

Evidence, Engagement and Consultation Summary

Ref no. P5 Relocation of the Leather Museum

Description of proposal

Title for consultation: Relocation of the Leather Museum

We are proposing to move the Leather Museum from its current site at Littleton Street West, Walsall, to one of our existing, more centrally located, town centre properties. We plan to showcase our industrial heritage in a more accessible, higher profile location and will look at new and innovative ways to bring the history of Walsall to life.

Estimated Net Saving / new income 2025/26

£190,000

Summary of evidence, engagement and consultation

123 people commented on this proposal. The proposal is strongly opposed:

- 23% fully support
- 14% support but with concerns / amendments
- 59% do not support
- 4% don't know.

Comments in relation to how the proposal might affect them included:

There is strong attachment to the current building. Many people are concerned about the potential loss of the museum's historical and cultural significance if it is moved from its current location. Several comments suggest that the museum's current location is perfect due to its historical context and the atmosphere it provides, which would be lost if moved to another location or modern building.

"The idea of the current place for the museum is within a building that used to be a leather factory. The inside of the building tells the story of leather beautifully. to move it to a more modern, central building is ridiculous as it will lose the essence of what leather, it's history and the manufacture of leather, is all about. Parking directly opposite the museum is also perfect for visitors, especially if you are to encourage visitors from outside of Walsall."

"The Leather Museum is a wonderful asset for the town. The exceptional skills of local craftsmen and women should be celebrated. The current Victorian factory location of the museum is a huge part of its appeal. Removing the museum to an anonymous unit in the shopping centre would destroy its unique character."

"The Walsall Leather museum is an assist to Walsall, a tourist attraction, it is what Walsall is known for, and because the leather museum is situated in a building which was a leather factory the visitor has a true experience of what the job was like, it has atmosphere and the smell of the leather, from over the years is part of the experience, all of which would be lost by putting it in an empty building."

There are worries about the accessibility and parking at the new location, which could make it difficult for visitors, especially those with disabilities.

"I'm worried that parking for those visiting the leather museum will be too difficult to access."

"I am a paraplegic wheelchair users residing in Terryfield Court, I regularly attend the seminars hosted at the Leather Museum at Littleton Street. If it was to move, I would no longer be able to

safely transport myself by electric wheelchair as the distance would be too far and as such this would negatively impact my wellbeing.”

“The museum being inside the original factory is an important to Walsall’s heritage & culture, it’s no different than any other historical site and should be preserved. Its facilities are accessible & location vital to the community who use it, i.e. those with accessibility issues as it is right in the centre of town where all amenities and support is located. It hosts a variety of community events & workshops that encourage community participation. Moving the location risks destroying this.”

“Is there parking? Is there safe access? Will security be available and have lighting?”

“Part of the issue is the car parking charges, simply moving it centrally will likely destroy the cultural heritage and accessibility - remove car parking charges and promote it more.”

A few comments show that some people think the museum would close under this proposal. Comments also focus on the museum's importance to the community, providing inexpensive activities for families and being a vital part of Walsall's heritage and identity.

“As a family with not much money, the museum provides wonderful inexpensive activities for us over the school breaks. It’s also a great place to meet up with other parents and it’s a vital part of the community.”

“As a family we use the leather museum regularly. It is one of the remaining older properties that helps bring the heritage of Walsall to life for our children.”

“This is our area heritage and is a fantastic facility in a superb building and location. We feel that to move it would lessen its impact and reduce the content.”

“This museum including the building is part of our heritage and gives us all a sense of identity.”

“Heartbreaking move that once done, will not be able to be reversed. Closing the Leather Museum’s authentic venue would be a devastating loss for town’s heritage and local pride.”

There are doubts about the financial savings of £190,000, with concerns that the costs of moving and setting up a new museum could outweigh the savings and will take a long time.

“The relocation will cost more than the savings of £190,000 and a lot of good will be lost. Reputational damage has to be considered. How can this happen for April 2025? It cant.”

“If the plan is to sell the LM building will the receipts be used for the relocation costs?”

“How can you relocate the Leather Museum, yet totally cut its budget? You need money to clear the building, store the objects and machinery, prepare a new space, move objects back in, market the new venue and reopen. This will cost you £190,000 and take at least a year to carry out.”

Some people believe that the museum would be more utilised if it were repositioned centrally and that move could bring footfall back to the centre.

“I think it would be more utilized in repositioned centrally.”

Some people believe that better advertising and promotion of the current museum would be more effective than moving it.

“It’s been there for years. Just advertise it better. It’s not a million miles away.”

There are concerns about the potential negative impact on the museum's visitor numbers and the local economy if it is moved.

“It is affecting everyone in Walsall, it is the main link to our famous worldwide leather trade. To move it from the current historic Leather Centre will kill it off completely.”

Alternative suggestions

- Move to the art gallery sharing space with the Art Gallery for workshops and demonstrations. Or relocate to the old Imperial cinema/pub.
- Create a Walsall History Centre: This would showcase Walsall's history, including sub-factors like Willenhall and its locks history. Enhance the offer by involving / get longstanding Walsall companies to sponsor or showcase their work. Co-locate services at the site.
- Give the museum more freedom to generate revenue or reduce costs by reducing opening hours and increase the number of events at the museum. Run classes. Hire out the museum for other purposes e.g. meetings, ‘night at the museum’. Seek external funding e.g. National Lottery. Increase advertising and town centre signposting.

Overall opinion from engagement and consultation

Respondents do not support this proposal.

Justifiable action from the evidence, engagement and consultation suggested in the Equality Impact Assessment

B – Adjustments are needed to mitigate adverse impact and to better promote equality

Mitigating actions required, if proposal approved

Ensure the new location is accessible for all.

People potentially negatively affected, if proposal approved

People with disabilities, children.

Response from Walsall Council on Proposal Ref P5

Following consideration of consultation feedback and equality impact assessment, Cabinet does not intend to implement the proposal in 2025/26, but it will be reviewed as part of the 2026/27 budget process.