



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:30 to 16:00

5 March 2024

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair)
Hoechner
Kidman
Schmierer
Wright

County Councillors:

Ward (vice chair)
Brociek-Coulton
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting Members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of the Norwich Museums), Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) and Councillors Graham (South Norfolk District Council) and Booth (Broadland District Council) Councillor Kybird (ex officio member)

Apologies:

County Councillors Birmingham, Reilly and Rumsby, and Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)

Also present:

Robin Hanley, Assistant Head of Museums
Stuart Garner, Operations Manager
Jan Pitman, Learning Manager (Norwich)
Francesca Vanke, Senior Curator of Norwich Museums and Keeper of Fine and Decorative Art

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public Questions and Petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023.

4. Norwich Museums Report – November 2023 to January 2024

The Assistant Head of Museums introduced the report (which is available on the website [here](#)) and proposed that he and his colleagues would present the relevant sections and pause after each section for members to ask questions or comment.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented Section 1, Infection Control Update, of the report. He confirmed that Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) was continuing to monitor infection levels and there had been no disruption found over the winter. The CO2 monitors remained in place across a number of sites. These monitors were also able to monitor the humidity and temperature remotely and some testing with the monitors had allowed for dashboards to monitor levels more closely. Further monitors were being made available to NMS by the County Council's property services to use across more sites. This would allow NMS to use the CO2 monitors to monitor the museums' sites environment as a potential alternative to the current system. The Assistant Head of Museums suggested that, in future, reports to the Committee the section on Infection Control Update could be omitted as this was now part of business as usual and if the situation was to change then this could be reported upon. The Committee supported this suggestion.

The Operations Manager presented Section 2, Norwich Museums Operations, of the report. Due to the ongoing Keep Project, the current opening arrangements were still in place, with the pop-up catering and retail facility within the Rotunda continuing to prove popular. The new entrance area was due to be handed back to NMS in Spring 2024 and would be made available to the public shortly thereafter. He detailed the number of ceremonies that had been held in Norwich Castle over the previous 12 months, which had generated an additional 18,397 in footfall.

The Learning Manager (Norwich) presented Section 3 of the report, Norwich Learning Team Activities – Highlights Report. The service was currently developing a new event for Key Stage 2 pupils at Strangers' Hall focussed on Robert Kett, and this would be piloted in early March 2024. The event would create a new immersive experience for pupils as it would allow pupils to meet different "characters" from that time period. For Key Stage 3 pupils, the Transatlantic Slave Trade event had recently been relaunched. This would continue to be updated to ensure that the subject matter was treated sensitively. A number of events were being planned as part of the Keep Activity Plan in advance of the re-opening, which included a "mystery" play, an immersive play performed by both actors and community groups at the Forum. This would be taking place the same weekend as the Lord Mayor's Procession and therefore would attract additional visitors. During the school holidays, a range of activities had taken place, including the opportunity for visitors to build a medieval town. The service was trialling new ways of engaging with pupils from more deprived areas of the city, which included providing free tickets to the families. The Learning Team continued to engage with a number of community groups and projects such as the UEA Norfolk Initiative for Coastal and Rural Health Equalities (NICHE) Kintsugi Project and The Garage's Creative Well-being Project. Work had started between the Learning Team and visitor services staff to develop twice daily history highlights tours for members of the public by visitor services staff.

In response to a member's question the Learning Manager (Norwich) confirmed that pupils from the Robert Kett Primary School in Wymondham would be invited to take part in the new event focussed on Robert Kett.

A member queried what the sensitivities were around the Key Stage 3 Transatlantic Slave Trade event. In response, the Learning Manager (Norwich) said that the Learning Team worked closely with the Norfolk Record Office to understand the complexities of items in the collection such as the Paston Treasure and the county's links to plantations. The event also sought to highlight the abolitionist movement within Norfolk.

In response to a member's question, the Learning manager (Norwich) said that further work was needed to identify the schools that were not engaging with the learning service. The service would be reaching out to the schools and nurseries within one mile of Norwich Castle to understand the barriers for those attending. This included working with Earlham Nursery to provide transport for pupils to help alleviate this particular barrier.

Members commended the Learning Team on the breadth of events offered and the range of groups that the service worked with and would welcome further information on the work that was undertaken in relation to the effects of arts and culture on well-being. The Learning Manager (Norwich) commented that the service was increasingly using items from the NMS collections and using these in new ways.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented section 4, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update, of the report. The current project was funded through additional funding from the Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Uplift award for the period 2023-26. While the focus of the activity for the current project was not in Norwich, activity in Norwich continued. The report detailed the number of young people who had taken part in activities related to the current project which had been running since May 2023. While the majority of activity took place face-to-face some continued to be hosted remotely. The new project involved NMS working more closely with the County Council's Information and Library Service and activity had therefore taken place at libraries. Involving young people was at the forefront of the project and young people were members of the project steering group to help shape the project and its activities. A key learning from the initial project funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) had been the development of staff to more confidently engage with young people. As previously reported to the Committee a funding bid to the NLHF was ongoing in collaboration with YMCS Leicestershire, and this would be submitted in May 2024 which, if successful the delivery of the project would start in late 2024.

The Chair asked for the terms "intervention" and "opportunity" to be clarified in relation to the Kick the Dust: Norfolk project. The Assistant Head of Museums said that during the development of the initial NLHF funding bid, the service had looked how to classify the different types of contact the project could have with young people and how to record these, as one individual may have multiple contacts with the service through the project. An "intervention" was any interaction that a young person had with the project and therefore it could measure the number of contacts an individual had with the project. An "opportunity" was an event that had been

offered. Using these classifications the service had been able to monitor how the programme was engaging with young people.

In response to a member's query, the Assistant Head of Museums said that the reason digital skills were included as a key aim for the new project was that digital skills were highlighted during a sector wide skills audit. Digital means were also becoming increasingly important to engaging with young people and other audiences. This did not assume that young people only wanted to engage with or to learn digital skills but that they could provide new ways of working with digital mediums. An example of this was a current project that was looking at creating digital resources such as a Zine version of the guidebook for Norwich Castle and digital tours. Young people involved with the Kick the Dust: Norfolk project had also been key in shaping the NMS social media channels. The project had shown the strength of collaboration between services both within the County Council and other organisations.

A member queried whether the University of East Anglia and Norwich University of the Arts students were aware that they were able to attend museums' sites for free when presenting their student ID badge. The Assistant Head of Museums said that NMS worked closely with the universities on this but was reliant on the universities to communicate this with their students. The service would reach out to the universities again to reiterate the offer.

In response to a member's question the Assistant Head of Museums said that he would reach out to the Kick the Dust: Norfolk co-ordinator to get a breakdown of activities that took place within the Broadland District Council and South Norfolk Council areas and provide this.

A member asked whether the NLHF provided information on the criteria it used to assess funding bids and whether the current bid for funding was likely to be successful. The Assistant Head of Museums said that the NLHF had a strategic framework that bids were assessed against. This had recently been refreshed but broadly this aligned with Norfolk Museums Services' values and missions. The service had a strong track record with getting funding both from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and other organisations such as the Arts Council England.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented section 5, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update, of the report. The service had been unable to organise a tour for committee members as the service had reduced the number of tours to the site to allow the level of activity on the site to move quickly. He would liaise with the Committee Officer to arrange a tour for members at a later date. The report had a number of photographs showing progress of the site. The next section of the project to be handed back would be the Percival Wing in April 2024, which would then be opened to visitors. This included the new entrance to the museum, the restaurant and shop. All structural works had been completed within the wing including the mosaic of the City Crest and other tiled flooring. Construction work in the Keep had been focussed on the installation of structural elements on the roof including the new roof platforms and ensuring that these were waterproof. Inside the Keep, the new floor levels had been installed which meant the partitioning of the space and electrical works could start. NMS had been working closely with the British Museum and agreed the loans for the British Museum Partnership Gallery and the interpretive text for the cases. A first draft of

the audio-visual displays had been received and was being considered. The tapestry that would be displayed in the Keep was being put together ready for installation. He said that it looked likely that the Keep would be able to reopen in late summer 2024.

Members congratulated NMS for the segment on BBC Radio 4's Today programme on 27 February 2024 on the Norwich Castle: Royal Place Reborn project. The Assistant Head of Museums said that it was hoped that the Today programme would revisit Norwich to report on progress of the project. The service was always looking at ways to raise awareness of the project.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented section 6, other activity across Norwich museums, of the report. The report included details of a range of activities at both sites. Members were referred to section 6.1 of the report, Museum of Norwich, a highlight during the period had been a Christmas cracker-making workshop. Section 6.2 detailed the activities at Strangers' Hall for the period. Strangers' Hall had had a big year in 2023 as the museum had celebrated its centenary as a museum. Support for events to celebrate this anniversary had been provided by the Norwich Freeman's Charity and the Friends of the Norwich Museums. A key part of this had been the improvements to the frontage of the museums. A highlight in the activity programme in December had been a LED candle-light tour of Strangers' Hall during the evening. This had created a special experience for visitors and was a creative way of using the building and its collections. Due to the fabric of the building, the annual deep clean had taken place in January and February 2024. This was key to maintaining the building and collections as it was important to keep on top of dust and pests.

In response to a member's query the Learning Manager (Norwich) said that a separate Norwich Industries day event had been planned for schools to complement *The Norwich Industries Tours* at Museum of Norwich that were taking place on the first Saturday of the month until April 2024.

Members discussed the *Strangers' Hall After Dark* event and commented that it had been an innovative event and could be held annually. The service could also explore conducting similar events in Norwich Castle following its reopening, an example for this could be Berlin's *Long Night of Museums*, where museums across the city were open and hosted events. The Assistant Head of Museums said that museums felt different at night and the service would need to consider such events and look at suitable events. The sites were occasionally opened out of hours for commercial events or for private hire. The Operations Manager commented that Strangers' Hall was a natural location for a candlelight tour as it would have shown how the building would have been experienced by its occupants. The event had also highlighted the Christmas decorations and the opportunity to develop a core Christmas programme for Stranger's Hall.

The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial update, of the report. The work of curators had been divided between work on exhibitions and collections management. The Curator of Historic Art had been working on reorganising the collection including an audit of the collections. She had also been developing a future watercolour gallery exhibition on Catherine Maude Nichols and other women artists. Due to the works in Shirehall to treat the dry rot, the Senior Curator of Costume and Textiles had been working on collection

management, and this included improving the documentation of the collection. She had been supported by volunteers to examine and repackage items within the collection. On 18 February 2024, the Senior Curator of Costume and Textiles had hosted the launch of a zine by local publisher Common Threads Press on embroidery, which had allowed visitors to view embroidery items from the collections. The Curator of the Norfolk Regimental Museum had been hosting students from Norwich University of the Arts. This followed from the relaunch of the website, which had attracted students to use the collections as a resource in their work. The Curator of Modern and Contemporary had recently worked with the Learning Manager (Norwich) on events related to the display of the film *Britannia* by Amarety Golding in the Timothy Gurney Gallery. She had also been working with the East Anglia Arts Fund on an exhibition within the T Galleries of Roger Ackling's work. The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art had been working on the Turner exhibition at the Time and Tide museum; *Crossings, Constructions and Connections* which had recently closed. She was now working on a forthcoming Norwich Castle exhibition; *JMW Turner and Changing Visions of Landscape*.

Members commented that they were pleased to see the forthcoming exhibition on women-only artists in the watercolour gallery to highlight the work of women artists in East Anglia. The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums said this would form part of a longer-term project to exhibit the work of women artists from the region.

The Operations Manager presented section 8, other developments, of the report. The Shirehall Courtroom works were ongoing to treat the dry rot. The work continued to be very complex due to the nature of the building and the number of structural timbers that had been affected. Due to the complexity and additional issues found during the course of the work, it was developing into a major capital programme as a number of additional points of water ingress had been found. Issues with subsidence had also been found within the building, which were believed to have been caused through the construction of the courtroom as it was likely that a slice had been cut from the Castle Mound to provide space to build the Courtroom. The service had a duty of care of the building to address the issues and was looking at ways to maintain appropriate access to all areas of the building for ongoing maintenance work once the project was completed. The Wider Impact Group was working alongside the Keep Project and the report detailed the activities that the Group was covering. Activity had recently increased due to the forthcoming handover of the Percival Wing. This activity included the introduction of a new ticketing system and a review of the customer journey. The customer journey would be very different from the original experience as visitors would be split between pre-booked tickets and those purchasing on the day. As the museum had been kept open throughout the project work was looking at bringing those galleries that had been closed to visitors back online, which included The Egyptian Gallery. A number of legislative changes had been made in regard to security and health and safety and these needed to be considered and implemented.

A member queried how the works to Shirehall would be funded. In response, the Operations Manager said that the current project was funded from Norfolk County Council's capital funding. The wider works were still being scoped and sources of funding would be explored.

The Operations Manager presented section 9, visitor numbers, of the report. It was anticipated by the end of the financial year 2023/24 that visitor numbers for Norwich Castle would reach 125,000. This meant a return to pre-pandemic levels of visitors to the Castle. Other sites had also seen increases to the visitor numbers.

Members thanked the Assistant Head of Museums and his colleagues for the report.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the Norwich Museums Report November 2023 to January 2024; and
- 2) ask the Assistant Head of Museums to liaise with the Committee Officer to organise another site visit of Norwich Castle for committee members.

5. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, addressed the Committee. A written report had been circulated to members (which was available on the website [here](#)). The Friends supported the Norwich Museums in a number of ways including support to Strangers' Hall for its centenary year, which had included funding to update displays using archive materials. Within Strangers' Hall the Friends had also been able to support the cleaning of a carpet through the bequest of a Friend. The Friends were looking forward to organising a tea party for its members and volunteers that had supported and worked on the Friends Tapestry that would be hung in the Keep upon its completion.

Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS) addressed the Committee. NCAS had restarted its talks and events programme with a talk from the Vice-Chancellor of Norwich University of the Arts. Further talks would be taking place in April and May, details of which had been published on the NCAS website. This included a collaboration with the Norfolk and Norwich Festival to hold a talk with an artist. She highlighted that students were able to attend NCAS talks for free. NCAS had worked with the Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art to host a Welcoming Patron event at Norwich Castle to welcome new patrons of the organisation. The support that NCAS provided to small local artists continued with the second round of bids for the *Small Grants Fund* having recently closed.

RESOLVED to thank Felicity Devonshire and Danusia Wurm for their reports and record the Committee's gratitude to the voluntary organisations that support the Norwich museums.

6. Schedule of Meetings – Civic Year 2024-25

(The chair agreed to take this as an urgent item).

The Committee Officer highlighted that the following schedule of meetings for the Norwich Area Museums Committee was proposed. This would be subject to approval at Norwich City Council's annual meeting.

RESOLVED to note the following schedule of meetings:

Tuesday 4 June 2024 at 14:30
Tuesday 3 September 2024 at 14:30
Tuesday 3 December 2024 at 14:30
Tuesday 4 March 2025 at 14:30

CHAIR