



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:30 to 15:50

4 June 2024

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (Chair, following appointment)
Caine
Kidman
Schmierer
Wright

County Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (Vice-Chair, following appointment)
Rumsby
Ward

Co-opted non-voting Members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of the Norwich Museums), Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) and Councillor Booth (Broadland District Council)

Apologies:

County Councillors Birmingham and Reilly, and Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund), Councillor Graham (South Norfolk Council) and Councillor Kybird (ex officio member)

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. Appointment of Chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Huntley as Chair for the civic year 2024-25.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED to appoint County Councillor Brociek-Coulton as Vice Chair for the civic year 2024-25.

3. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public Questions and Petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

5. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2024.

6. Norwich Museums Report – February to April 2024

The Assistant Head of Museums introduced the report (which is available on the website [here](#)) and together with colleagues presented the relevant sections to allow for members to ask questions or comment.

The Operations Manager presented Section 1 of the report - Norwich Museums Operations. It was reported that, due to the ongoing Keep Project, the current opening arrangements were still in place; and the catering and pop-up retail store in the Rotunda were still in operation. He highlighted that the number of ceremonies held during the previous 12 months had been 718, which had generated an additional 17,734 visitors in terms of footfall.

The Learning Manager (Norwich) presented Section 2 of the report - Norwich Learning Team Activities – Highlights Report. It was reported that the service had now run the Key Stage 2 Kett's Rebellion learning session three times, and this had generated positive feedback especially on the interactive nature of the session. The Early Years and Family Saturdays was a key part of the learning team's delivery and provided opportunities to test out ideas for sessions, which could be included in the school holiday programme. Through the Early Years and Family Saturdays, the service continued to provide free family passes to those from areas of deprivation or other access needs. Around 25% of passes issued had been redeemed and the service was looking at ways the level of take-up could be improved.

Improving access to the Norwich Museums collections was a focus of the Learning Team and this included tours of the Museum of Norwich that complemented the *Norwich Works: The Industrial Photography of Walter and Rita Nurnberg* exhibition at the Castle. This provided additional local context and history of the exhibition. For the *Norwich Works* exhibition, the Learning Team had once again worked with Daniel Jillings to provide British Sign Language tours. This had been an activity that had been part of the Keep Activity Plan and was continuing to develop as an approach for exhibition at the Norwich Museums.

A number of other events and activities had taken place over the period in partnership with other organisations such as The Garage's Creative Well-being workshop, a visit from the Norwich International Youth Project to the Museum of Norwich and the ongoing Community Culture Club programme funded by the Norfolk Initiative for Coastal and Rural Health Equalities (NICHE). A presentation on the Community Culture Club would be provided to members at the end of the formal meeting.

As part of the Castle Keep Project Activity Plan, the Learning Team was working on “From Norwich with Love”, performances that would be held at The Forum on Saturday 13 July 2024 as part of the Lord Mayor’s celebrations which would be an interpretation of local history.

A member commented that it was positive to see within the report the teacher training events and that he hoped these were an annual event. The Learning Manager (Norwich) commented that the event had been happening for several years, but the event may need to be reviewed to include engaging with other providers of teacher training in Norfolk.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented Section 3 of the report - Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update. Since the publication of the report, to the end of May 2024, there had been a total of 1749 interventions with 822 individuals over 1500 hours of activity. The majority of the activity was delivered in person, but some activity was conducted remotely. Since April 2024 the Kick the Dust project had been funded by the Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) Uplift Award for the period to 2027. Support for the project had also been provided through other partners such as Public Health Norfolk, to support activity that focussed on mental health. While the focus of the ACE NPO funding was areas outside of Norwich due to funding from other partners this meant that activity could continue to take place within Norwich.

The Assistant Head of Museums highlighted ~~to members~~ that over 90% of the activities had been shaped and designed by young people, which was a testament to ensuring that there was sustained engagement. The report detailed the feedback that had been received from participants and the impact the activity had had on their mental health using the Warwick-Edinburgh Mental Well-being scale. The majority of responses agreed that the activity had had a positive impact on their mental health and well-being.

The Assistant Head of Museums confirmed that the Round 2 funding bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) in partnership with YMCA Leicester for the Your Heritage Your Future (YHYF) project had now been submitted. The bid would be considered in September 2024 and if approved the project would commence delivery in late 2024 across the East of England and East Midlands. The BHYF project would look to share experiences across the museums sector on how to work with young people and developing programmes such as the paid traineeships that NMS had provided.

The Chair commended the service for the Kick the Dust project for 2018 to 2023 which had far exceeded the initial targets set and proved valuable for young people across the county.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented Section 4 of the report - Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update and reported that the service was close to being able to reopen the Percival Wing to the public. This would be another significant milestone in the project as it would allow the main entrance to the Castle to be used for visitors. The hoardings that had been erected in front of the main entrance would also be moved which would provide a cleaner view of the Castle. The glazed atrium of the entrance would also

include the shop, restaurant and education space. Once the Percival Wing was reopened the hoarding line between the Rotunda and the entrance could also be removed. The construction works within the Keep were ongoing and roof platforms had now been installed, which marked a significant step for the construction works in the Keep. Construction would likely finish in late 2024. For the British Museum Partnership Gallery, the service was working closely with the British Museum on the interpretation panels. The Assistant Head of Museums confirmed that once the Percival Wing had reopened, that a tour for members could be arranged.

A member asked the Assistant Head of Museums to detail some of the challenges that the service had had to deal with over the course of the project and whether any of the legislative changes to Fire Safety Regulations would impact visitor numbers once the Keep was fully reopened. The Assistant Head of Museums assured members that the service worked closely with a fire safety specialist on fire management, which included close collaboration with the fire brigade and so was confident that all legislative requirements were being met while maximising occupancy rates. The safety of visitors, staff and volunteers of the Castle and all museum sites was a priority for the service.

The Assistant Head of Museums said that a number of unforeseen circumstances had impacted the project. The contract for the works had been awarded in 2020 and there had been impacts on the construction industry due to the COVID-19 pandemic. The availability and cost of steel had been impacted by the War in Ukraine. The principal contractor, Morgan Sindall Construction had worked throughout the project to ensure that momentum of the project was ongoing throughout. A number of challenges were due to the age and history of the building. Throughout its history several changes had been made to Norwich Castle not all of which had been recorded. When making these discoveries the service and contractor worked closely with the City Council as landowner, the conservation officers within the planning department and Historic England to understand the impacts of changes to the building and the impact of any discoveries on the plans for the construction.

In response to a member's query, the Assistant Head of Museums confirmed that the NLHF and other partners had provided support for the additional costs associated with the project. The ticket prices for Norwich Castle were currently lower than before the start of the project and free entry to the Museum of Norwich was included within the price. The price of tickets in future would match the cost of tickets to Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse as this was comparable to the length of a visit at Norwich Castle. The Norfolk Museums pass would continue to be available for visitors. The service was very aware that ticket prices could be a barrier to access for visitors, but a balance had to be made between generating income and providing access. The service provided a number of initiatives that helped with access to the museums, such as the Heritage Open Days and targeted free or low cost admissions for particular groups.

A member asked whether as part of the Keep Project, consideration had been given to provide more seating within the spaces for those individuals who needed to rest while visiting the museum. The Assistant Head of Museums confirmed that accessibility was at the heart of the project, including enabling

access to the roof for everyone. The design for spaces would include seating and throughout the project the service had been listening to comments from visitors and adjusting its plans to reflect some of the comments received.

The Assistant Head of Museums presented Section 5 of the report - other activity across Norwich. The report detailed a range of activities at both sites, which demonstrated the work of staff to provide an engaging programme for visitors. The Museum of Norwich worked with a number of organisations and partners to host a range of events in different ways, which included activities related to the Kick the Dust project, Art at Work Partnership and English Plus. Staff at the museum had also either created their own exhibitions, such as *Muslims: Norwich* or displayed work related to the *Norwich Works* exhibition.

In 2023 Strangers' Hall had celebrated its centenary and a number of programmes and activities had finished in relation to this. A major part of this had been conservation and restoration work to the items within the collection and the building. Members were referred to the activities at both museums as part of the holiday programme.

The Chair commended the staff of both sites on the range of activities that took place at the Museum of Norwich and Strangers' Hall.

The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums presented Section 6 of the report - Norwich Curatorial update. The Curator of Historic Art was working on a range of activities including a bequest that had been received of a painting and drawings by John Sell Cottman. These works would be displayed in the Castle in due course. She was also working on a watercolour exhibition on the work of Catherine Maude Nichols. Adjacent to the work on the Catherine Maude Nichols exhibition she was conducting research on women artists from East Anglia who's work may have been underrepresented.

The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums was continuing her work on the Turner exhibition for Norwich Castle called *JMW Turner and Changing Visions of Landscape*, which would open in the Autumn and would be part of a number of exhibitions over the coming year featuring Turner. This exhibition would therefore be part of publicity programme from the Tate galleries.

The Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art had been working on the *Roger Ackling: Sunlight* exhibition which had opened recently at Norwich Castle. This exhibition had been produced in collaboration with the East Anglia Arts Fund. As it had been the 35th anniversary of the Costume and Textile Association the Senior Curator of Costume and Textiles had hosted a lecture about the association. She has been working on the accession of a shawl that had been the prototype of one gifted to Queen Victoria by local manufacturers. As the collections had been moved for the Shirehall works the Senior Curator of Costume and Textiles was working with volunteers to update the documentation and online content about the costume and textiles collection.

The Curator of the Norfolk Regimental Collection had been working with a Museum Trainee on a Far East Prisoner of War exhibition for the next year, to commemorate a number of key anniversaries ~~were happening~~ in relation to WW2. She had also been working with Fine Arts students from Norwich

University of the Arts to use the regimental collection as basis for their own works. The Senior Curator of Archaeology was largely occupied with the Keep project but continued to work on research projects.

A member commented that they were looking forward to an exhibition of women-only artists in future to highlight this group.

The Operations Manager presented Section 7 of the report - other developments. The Shirehall works were nearing completion, and it was likely that these would complete in August and September. This would enable the service to recommence tours of Shirehall.

The Operations Manager presented Section 8 of the report - visitor numbers. The updated figures had been circulated at the meeting and were available on the Council's website [here](#). He highlighted that the visitor numbers for Norwich Castle for the 2023/24 financial year had seen a substantial increase in comparison to the 2022/23 financial year. This had largely been due to the exhibitions that had taken place at the Castle. He was pleased to report that Norwich Castle had seen a return to six-figure visitor figures. The increase in visitor numbers for the other sites had also seen increases in comparison to 2022/23.

In response to a member question the Operations Manager confirmed that the increased figures in April 2023 were due to the Gloucester exhibition, which had closed in September 2023.

The Operations Manager confirmed that the service would take part in the Heritage Open Days for 2024, and it was hoped that the Percival Wing would be open by then which would allow for an increase of visitors for the Heritage Open Days.

Members were assured that the subsidence that had been discussed at the previous committee meeting had been historic subsidence and not new subsidence. Buildings continued to move and settle and this was the cause of new cracking. The historic subsidence was evident when walking through Shirehall as the floor was not level throughout the building. The structural engineers who had been working on the Shirehall Courtroom project had assured that the building was not at risk of further subsidence.

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

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the Norwich Museums Report February to April 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.

7. 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](#)). She highlighted that the Friends had had their Annual General Meeting and the support they had provided to help improvements to the Museums. This included restorative work to a 18th Century painting in Strangers' Hall. The Friends would be hosting a number of events over the following months, which included a talk entitled "Historic Buildings Mythbusting". The Friends would be present at the Royal Norfolk Show to encourage new members to join.

Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS) addressed the Committee. NCAS had had sell-out talks since the last committee meeting. This had included talks in collaboration with the Norfolk and Norwich Festival. The talks were a key aspect of NCAS' fundraising efforts to support the Contemporary Art Gallery. Through the fundraising NCAS had part-funded the purchase of work by Roger Ackling which was part of the new exhibition at the Castle. The organisation continued to fund the Small Grants Scheme and would be awarding prizes to students at the Graduate Show at Norwich University of the Arts. Some of the talks that NCAS would be hosting over the summer included one on the industrial and social heritage of Norwich and Cambridge. The programme of talks were available on the NCAS website.

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.

CHAIR