



## NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

2pm to 3.45pm

19 March 2012

**Present:**

**City Councillors:**

Bradford (chair)  
Fairbairn  
Thomas

**County Councillors:**

Nobbs (vice chair)  
Edwards  
Scutter  
Toms  
Ward

**Co-opted Non-voting members:**

Councillor Bracey (Broadland District Council); Councillor Kemp (South Norfolk Council); Charlotte Crawley (East Anglia Arts Fund); Felicity Hartley (Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society)

**Apologies:**

City Councillors Banham (other council business) and Grahame, and County Councillor Mooney

### 1. TOUR OF THE NEW TITIAN EXHIBITION

The committee undertook a viewing of the Titian's "Diana and Actaeon", which was on tour from the National Gallery, London.

### 2. MINUTES

**RESOLVED** to approve the minutes of the meeting held on 10 January 2012, subject to inserting "unchanged" to the resolution of item 4, future management of the Norfolk museums service, so that it reads as follows:

**"RESOLVED**, with 8 members voting in favour; to recommend to the Norfolk joint museums committee that the current arrangements for the delivery of the Museums and Archaeology service in Norfolk remains unchanged."

### 3. GENERAL UPDATE ON THE NORWICH MUSEUMS

The Norwich museums manager, Norfolk County Council, presented the report which had been deferred at the last meeting of the committee and since updated. The head of museums and archaeology, Norfolk County Council, and the Norwich museums manager answered members' questions. The assistant director of cultural services, Norfolk County Council also commented.

## **Visitor numbers**

During discussion the committee considered how income could be generated at the shop and the café. Members suggested partnership arrangements with a local department store and better signage from the street to promote the shop and café. A member also suggested that merchandise in the shop could reflect the collections, such as crafts used in the production of textiles. The head of museums and archaeology said that the café was quite busy at lunchtimes with more people coming in just to eat. There were times that the café was at capacity and additional tables were provided in the school holidays. An admissions charge was not made for people who wanted to use just the shop or the café. Officers had undertaken a review of the museums' commercial activities and had visited Brighton Museums to get an idea of what worked there. The museums and archaeology service was also working with a local retailer to develop commercial products, such as bags and scarves, based on the Norwich textile collection.

The chair suggested that there was potential to promote the Norwich museums by using display cabinets and pictures at City Hall which would be seen by visitors to the council and could generate visits to the collections held in the museums.

During discussion members referred to the reduction in admission numbers in August 2011 and considered that it would be useful to have a break down of attendance figures. The committee noted that admission numbers were not in decline with school visits being on a par with the previous year. Members were advised that visitor numbers could be analysed and that a breakdown could be provided based on admission ticket type.

## **Funding**

The head of museums and archaeology said that the Arts Council England Major Partner Museums funding would likely be around £3.6m over the 3 years. She explained that the Norfolk museums and archaeology service (NMAAS) application had received the second highest score in the evaluation of the bid. The East of England had done well with Cambridge University Museums receiving the highest scores.

Councillor Bracey referred to the display of the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum collections and said that the Royal Air Force (RAF) and the Navy should also be represented. The head of museums and archaeology said that the arrangement was with the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum Trust who owned the collections. There were other national organisations and museums that displayed collections from the RAF and the Navy.

The committee discussed the salary budget savings and noted that there were opportunities for county council employees in the museums and archaeology service to take secondments on fixed term contracts, which provided career development opportunities.

## **Theft of Nelson objects and attempted theft of rhino horn**

The head of museums and archaeology answered questions on the on-going police investigation into the recent theft of the Nelson objects and the attempted theft of a 19<sup>th</sup> century, taxidermy specimen, a rhino head and its horn. An independent review of security was underway, conducted by the national security advisor for the Arts Council. The county council had also asked its internal auditors to also look at the security system at the museums. The exhibition of the Titian masterpiece demonstrated that the National Gallery had confidence in the security systems in place at Norwich Castle Museum. The review would be thorough and reported to members as soon as appropriate. Members were also advised that the county council was responsible for insuring the collections held in the Norwich museums.

Councillor Ward suggested that NMAS recruited more volunteers to support the museums staff and provide additional security.

During discussion members expressed concern that they had not been aware of the thefts until they had read about them in the press. The head of museums and archaeology apologised to the committee for not advising members in a timely way. She explained that it had been necessary to take a low key approach until the reason for the breach in security had been identified but accepted that members had the right to know at the earliest opportunity, and definitely before any press report. The county council had also asked for a review of communications of major incidents so that lessons could be learned from this incident.

Members discussed how they would like to receive information in future and it was agreed that they would like regular monthly updates on the museums service in Norwich and that this would be sent to members by email.

## **Recent and current exhibitions**

Members noted the prestige of the Norwich Castle Museum being the only regional museum to hold the Titian exhibition as part of the National Gallery's outreach programme. Members also commented on the quality of the non-reflective glazing.

## **Project updates**

The Norwich museums manager and the head of museums and archaeology reported that the Bridewell Museum would be opening on 3 July 2012 and would open all year round on Tuesdays to Saturdays. The official opening would be the previous weekend. In the past the museum had been closed in the winter months because it had been difficult to heat.

Members were advised about the improvements to the Colman Galleries due to reopen at Easter 2012. The old heavy wooden doors had acted as a barrier to the galleries and would be removed and replaced with new glass doors. However the old ones would be retained in case of a future use for them.

### **Courtroom, Shirehall Study Centre**

Members were advised of the work to create a study centre in the courtroom in the Shirehall and that there was a demand from schools visiting the museum. This would include the reinstatement of the route from Norwich Castle to the Shirehall through the spiral staircase. The county council's building maintenance budget had paid for the works and Arts Council funding would fund the displays.

### **Norfolk and Norwich Festival – Museums at Night**

During discussion the vice chair referred to the celebration of Museums at Night on 19 May 2012 and said that he welcomed the return of the free entry event. Charlotte Crawley said that the event was being publicised in the Norfolk and Norwich Festival brochure.

### **Buildings update**

During discussion members noted that planning applications had been submitted to the city council and English Heritage for a scheme to address the problems of roosting pigeons on the roof of Norwich Castle.

The Norwich museums manager advised the committee that the costume and textile library and all study resources were now available at Norwich Castle Study Centre. It was noted that the entrance to the Norwich Castle Study Centre was through the old Regimental Museum entrance and that there had already been a number of visitors showing an interest in the new resource.

### **RESOLVED to:**

- (1) note the report;
- (2) ask the Norwich museums manager to provide regular updates which will be emailed by the committee officer to all committee members.

### **4. CHANGES TO COUNTY COUNCIL'S CABINET MEMBER FOR CULTURE, CUSTOMER SERVICES AND COMMUNICATIONS**

### **RESOLVED to:**

- (1) record the committee's gratitude to County Councillor James Carswell for his work as the cabinet member for culture, customer services and communications;
- (2) note that Councillor Barry Stone is the new cabinet member for culture, customer services and communications at Norfolk County Council.

CHAIR