



MINUTES

NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

2pm to 3.05pm

23 October 2012

Present:

City Councillors:

Bradford (chair)
Ackroyd
Blunt
Gee

County Councillors:

Edwards
Scutter
Toms

Co-opted Non-voting members:

Councillor Hornby (South Norfolk Council), Felicity Hartley (Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society) and Ceri Lamb (Friends of Norwich Museums)

Apologies:

County Councillors Ward (vice chair), Mooney and Nobbs; City Councillors Lay and Thomas; also Councillor Bracey (Broadland District Council) and Charlotte Crawley (East Anglia Arts Fund)

1. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 17 July 2012.

2. THE NORWICH MUSEUMS

The assistant head of museums presented the report, prepared by the Norwich museums manager, and answered members' questions.

Visitor numbers

Members noted that visitor numbers had been affected by the Olympics and the inclement weather but visitor numbers on balance across the Norwich museums appeared to be in line with statistics for previous years. The Bridewell Museum had reopened in July 2012, and was set to achieve its target visitor numbers for the remainder of the year. Members noted that this could be attributed to press coverage and publicity around the refurbishment of the Bridewell Museum and that there would be additional marketing to ensure visitor numbers were maintained.

Finance

In response to a question, the assistant head of museums confirmed that the Norfolk Museums and Archaeology service (NMAS) had been restructured and was employing fewer people but relocation of the regimental and costume and textile

collections meant that as the service used fewer buildings there was a reduction in staffing. However this did not compromise the security of the collections as the numbers of staff working in the museums' galleries had not been reduced.

The assistant head of museums reported that the county council was seeking cumulative budget efficiencies over several years. External funding from the Arts Council could not be used to off set reductions to the local authority's base budget but could be used for specific projects which increased the financial resilience of NMAS, such as supporting the relocation of the costume and textile collection from Carrow House and funding the new commercial manager post which NMAS was currently in the process of appointing. The commercial manager would be part of the senior management team and responsible for maximising income generation and line management of the retail and catering areas.

Funding

The assistant head of museums explained how the Esmée Fairbairn Foundation funding would be used to review the collections across the service. This would include considering the reallocation of items to other museums which could make active use of them.

Temporary exhibitions

The assistant head of museums advised members to visit the Norwich Castle open Art Show (20 October to 9 December 2012) and pointed out that the standard of work from local artists was very high. The East Anglian Art Fund received 35% of the proceeds of sales from the show. The next show would be held in 2014.

The Magic Worlds exhibition, on loan from the V&A Museum of Childhood, would be held from 26 January to 14 April 2013. This nostalgic exhibition would be of interest to old and young alike, particularly in family groups, and links would be made to the toy collection at Strangers' Hall.

The assistant head of museums advised the committee that NMAS was working with the British Council and museums in Beijing and Mumbai to put together an exhibition on the history of tea, including its production and international trade. Further information would be available about this project at future meetings.

In response to a question, the assistant head of museums said there would be connections made between the visiting Empire: Roman Power and People exhibition and local archaeological sites.

Museum and gallery refurbishments

The assistant head of museums said that it was good practice to refurbish and update displays on a cyclical basis to avoid major capital works.

The committee was advised that the introductory film to Norwich Castle and the film for the Boudica gallery would be updated, potentially by using cartoons to create interesting and informative films.

Special events

Councillor Edwards said that the library at Mile Cross had hosted an excellent event on Christmas in the olden days. This had been well attended and older people had spoken to young people about their experiences. He advised that NMAS liaised with the library service when preparing for the Christmas at the Castle event.

Friends of the Norwich Museums

The committee acknowledged the welcome contribution of the Friends of the Norwich Museums who had contributed £25,000 to the refurbishment of the Bridewell Museum and their unstinting support for the Norwich museums.

Museum trainee scheme

(A copy of the presentation is available on the city council's website.)

The assistant head of museums gave a presentation on the museum trainee scheme and answered questions. He explained the selection process and that of the 400 applicants, 60 had been invited to attend assessment centres from which the final eight trainees would be selected from a broad range of life skills and potential, rather than focussing on educational attainment or age. The scheme was a pilot scheme and would benefit NMAS and its reputation, as well as providing a broad experience for the trainees. Trainees would be paid £15,700 a year and should have a good prospect of employment in museums across the country after the end of the year or with NMAS if there was an appropriate vacancy. The scheme was not accredited but this could be considered as the scheme developed.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) thank the Friends of Norwich Museums for its contribution of £25,000 to the refurbishment of the Bridewell Museum;
- (3) endorse the museums trainee scheme.

3. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED to hold the next meeting on Tuesday 11 December 2012 at 2pm.

CHAIR