



NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

2pm to 4pm

17 July 2012

Present:

City Councillors:

Bradford (chair following appointment)
Ackroyd
Blunt
Gee
Lay
Thomas

County Councillors:

Ward (vice chair following appointment)
Mooney
Edwards
Toms

Co-opted Non-voting members:

Councillor Bracey (Broadland District Council); Councillor Hornby (South Norfolk Council), Charlotte Crawley (East Anglia Arts Fund); Felicity Hartley (Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society) and Ceri Lamb (Friends of Norwich Museums)

Apologies:

County Councillors Nobbs and Scutter

1. TOUR OF THE CECIL BEATON DIAMOND JUBILEE EXHIBITION

The committee undertook a guided tour of the Cecil Beaton Diamond Jubilee exhibition, which was on loan from the Victoria and Albert Museum, immediately before the start of the meeting.

RESOLVED to thank Charlotte Crawley for leading the tour of the Cecil Beaton Diamond Jubilee exhibition.

2. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

RESOLVED to appoint City Councillor Bradford as chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

RESOLVED to appoint County Councillor Ward as vice chair for the ensuing civic year.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 19 March 2012, subject to noting that Councillor Kemp (South Norfolk Council) was not present and therefore deleting him from the list of co-opted members present at the meeting.

5. NORWICH MUSEUMS

The Norwich Museums manager presented the report and together with the head of museums and archaeology answered members' questions on the report.

Visitor numbers

During discussion the committee considered the profile analysis of visitor numbers and the trends in different categories of visitor numbers at varying times. It was noted that there were more fee paying visitors in school holidays and that change over in exhibitions also affected visitor numbers. Members also noted that it was difficult to capture the number of disabled visitors and that there were concessionary tickets available for the unemployed and their families. The Norfolk museums and archaeology service (NMAS) carried out a "mosaic" analysis of visitor postcodes periodically but could not do this on a regular basis. An integrated box office/retail software system was being procured and would make it easier to report visitor and retail statistics in future.

The Norwich Museums manager said that the museums and archaeology service was about to launch a museums pass for young people aged 16 to 25 years. Discussion ensued about the need to encourage young people to visit museums who were no longer eligible for child tickets (5 to 16 years) or students. The Cultural Olympiad Weekend was specifically aimed at this demographic. Members were also advised of the work with unemployed people and that concessionary tickets were available. Under-sixteens could not visit the museums unless accompanied by an adult for child protection reasons. The NMAS encouraged the use of family tickets, children's activity events and school visits.

Members noted that the success of "pop in for a pound" ticket which had been well promoted and was popular. It was particularly useful for people to visit the museum after work or school to see a particular exhibition and complemented other ticket use. The scheme was going to be extended to the Bridewell Museum.

Funding

Members of the committee noted the purchase of the glass sculpture by Geoffrey Mann "Flight Take Off" with funding from the Art Fund Collect Prize and discussion ensued on the acquisition of art and items by curators in accordance with the NMAS acquisitions display policy. Fund raising was made for particular purchases which came up for auction and were particularly relevant to the city, eg, the roundels purchased with funding from the Victoria and Albert Museum.

Councillor Toms asked about the Birds exhibition in 2014 and was advised that the exhibition would focus on the relationship of birds to people and include natural history, jewellery and paintings from local artists.

Retail

The committee noted that the net profit of the shop at Norwich Castle was 15% and that the net profit margin was less for the smaller shops at Strangers' Hall and the Bridewell. The committee also noted that bouncy balls were the best selling item in

the shops and that collections of goods such as scarves and stationery were being developed to reflect the museums' collections.

Discussion ensued on the problem of the location of the shop in Norwich Castle and unlike other museums this was separate from the reception desk and entrance/exit. The head of museums and archaeology advised members that it was not practical to ensure that people left the museum through the shop.

Exhibitions

Charlotte Crawley reported on the arrangements for the Norwich Castle Open Art Show 2012. The show would be bigger than previous shows, with works of art being displayed from a good cross-section of professionals and amateurs, and with a new regional focus on Norfolk and its neighbouring counties; Essex, Cambridgeshire and Suffolk. Visitors to the exhibition would be able to purchase paintings with a debit card rather than by cheque, which would be easier for administration purposes.

Capital programme

The Norwich museums manager reported that visitor numbers to the Bridewell were greater than projected and there had been good press coverage on its reopening. A visit to the Bridewell Museum took about half a day which was longer than expected. Although there had been requests for a café it was not feasible and visitors were allowed to take a break and go out for refreshments and return to the museum.

Whilst noting that the reopened Bridewell Museum was "fantastic" a member pointed out on behalf of Councillor Scutter that the advertisements advising members of the public about the re-opening had not included the actual date. It was noted that the canopy was a temporary one to see how it worked in the courtyard but would be replaced with a better one.

Councillor Bracey, referred to the Royal Norfolk Museum Collection, and said that whilst he appreciated that there were other museums in the county that exhibited memorabilia from the RAF and the Royal Navy, there should still needed to be a central location in Norwich to reflect all three armed services.

Discussion ensued on the Courtroom which had ceased use as a court in the 1980s and how it would be used once it was redecorated. Members were advised that oral histories were being collected and one member said that she had served on jury service there. Suggestions for its use included reference to the re-enactment of trials at the Guildhall by actors and the committee considered that the Courtroom would be a good venue for similar re-enactments.

Teaching museum

Discussion ensued on NMAS's initiative to become a teaching museum on the lines of teaching hospitals, teaching school and teaching theatres. Members were advised that there would now be 6 new entrants starting one-year contracts in January 2013 and that 3 of them would be based in Norwich. The teaching museum would also work with independent museums and share training and good practice with their starter posts.

Curators report 2010-11

Councillor Gee praised the curator report and said that he had found it “interesting and absorbing”. The head of museums and archaeology said that the chief curator would be very heartened by his comments. It was noted that the curator report for 2011-12 would be available in the autumn.

Other news

Members praised the 3D video projection on Norwich Castle which had been part of the city’s Olympic celebrations and the farewell to the torch from Norwich Castle.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) ask the Norwich museums manager to continue to produce monthly update reports for members;
- (2) focus on the improvement of retail and visitor numbers at future meetings.

6. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

RESOLVED to hold the next meeting at Norwich Castle on Tuesday 23 October 2012 at 2pm.

CHAIR