

## 8. WEST LOTHIAN CARRIAGE COLLECTION

The Council Executive considered a report (copies of which had been circulated) by the Head of Cultural Services setting out proposals for the disposal of the West Lothian Carriage Collection.

The report recalled that in 1995 West Lothian District Council, with financial assistance from National Museums of Scotland, had purchased eight horse-drawn carriages from Scotmid to assist in developing a museum at Hopetoun House as a tourist attraction, but the museum had never been created.

The report went on to advise that Hopetoun House Preservation Trust had asked the council to remove the carriage collection from their premises by Spring/Summer 2009 as it planned to re-develop the building where the carriages were housed.

The report outlined changes that had taken place over recent years with the collection over the years, such as the redevelopment of the original carriage house at Hopetoun House which had resulted in the carriages being stored in a less suitable building some distance from the House, as well as the sale of two carriages and one horse-drawn cart. There was no other suitable publicly accessible accommodation to house the collection at Hopetoun House.

The Head of Cultural Services proposed that the council dispose of the carriage collection in line with guidelines from the National Museum of Scotland. In the first instance, the option of transferring the collection free of charge to other accredited museums more able to care for and display the collection for public benefit had been explored. Glasgow Museum of Transport and Edinburgh City Museums had both turned down the opportunity to take all or some of the collection. National Museums of Scotland (NMS) had offered to take one carriage and were considering a second. Grampian Transport Museum had made a formal offer on two carriages. Stirling Smith Art Gallery and Museum had also offered to take one.

Currently, four of the five remaining carriages had definite offers of care. If National Museums of Scotland agreed to take two carriages, all carriages would be removed from Hopetoun House by Spring 2009, subject to council approval of the proposed method of disposal.

If National Museums of Scotland decided to take only one carriage, the council would be asked to delegate authority to the Museums Development Officer to seek suitable museums in England, failing which, agreement to send the carriage to the next available national carriage auction in Reading. As requested by members of the Culture and Leisure Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel, the Head of Cultural Services now proposed to ask NMS to waive their share of the proceeds in return for the transfer of the one cart they had indicated they wished to add to their collection.

The report explained that the carriage endowment (and proceeds of any sale after paying 50% to NMS, if required) would no longer be required for care of the carriage collection after disposal. It was proposed that the Council ring fence these funds to be used as a capital fund for the development of West Lothian Council's Community Museums. This would enable West Lothian Council Museums Service to work in partnership with the community museums and take advantage of Heritage Lottery Funding without requiring match funding from the Council.

It was recommended that the proposals for the disposal of the West Lothian Carriage Collection be approved. This would include the proposal by the Culture and Leisure Policy Development and Scrutiny Panel as detailed in the report.

In response to a question raised by Councillor Cochrane, the Library Services Manager considered that none of the carriages referred to in the report were of West Lothian provenance.

#### Decision

To approve the terms of the report.