on playing [and developing] their role.'

'Listen to what the people are saying. Be more positive on what is happening.'

'Admit what you are proposing to do. Acknowledge the impacts on volunteering, particularly for those with special needs.'

Group Three (all seven participants stated views)

'What happens to the kids who already use Snibby? What about nearby residents? Why is it always about money?'

'Find alternatives. Ask the public what they can do to save money. Save the Museum.'

'A lot of people rely on their interaction at Snibston as an essential part of their life.'

'I would like the Council to think again and look at alternatives for funding the site. Please look past the money aspects and take into account the effect on the local and wider communities and the vulnerable groups within.'

'Where people/volunteers are directly/adversely affected, consideration should be given [to the impact on them]. Consider what alternatives there are to maintaining the facility or improving it. Listen.'

'Lack of confidence that: (i) the proposals have been properly costed and assessed; (ii) the Council wants any form of Museum; (iii) The Council's plans are based on anything other than maximising sales of land for housing.'

'Scrap the proposals. Listen to and act on what the people want. Facilitate and support alternative plans. By doing the above, more volunteering opportunities will be created.'

Appendix 4**Participants' Verbatim Feedback on the Discussion Groups**

(taken from their post-discussion questionnaires)

Q: We're very interested in your opinion of today's discussion group. Please write below whether you found it useful or not useful; enjoyable or not enjoyable; or any other comments about today.

Group One (learning difficulties and disabilities) (four out of six participants fed back)

'Very useful and very enjoyable.'

'Yes, it was very useful.'

'Very interesting.'

'It has been good for us to air our opinion. The chap was delightful.'

Group Two (eight out of twelve participants fed back)

'I found it very useful.'

'Useful if it makes any difference. Well facilitated.'

'The discussion was excellent.'

'Useful. Enjoyable.'

'Good to vent my feelings but not feeling optimistic about the future of Snibston.'

'I don't believe that the consultation document makes clear what a new museum would do and whether it would by its structure prove to be non-viable.'

'Useful, but is it going to be noticed?'

'Views were generally open.'

Group Three (all seven participants fed back)

'I found the discussion group useful. It was invaluable to hear from other volunteer bodies that tap into Snibston.'

'Very useful to be able to discuss and hear other people's/peers' views on proposals. Hope very much that the results are faithfully and fully reported.'

'Useful. Enjoyable. Facilitator very good.'

'Enjoyed the discussion as was able to put our points across.'

'Very useful. But will it be of any consequence?'

'Fairly enjoyable and fairly confident that some of my points have been captured.'

'Very good. Found out good info. Enjoyed it!'

This page is intentionally left blank