

Southend-on-Sea Borough Council

Report of Corporate Director for Place

to
Cabinet
on

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Report prepared by: Luisa Hagele, Assistant Curator for
Archaeology

Agenda
Item No.

25

The *London* Shipwreck – Seventeenth Century Bronze Cannons

Executive Councillor: Councillor Graham Longley
Part 1 (Public Agenda Item)

1. Purpose of Report

- 1.1 To set out proposals relating to the three historically-significant cannons illegally salvaged from the site of the 17th Century shipwreck the *London*, lying approximately one mile from the end of Southend-on-Sea Pier.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1 **That Members note that funding of up to the full £56,000 is required for returning these unique and historically-significant archaeological finds back with the rest of the collection. If grant funding is not available then this cost will fall to the Council to fund in full.**

3. Background

- 3.1 The wreck of the 17th Century ship the *London* was discovered in the Thames Estuary in 2005, during works in advance of the London Gateway Port development. Following initial investigations, the wreck was identified as the second-rate warship that formed part of the squadron sent to collect Charles II from the Netherlands in 1660 to restore him to his throne. During this journey, the *London* is said to have carried James Duke of York, the brother of Charles II and later also the King of England.
- 3.2 Built in Chatham in 1656, the *London* was one of just three completed wooden 'large ships' of ten ordered by the Cromwellian Navy for the Anglo-Dutch War. Her illustrious career was cut short on 7th March 1665. It had been intended that she would participate in the second Anglo-Dutch War and had been on her way from Chatham to the Hope when she mysteriously blew up at her anchorage at the Nore. The internal explosion killed around 300 people, including thirty women and children who had come aboard to see off their loved

ones. With just 24 survivors, Samuel Pepys wrote in his diary that the 'sad news' of the *London* had been 'taken very much to heart'.

- 3.3 Investigations at the wreck site have been undertaken by Wessex Archaeology, Historic England, Cotswold Archaeology and a local licensed diving team since the *London's* rediscovery. Although the wreck itself lies shattered into two extremely fragmentary pieces, lying 400 metres apart, the site has proven rich in objects with huge research and display potential. Finds recovered have included tools and utensils, fixtures and fittings, ordnance and navigational equipment and an abundance of personal belongings.
- 3.4 As the repository museum for the Thames Estuary, all finds excavated from the *London* legally belong to Southend Museums Service and the Council, whose role remains to safeguard the heritage of the Southend-on-Sea area for the benefit of the local community.
- 3.5 Three Seventeenth Century bronze cannons were illegally salvaged from the wreck site of the *London* in 2008 and are currently residing in the United States of America (USA). The perpetrator has been prosecuted for the theft and was sentenced to 2 years in prison on the 4th September 2015.
- 3.6 The Police, Maritime and Coastguard Agency have undertaken the investigations in Britain, whilst the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI) has been involved with proceedings in the USA. The Maritime and Coastguard Agency have connections within the United States Embassy, who have offered to cover the costs of the return of the cannons to the UK.
- 3.7 The cannons themselves are unique and historically, extremely significant; taken from the Dutch by the English, following a surprise attack during the first Anglo-Dutch War. As far as can be determined, there are no other cannons like this in existence.
- 3.8 Under Article 3 of the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995), Southend Museums Service and the Council are entitled to claim for the restitution of the cannons within a period of three years from the time Southend Museums Service was informed of the location of the cannons (June 2015).
- 3.9 The cannons were purchased by a U.S. citizen (the current possessor) at a legal auction in the USA for a final hammer price equating to £56,000. Under Article 4 of the UNIDROIT Convention on Stolen or Illegally Exported Cultural Objects (1995) the current possessor is required to return the cannons to Southend Museums Service and the Council. However, the current possessor neither knew nor ought reasonably to have known that the cannons were stolen, but exercised due diligence when acquiring them, and thus is entitled under Article 4 to payment of fair and reasonable compensation. The total hammer price of £56,000 is required to compensate the current possessor.

4 Other Options

- 4.1 Charitable funding is currently being sought from the Headley Trust (Headley Museums Archaeological Acquisitions Fund) and the V&A Purchase Grant Fund. Competition for such funding remains fierce each year and there is little guarantee that the Museum Service will be granted all or any of the necessary funding.
- 4.2 Should Southend Museums Service be unable to raise the funds in time, Leeds Royal Armouries have expressed an interest in purchasing the cannons. They would then be in the UK but not in Southend.

5. Reasons for Recommendations

- 5.1 Southend Museums Service intends to bring the cannons back to Southend to be reunited with the rest of the *London* archaeology collection and made available for professional research and the enjoyment of the local community. In order to achieve this end, the Museums Service must compensate the owner the £56,000 hammer price that he paid for the cannons in good faith.
- 5.2 In the longer term, the cannons will be one of the main attractions of the planned 'shipwreck gallery' in the New Museum and entice visitors to the town to view some of its unique and important archaeological collections. It is hoped that such exposure will also help draw more visitors to the town to experience the cultural heritage that the area has to offer.

6. Corporate Implications

6.1 Contribution to Council's Vision & Corporate Priorities

- 6.1.1 The recommendations support the Corporate Priority to Support Southend to be alive with Sport and Culture. They also support the Corporate ambition of a New Museum as a key part of making the town a visitor destination.

6.2 Financial Implications

- 6.2.1 There is a need for a one off payment of £56,000 to compensate the current possessor of the three cannons. Currently there is no existing budget for this payment. However, if Members are minded to approve the purchase of the three cannons then the sum of £56,000 could be met from the Council's Contingency if grant funding is not available.

6.3 Legal Implications

- 6.3.1 There are no legal implications as a result of this report.

6.4 People Implications

- 6.4.1 There are no people implications as a result of this report.

6.5 Property Implications

6.5.1 There are no property implications as a result of this report.

6.6 Consultation

6.6.1 There are no consultation implications as a result of this report.

6.7 Equalities and Diversity Implications

6.7.1 There are no equalities and diversity implications as a result of this report.

6.8 Risk Assessment

Risk	Impact/Likelihood High (H) Medium (M) Low (L)	Mitigation
The Museum Service's shipwreck collection is incomplete and will not fulfil its potential as a major draw for future visitors	H / H	Cannons to be purchased by Southend Museums Service making them a permanent part of the collection for display
The reputation of the Museum Service will suffer	H / H	The purchase of the cannons will confirm Southend Museum's position as a serious service which values its collections.
The service will not be successful in attaining the required level of funding from external sources	H/H	The council agrees to underwrite the cost of the purchase (up to £56,000)

6.9 Value for Money

6.9.1 There is no value for money implications as a result of this report.

6.10 Community Safety Implications

6.10.1 There are no community safety implications as a result of this report.

6.11 Environmental Impact

6.11 There are no environmental impacts as a result of this report.

7. Background Papers

7.1 There are no background papers.

8. Appendices

8.1 There are no appendices.