



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:30 to 15:35

5 September 2023

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair)
Hoechner
Kidman
Oliver
Schmierer

County Councillors:

Ward (vice chair)
Birmingham
Brociek-Coulton
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Janey Bevington (substitute for Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)) and Councillor Graham (South Norfolk District Council)

Apologies:

County Councillors Reilly and Rumsby, Councillor Booth (Broadland District Council) and Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Also present:

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. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 June 2023.

3. Norwich Museums Report – May to July 2023

The operations manager 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 operations manager presented sections 1 and 2 of the report. He confirmed that the Covid-19 measures, as detailed in the report, were still in place. The restaurant

would be opening in the following months which would increase the offering of refreshments to visitors. In respect of the number of ceremonies at Norwich Castle numbers for July and August 2023 were strong and the exact figures would be reported at the next committee meeting.

The learning manager (Norwich) presented section 3 of the report, Norwich Learning Team activities – highlights report. He highlighted the work that the service had done regarding Early Years learning through a partnership with Earlham Nursery. This partnership allowed the service to interact with families in a holistic manner and it was looking at ways of improving access for these visitors. The focus on improving access was a key focus of the service, and this would form part of a review of the learning service. Through the work undertaken with children with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) the service had been looking at different approaches to delivering the material. Members were referred to the number of activities that had taken place for a range of learners through events and conferences.

In reference to the section 3.5 of the report, Visitor Programme Activities, the learning manager (Norwich) said that a highlight had been the activities that took place during Refugee Week 2023 in partnership with New Routes and Art at Work Community interest company (CIC). Staff from Morgan Sindall had been able to provide a demonstration of the crane used for the Keep project to the Snapdragon group. The Snapdragon group had been able to see how the crane used by Morgan Sindall worked thanks to the staff on site. Both the Snapdragon and Snaplings groups continued to receive positive feedback.

The summer programme of visitor activities at Norwich Castle had focussed on *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester: Norfolk's Royal Shipwreck: 1682* exhibition. The museum had partnered with the Royal National Lifeboat Institution (RNLI). The activities would help to raise awareness of the work of the RNLI across and give visitors of Norwich Castle a better understanding of water safety throughout history.

The learning manager (Norwich) referred members to section 3.6, Museum of Norwich and section 3.7, Strangers' Hall, of the report. Both museums had been working with a range of partners to deliver activities for visitors to the museums. This included The Garage, New Routes, the City of Ale and the Mancroft Advice Project's young parents group.

A member commented that it was positive to see the range of activities that were provided and the range of partners the service was working with.

In response to a member's question the learning manager (Norwich) said that he would need to complete the review of the learning programme in order to provide detailed information on schools that were not engaged with the service and to understand the barriers.

The chair commented that it was positive to see the support from the Norwich Freeman's Charity for the Art Teachers' Masterclass held at the Norwich Castle.

The learning manager (Norwich) presented section 4, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update. The report covered the initial project as funded by the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NLHF) which had now been concluded and the next phase which was funded through an Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio

Organisation Uplift award for three years. While the activities of this phase of the project would be focussed in Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn and Thetford, some activities in Norwich would continue. The service was currently developing the programme further and would be working with the Norfolk Library and Information Service (NLIS) to provide activities to young people. There had only been a small amount of feedback but this had shown a positive impact on the wellbeing of the participants. As previously reported to the committee the service had worked with YMCA Leicester to submit a round 1 funding bid to the NLHF *Grants for Heritage* which had been successful. This would allow both organisations to work on developing a Round 2 bid, which would allow for project delivery to start in late 2024.

The operations manager presented section 5, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update. The project was on track for the handover of the Percival wing to the Norfolk Museums Service to be completed by October 2023. The Keep would be reopening at Easter 2024. The Changing Places toilet that had been handed back to the service in August 2022 was available for members of the public to use free of charge and was being used.

The operations manager presented section 6.1 of the report, Museum of Norwich. The museum had held the successful exhibition *Threads of Connection: A Creative Response to Our Textile Heritage* which had been produced in collaboration with Art at Work CIC. The exhibition had focussed on the Norwich textile industry and works produced to promote wellbeing and good mental health. Subsequently Art at Work had applied for NLHF funding which would allow the organisation to be based at the museum for three years. A range of activities had been held at the Museum of Norwich, including an activity based on the museum's shoe collection during the May half-term holiday and activities for Refugee Week, where the Museum of Norwich staff worked with the county council's People from Abroad Team. The Museum of Norwich had also taken part in the Norwich Lanes Fayre during which the museum opened rooms not usually used old shop and was able to offer over 400 visitors the Kett's Rebellion Virtual Reality experience. He highlighted that the Museum of Norwich had recently made a new acquisition of some coins that had been held by a then aged four Joy Burton during the Baedeker Raids in 1942. These coins were a significant artifact that told of the effect of the Baedeker Raids on Norwich.

A member asked for clarification on the historical context to the *Threads of Connections: A Creative Response to Our Textile History* exhibition. The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative arts said that the exhibition had focussed on wellbeing and the textile heritage of the city. There was a strong heritage of the weaving and textile industry in Norwich, which was presented to members of the public in both the Museum of Norwich and Strangers' Hall.

The operations manager presented section 6.2 of the report, Strangers' Hall. The museum had held a range of activities for Refugee Week 2023, including an interview for Radio Norfolk highlighting items in the Strangers' Hall collections. The final Refugee Week event coincided the City of Ale festival. This had involved local brewers partnering with brewers from Flanders to brew new beers to celebrate the history of 'The Strangers' in Norwich. A key celebration for Strangers' Hall had been the centenary celebrations of the museum that took place in July 2023. The museum had been supported by The Norwich Freeman's Charity and Friends of Norwich Museums for the celebration. This had included redesigning the store front to update the window displays. The new displays had been commissioned by the artist to

showcase the museum's history. New interpretation panels had also been installed within the museum that included archive photos and documents from when the museum first opened in 1923.

A member commented that the new window display was very engaging and the museum could be considered a 'hidden gem' in Norwich and the new frontage would encourage new visitors to the museum. The museum would be taking part in the Heritage Open Days and provide free entrance on certain days which would allow visitors who may not ordinarily be able to afford to visit the museum, the opportunity to do so.

The senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative arts presented section 7 of the report, Norwich Curatorial update. A number of events and activities had been held based on the Gloucester exhibition. The exhibition had attracted over 60,000 visits to date. A highlight had been a Black History event which celebrated Jamaican Independence Day.

The senior curator of Norwich museums was currently working on two Turner exhibitions, one that would be in the Time and Tide Museum in Great Yarmouth and another that would open in Norwich Castle in October 2024, as part of this she had been working on loan requests. The curator of historic art had recently made a major acquisition, including a painting by van Ruisdael. This was the first van Ruisdael painting in the Norfolk Museums collections. Van Ruisdael had been influential in the development of the Norwich School of Artists.

The curator of modern and contemporary art had been working on a new project that involved a local artist to reimagine how paintings are viewed by hanging some works in Norwich Castle upside down, this project, *Five Paintings* would be at Norwich Castle between 30 September 2023 and 31 March 2024. The curator of Norfolk Regimental Museum had recently made acquisitions, one of these was a diary from a Prisoner of War in Germany and accompanying letters that had been sent to the individual's mother in Norfolk. The senior curator of archaeology continued to be occupied with the Keep project, including updating the displays in the Boudica gallery.

In response to a member's question the senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative arts said that Norfolk Museums Service had a number of processes in place to safeguard against any items from the collections going missing. This included documentation on every item and regular key audits to ensure that only the appropriate people had access to the collections.

A member queried what would happen with the items from the Gloucester exhibition when it was deinstalled. The senior curator of Norwich museums said that the painting that was in the gallery would be installed in the Time and Tide museum, plans for the other objects were still being developed with involvement from The Gloucester 1682 Trust.

In response to a member's question the senior curator of Norwich museums confirmed that she would bring an update on the work of the senior curator of costume and textiles to the next committee meeting. During the period of the report the senior curator of costume and textiles had been occupied with collection stores move to allow for the remedial works to Shirehall.

The operations manager presented section 8 of the report, other developments. The work to combat the dry rot in Shirehall had started on 4 September. There had been a delay to the commencements of the works due to the complex methodology needed to install the scaffolding that would protect the building. Due to the extent of the damage due to the dry rot, a number of structural works would need to be completed, including replacement of affected timber. The service had worked closely with city council planning officers to secure the appropriate permissions to carry out the works. As the service was also looking to address the issues more extensively to prevent the situation from re-occurring, the works would likely take six months to complete. The operations manager confirmed that the external lift that had been damaged through vandalism was now fully operational as the replacement glass panel had been installed.

The Wider Impact Group had been started as part of the Keep project to help facilitate the delivery of the project. The Wider Impact Group had been particularly busy due to the handover of the Percival wing on 11 October 2023. As part of this the group had developed the plans for the new restaurant and retail shop. The report included photographs of the chosen colour palette and furniture for the restaurant. As the restaurant would be free to visit, the service had chosen a range of archive photographs of Norwich Castle that included Victorian images of its use as a prison to its development into a museum to show the history of the building. The new glazed roof would also give visitors views of the castle which had not previously been visible. The new branding for Norwich Castle that had been developed by the Wider Impact Group was being rolled out across the museum, including updating the signs for the galleries.

The operations manager presented section 9 of the report. The visitor numbers showed a strong uplift at Norwich Castle due to the Gloucester exhibition that had been particularly popular. It was likely that 2023 would see visitor numbers for Norwich Castle to return to six figures. The other museums had also seen uplifts in visitor numbers compared to previous years which could be a reflection of increased confidence of visitors following the Covid-19 lockdowns.

The operations manager gave an update on the social media performance of each of the Norwich Museums sites. The full report would be circulated to members outside of the meeting. The figures showed that the use of Instagram was continuing to see the largest growth in engagement, with Reels in particular being popular. Each site had taken place with the hashtag #MuseumWeek which increased engagement. The Museum of Norwich Instagram page was seeing a strong growth in follower numbers and engagement, and some of the most popular posts included those that gave more information about objects and archive footage. The service was monitoring Twitter following its rebrand to X and the new Meta owned social media platform Threads to understand the future of both platforms.

The members thanked the operations manager and his colleagues for the report.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the Norwich Museums Report May to July 2023; and

- 2) ask the senior curator of Norwich museums to provide an update on the work of the senior curator of costume and textiles to the next committee meeting.

4. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

The chair introduced the report from the Friends of the Norwich Museums, which and been circulated to members and was available on the website [here](#).

Janey Bevington, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS), addressed the committee and said that NCAS had held a successful art auction at City Hall. The society's annual general meeting had been well attended. A programme of talks for the autumn and beyond had been scheduled including artists from the Royal Academy of Arts, Cornelia Parker and Mali Morris. NCAS were closely monitoring the replacement of the Hay Hill Poirier sculptures. A permanent art gallery for NCAS and other art societies was still being sought within the city.

RESOLVED to thank Janey Bevington and Felicity Devonshire for their reports and record the committee's gratitude to the voluntary organisations that support the Norwich museums.

CHAIR