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### FREE ENTRY FOR HAT WORKS MUSEUM

In line with other national museums and attractions in the North West, Stockport's Hat Works museum will soon be offering free admission to all 'walk-in' visitors.

Since the successful heritage attraction opened in 2000, visitor numbers have been in excess of 30,000 per year. However, the cost of entry to museums generally, including Hat Works, is recognised as a real barrier to visitors.

From Easter 2005, and to coincide with the 5th Birthday of Hat Works, the entry charge of £3.95 will cease. Visitors will be encouraged to take a guided tour for £2.00 each, but can if they wish, view the museum unguided at no cost. Charges will still apply to pre-booked group tours, educational visits and special events.

Councillor Pam King, Executive Member for Leisure and Culture, said: "We took the decision that admission charges for Hat Works should be scrapped in time for its 5th birthday celebrations. This is our gift to all visitors so that everyone will be able to visit the museum and experience Stockport's unique heritage in a fun and accessible way."

This decision means that Stockport has adopted the same charging policy as the Museum of Science and Industry in Manchester, the Imperial War Museum North on Salford Quays and other national museums in London and Scotland. All museums operated by local authorities across Greater Manchester, apart from Wigan Pier, which is run by a trust, have also adopted admission free policies.

Attractions which do not charge an admission fee have seen a significant impact in the number of visitors returning to museums and galleries - an 80% increase nationally and 50% in the North West.

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Since becoming the flagship heritage attraction in the town centre, Hat Works has achieved remarkable success. In 2002 it won Silver in the 'England in Excellence' Tourism awards for Best Small Visitor attraction in the UK and Gold in the same category in the 2004 Manchester Tourism Awards.

Visitors can enjoy a stunning display of hats from fur felt of the early 1800s to catwalk fashion of the 21st century, see working Victorian style machines rescued from former local hat factories, look at the rolling programme of special exhibitions or grab a bite to eat and a drink in the Level 2 Café.

Hat Works is now inviting everyone to join in its 5th birthday party celebrations on Monday 28th March from 1– 5pm. There will be music, balloons, entertainment, face painting, party hat making and a special birthday cake. Admission to the party is free and there is no need to book. This is the chance for all the family to have fun and see what Hat Works has to offer.

For more information on Hat Works and the 5th birthday celebrations, please contact the museum direct on 0161 355 7770.

**ENDS**

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