

Committee(s)	Dated:
Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee	18 th July 2022
Subject: The Monument to the Great Fire of London Full Year Performance Report April 2021 to March 2022	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation's Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	Contributing to a flourishing society, supporting a thriving economy and shaping outstanding environments
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	N
What is the source of Funding?	
Report of: Director of Natural Environment	For Information
Report author: Chris Earlie, Director of Tower Bridge	

Summary

This report outlines the visitor attraction at The Monument for the period April 2021 to March 2022, focusing on the lasting impact of the pandemic on its ability to operate and visitor appetite.

Following closure as a public attraction in March 2020 in light of the pandemic and resulting Government restrictions, The Monument to the Great Fire was closed throughout the financial year 2020/21, due to the lack of scope for maintaining any level of social distancing in light of the severe space limitations within its historic structure. This continued into 2021/22 until Government restrictions (including distancing measures) were relaxed. The Monument saw a number of pilot reopening periods to test visitor appetite and footfall. Following careful financial analysis, it remained open to the public on weekends and school holidays thereafter.

Recommendation

I recommend your Committee notes the details of performance within this report, with specific relation to the lasting impact of the pandemic and the resulting closure and reduced opening levels at the Monument.

Main Report

Background

The most recent report on performance for the Monument was received by the Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee in July 2021, which provided details for the financial year 2020/21.

The Continued Impact of the Pandemic

1. Following closure as a public attraction in March 2020 in line with Government restrictions, The Monument to the Great Fire remained closed throughout the financial year 20/21, due to the lack of scope for maintaining any level of social distancing in light of the severe space limitations within its historic structure.
2. Visitor attractions were able to reopen in mid-May 2021, albeit with strict Government restrictions in place with regard to social distancing. Given the natural space limitations of the entrance and spiral staircase, compliance with such measures was not possible for the Monument and it remained closed.
3. Following legal requirements for distancing being removed in July 2021, the tourism industry saw substantial visitor appetite for measures remaining in place to maximise visitor confidence. Sentiment data showed that over 60% of public respondents stated they would not visit at all without measures in place. Such measures were retained at Tower Bridge, resulting in higher levels of visitors than many of its peer attractions but of course this was impossible for the Monument.
4. A period of reopening was trialled at the end of the summer (a week in August and a week in September to trial both school holiday and 'business as usual' scenarios respectively) with visitor footfall not outweighing the additional cost of providing operational staffing during weekdays, and as such the Monument remained open until the end of the financial year on weekends and school holidays only, in order to reduce losses as far as possible. Ultimately there remained, and continues to be, a lack of public appetite for visiting the Monument due to the severe space constraints within the historic structure.

Table 1 - Monument Income (Apr 2021 – Mar 2022)

	ACTUAL To March 2020/21	Budget April to March 2021/22	ACTUAL April to March 2021/22	Variance to Target Over/(Under)
	£	£	£	
Furlough grants	163,884	1,000	1,068	7%
Ticket Income	(2,678)	121,000	120,851	0%
Retail Income	-	1,000	1,061	6%
Total Income	161,206	123,000	122,980	0%

5. Admissions and retail income is shown here as £121,912 combined, which was attained during the pilot reopening periods in August and September, and across weekends and school holidays in the second half of the year.
6. In total, 28,795 visitors were welcomed to the Monument in 2021/22. This averages 364 visitors per day across weekends and school holiday periods from October 2021 to March 2022.

Table 2 - Monument Expenditure (Apr 2021 – Mar 2022)

	ACTUAL To March 2020/21	TARGET To March 2021/22	ACTUAL To March 2021/22	Variance to Target (Over)/Under
	£	£	£	
Total Employee Expenses	(252,810)	(167,000)	(151,974)	9%
Premises Related Expenses	(73,240)	(2,000)	(2,378)	(19%)
Supplies & Services	(2,093)	(5,000)	(4,502)	10%
Recharges Within Funds	(8,597)	(12,000)	(13,333)	(11%)
Support Services	(95,751)	(89,000)	(91,787)	(3%)
Total Expenditure	(432,246)	(275,000)	(263,974)	4%

7. The overall expenditure position for the Monument was at £263,974 which is a 4% underspend against the revised target. The Monument utilised support made available by central government until mid-May, including all attraction staff being placed on furlough throughout 2020/21 and into the first month of 21/22. For context, the 2021/22 total expenditure figure represents a 38% decrease on expenditure in 2020/21, due to careful planning to reduce the deficit as far as possible.
8. Your committee will be aware that the Monument is staffed from the pool of Tower Bridge employees, for efficiencies in reducing the burden on both attractions by having a shared management and staffing resource – this being an arrangement dating back to 2002. The Monument's ability to operate from a financial viability perspective is based on 120 visitors per day, this being the 'break even' point for income when balancing the additional cost of deploying operational staff to open and manage the attraction. The majority of the saving in the table above was on staff costs, wherein operational posts naturally became vacant due to leavers/retirees, and was therefore achieved without the need for staff redundancies.
9. The Monument retained a proportion of staff costs during the year, which comprised staff involved in maintaining and managing the property while closed, including routine maintenance and security provision. Security patrols were

increased in response to the attraction closure and resulting lack of operational staff presence onsite.

10. Other retained staff costs relate to continuing to develop and deliver the learning programme at The Monument, throughout closure and given the inclusion of the Great Fire within the national curriculum. This currently includes the provision of virtual sessions for schools, the development of dynamic online content for schools studying the Great Fire, and piloting online family learning activities as detailed below.

'Taking Our Services Online' During Closure

11. Throughout the pandemic and thereafter, The Monument became 'physically closed but digitally open'. Similar to its peer attractions, a number of services were quickly developed or redeveloped digitally in an effort to stay relevant, visible and provide meaningful cultural content and learning resources for public engagement during lockdowns and tier restrictions.
12. Despite the Monument remaining closed to visitors, updates to the website and social media were made regularly in an effort to remain visible and 'digitally open'. Website users were offered a series of podcasts and various digital content focused on the Great Fire and the Monument's Frieze.
13. The Marketing team continue to ensure all information and signage, both on site and online are up to date. As part of the on-going marketing plan, media and influencer visits are proactively arranged to maximise profile and awareness.

Education and Community Engagement

14. Despite the Monument's continued closure, the first six months of 2021/22 saw the learning programme continue to engage audiences with its themes and stories. Virtual Q&A sessions proved popular with core Key Stage 1 audiences, as did a collaborative virtual Family Activity Day, delivered in partnership with Barbican Libraries. A new partnership was also established with London Metropolitan University, in which collaboration focused on developing and delivering a module for students undertaking the university's inaugural MA in Public Art and Performance. This project generated creative responses from students, and it is anticipated that the relationship will continue in future years. Community talks have been delivered with AgeUK and Open Age, engaging an entirely new audience for the programme.
15. School groups were welcomed back to the Monument onsite from September. This was facilitated on a pre-booked basis, with the site otherwise closed during term-time weekdays. From September to March 902 Key Stage 1 pupils visited the site, 330 of which were participating in the Great Fire Study Day – a partnership with Guildhall Art Gallery's Learning team and Culture Mile Learning.

16. The new partnership planned and established with London Metropolitan University in 2020/2021 was delivered in 2021/22. Students undertaking the university's inaugural MA in Public Art and Performance participated in virtual workshops with The Monument Learning and Exhibition staff, before devising their own creative proposals for audio interpretation at the site. It is intended that this relationship will continue in future years.
17. With the gradual easing of restrictions, demand for virtual community talks continued and were delivered between June and September, reaching 102 local older people via Artizan Street Library and Open Age.
18. New digital approaches were developed in 2021/22, including a partnership with the Learning and Digital teams at St. Paul's Cathedral to produce a film for schools, available online, and exploring the links between the two sites.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

19. The Monument complements the Corporate Plan in contributing to a flourishing society by providing access to world-class heritage, culture and learning to people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds and in shaping outstanding environments by protecting, curating and promoting heritage assets, cultural experiences and events. This contribution has of course been reduced while closed due to Government restrictions and at a reduced operating model due to lack of visitor appetite given the severe space constraints within the structure.

Financial Implications

20. The Monument's ability to operate from a financial viability perspective is based on 120 visitors per day, this being the 'break even' point for income when balancing the additional cost of deploying operational staff to open and manage the attraction. Aside of this, the Monument retains a proportion of management and staff costs when closed entirely, which comprises staff involved in maintaining the property and increased patrols, including routine maintenance and security provision. Other retained staff costs when closed relate to continuing to develop and deliver the learning programme at The Monument, given the inclusion of the Great Fire within the national curriculum. This currently includes the provision of virtual sessions for schools, the development of dynamic online content for schools studying the Great Fire, and online family learning activities, which regularly see excellent feedback and high levels of participation.
21. The severe impact of the pandemic on the Monument's ability to open as a visitor attraction has resulted in a deficit at year-end for The Monument of £140,994, which marks a 48% reduction on the end of year 2020/21 deficit figure of £268,362. Per a report approved under delegated authority in December 2021, a request was made to the Chamberlain that the final deficit would not be carried into 2022/23.

Conclusion

22. While other attractions such as Tower Bridge experienced positive and continued business recovery following the lifting of distancing measures and throughout the last year, the Monument remained an unattractive visitor proposition in 2021/22 due to its severe space constraints in the context of pandemic recovery. While distancing requirements were a legal requirement the Monument remained closed but was able to reopen in September 2021/22 in line with Government advice. Since this time footfall has continued to be significantly impacted by lack of visitor appetite, given the visitor experience involves a narrow spiral staircase and no potential for distancing.
23. Measures including ticketed timeslots and encouraging the use of face coverings were implemented upon reopening, and a trial week in August saw positive footfall. A second trial reopening week in September after schools had resumed saw much reduced figures during weekdays, resulting in the Monument remaining open on weekends and school holidays only.
24. Despite the closure and impact on income, the Monument saw a reduction in expenditure with the aim of reducing losses and positive development and uptake of its learning provision across 2021/22, both virtual and onsite.
25. Current industry data and sentiment (via London & Partners, Visit England and the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions) predict the capital will not see a return to 2019 visitor and footfall levels until 2023/24.
26. For 2022/23 to date, the Monument resumed full opening hours in April and May but again reverted to weekends and school holidays only following a decrease in visitor footfall on weekdays. It is anticipated the Monument will reopen fully again at the outset of the 2022 summer school holiday period.

Consultees

27. The Chamberlain has been consulted in the production of this report.

Contact:
Chris Earlie – Director of Tower Bridge
Tel: 020 7940 3969
E-mail: chris.earlie@cityoflondon.gov.uk