



NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

14:05 to 15:30

9 December 2014

Present:

City Councillors:

Button (chair)
Blunt
Bradford
Price
Maxwell

County Councillors:

Bremner
Dearnley
Watkins
Morgan

Co-opted Non-voting members:

Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)
Charlotte Crawley (East Anglia Arts Fund)
Rory Quinn (Friends of Norwich Museums) – standing in for Ceri Lamb

Apologies:

County Councillors Sands (M) and Gihawi and City Councillors and Councillor Bracey (Broadland District Council) and Ceri Lamb (Friends of Norwich Museums) and Councillor Hornby (South Norfolk Council)

1. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIR

As Norfolk County Council had now made their appointments for the civic year, the process to select a chair took place.

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Sally Button as chair for the remainder of the civic year.

2. APPOINTMENT OF VICE CHAIR

As Norfolk County Council had now made their appointments for the civic year, the process to select a vice chair took place.

RESOLVED to appoint County Councillor Bert Bremner as chair for the remainder of the civic year.

3. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

4. MINUTES

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 17 June 2014.

5. THE NORWICH MUSEUMS – MEMBERS' BRIEFING DECEMBER 2014

Rachel Kirk, the museums manager presented the report and answered member's questions.

She reported that a voucher scheme which included entrance to Stranger's Hall and the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell - in conjunction with Norwich Castle Museum - needed further development, explaining that day trippers often do not have time or inclination to visit all museums within one day. She said it was possible that this may be developed into a county-wide, two week voucher aimed at holiday makers to the region.

Rachel explained that there had been issues regarding visitor numbers to Stranger's Hall as the Tudors had been taken off the school curriculum. As such, visitor numbers had been down and were proving difficult to turn around. She added that archaeology is now a part of the curriculum and as such visitor numbers to the Castle Museum had increased. Taking into account the 'Storming the Castle' attraction, which engages pupils in maths problems, she said that the education side of the museums service was doing well, although a little unsettled.

In response to a member's question, the museums manager agreed that it would be worth exploring extended timescales for tourist tickets to the museums such as those issued at the historic dockyard in Portsmouth. Another suggestion was to examine a similar option to that employed by the Eden Project in Cornwall, namely free re-entry within one year which could incentivise additional visits to the city, encouraging further spend within shops and cafes. The museums manager said that these options could be born in mind, but would need to be closely examined to see which model would fit best with existing offers. She also clarified that school visits are included in the total visitor number section of the figures circulated prior to the meeting.

Rachel said that the possibility of online ticketing was also being examined although progress was proving slow in this area. She explained that this was due to software issues and trying to ensure that functionality matched across all county council and museum service systems. Members expressed surprise that online ticketing was not available and also that tickets for museums were not able to be purchased via tourist information centres. There was a consensus that museum tickets for any museum in the county should be available at any tourist information centre in the county.

She went on to highlight the upcoming Manet exhibition, which she explained would receive publicity through both advertisement and editorial content in the Eastern Daily Press. In response to a member's question, she explained that touring exhibitions tend to take a fixed fee from the museum (rather than a percentage of ticket sales) and the museum covers some of the cost of transporting items to the exhibition as well as some of the staffing costs included in that move. She added

that it was better value for money to be involved in touring exhibits which visit the museum on a temporary basis rather than putting together a special exhibit themselves.

The museums manager then explained some of the commercial developments within the museums service, including hosting weddings at both the Castle Museum and Stranger's Hall. In terms of the castle, both the Keep and the Colman Art Gallery were licensed for wedding ceremonies, although as the museum was open seven days a week, these would be evening ceremonies only. Stranger's Hall would look to open to the public on Sundays, allowing weddings to take place on the more popular day of Saturday. It was considered that visitor numbers were unlikely to be affected by this change of day as long as clear communication took place to ensure people were aware of the switch to Sunday opening.

Members agreed that, as long as care was taken in the way in which the buildings were used, weddings appeared to be a valuable way to help toward the budget shortfall and maintain the buildings for visitors to enjoy.

In response to a member's suggestion, the museums manager agreed that it would be useful to bring a report to committee after a year of holding weddings to see what - if any - effect this new venture had had on visitor numbers and funds raised.

RESOLVED to note the report.

6. NMS COLLECTIONS RATIONALISATION STANDARD REPORT

The museums manager clarified to members the way in which items were accessioned to the museums service and the reasons behind their acquisition. She then gave reasons for those items featuring on the current rationalisation report.

She then talked to members through all items on the list highlighting that much of its content was not relevant to collections held in Norwich museums.

RESOLVED to note the report.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Before closing the meeting, the museums manager explained that a press release would be given regarding a crowdfunding campaign, intended to raise money to re-gild the frame of the popular 17th century painting, The Paston Treasure.

A member agreed that crowdfunding was an excellent idea within the museums service and it should be explored for use throughout public services.

CHAIR