



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:15 to 15:30

7 June 2022

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair -following
appointment)
Kidman
Thomas (Vi)
Schmierer
Wright

County Councillors:

Birmingham
Reilly
Ward

Apologies:

City Councillors Osborn, and, County Councillors Brociek-Coulton, Rumsby and Watkins, Councillor Kybird (ex officio member) (other council business), Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Danusia Wurm and Janey Beddington (her substitute) (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) and Councillor King (Broadland District Council)

1. Appointment of Chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Huntley for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of Vice Chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Brociek-Coulton for the ensuing civic year.

3. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

4. Declarations of interest

None.

5. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 1 March 2022.

6. Norwich Museums Report – February to March 2022

The assistant head of museums introduced the report 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 assistant head of museums presented the first section of the report. There were measures in place to improve ventilation and ensure the safety of visitors and staff as visitor numbers began to return to pre-pandemic levels. Volunteers were also being welcomed back into the museums.

The operations manager presented section 2, Reopening the Norwich Museums. Members noted that in April there had been 99 ceremonies, with a footfall of 2,494, showing a return in confidence as Covid-19 restrictions were removed. In reply to a member's question, the operations manager said that the ceremonies and footfall were as expected and set to increase but was still down on pre-pandemic levels. He explained that the footfall had been less because of the restrictions on the number of guests attending ceremonies. This had increased from less than 30 to 50 in March.

The assistant head of museums services presented section 3, Norwich Learning Team activity – highlights report, and said that Colin Scott, the Eastern Area learning manager and Jan Pitman, the Western Area learning manager were supporting the Norwich learning team on a temporary basis whilst the post of learning manager Norwich was vacant. The team continued to have a strong relationship with schools and, whilst noting the reduced capacity, bookings had been full for the autumn and spring terms. A positive of the pandemic, was that staff had acquired a high level of skills to provide digital resources to complement school visits. In reply to members' questions, the assistant head of museums explained that as with all learning events, the *Life at the Time of the Great Fire of London* event at Strangers' Hall was linked to the national curriculum. Events were developed in conjunction with teachers and were piloted and tested. The programme was constantly evolving to reflect changes in the curriculum. The team had received the Sandford Award which demonstrated the quality of the learning programme.

During discussion, Councillor Ward said that as chairman of Norfolk County Council, accompanied by the then Lord Mayor, he had attended the 600th anniversary of the Great Fire. The county of Norfolk had been the largest contributor to the fund to rebuild London after the fire.

The committee noted the visitor programme as set out in section 3 of the report. This included events as part of the Love Light festival, with Norwich Castle being at full capacity throughout. Members noted that an audio series *Unstitched* had been produced to provide the stories behind textiles in the NMS collection. As part of the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn activity programme tales of Norwich's historic past had been commissioned and launched; events tailored for Early Years audiences and a poetry trail around the city. These demonstrated the reach of the project beyond Norwich Castle.

Members noted the *Kick the Dust* statistics. A bid to the Heritage Lottery fund was being prepared on partnership with the Leicester Kick the Dust project to secure future funding when the current funding stream ended in March 2023. The assistant

head of museums invited members to contact Christine Marsden, the Kick the Dust project coordinator for further details on projects in their wards/divisions.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn and updated members on the progress of the construction works, including preparations for the installation of steel works in the Keep and the concreting of the base for the lift shaft in the main stairwell, in consultation with Historic England and the city council's conservation and design officers at every stage to ensure that the new structures fit the purpose but preserve the historic fabric of the building. The new accessible toilets and changing place facility would be operational from the end of the summer. A pop-up café would be used to service the Rotunda at busy times to supplement the main café/restaurant which would be expected to be handed back in the second phase by Easter 2023. Demolition of the old shop area was currently underway. The contractor had started work on the relocation of the old Boardman stairs to follow the original stair line one outside the Keep. The project was progressing well with detailed planning work being undertaken on the exhibition areas. These would include a new permanent gallery to display objects on long-term loan from the British Museum. Members also noted the work of the Wider Impact Group which included work on the content and visual displays for a new Dungeon Tour, the new ticket barrier system and the new restaurant/café, and retail area. Regarding timelines, the entrance/café area was expected to be available next year, with construction works in the Keep expected to be completed by September 2023, followed by work on the exhibition spaces for opening in 2024.

During discussion, the assistant head of museums confirmed the arrangements in place to mitigate increased construction costs and that contingencies were in place. The objects on permanent loan from the British Museums focused on the medieval period. The artefacts on display would place Norwich and Norfolk in the national and international context, which as the second richest city traded with the Arab world and beyond.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6, Other activity across the Norwich Museums and updated members on the activities at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and Strangers' Hall. Covid-19 would soon be part of our past. KonectBus had donated posters, used on local buses to promote social distancing and public health messaging, to the *Picturing the Pandemic* contemporary collection.

In the absence of the senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative art, the assistant head of museums presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial update. *The World We Live In: Art and the Urban Environment* exhibition was the first to take place in the T (temporary) galleries since the improvements to the environmental controls. Dr Rosie Gray was also working on the *Slaves of Fashion* by the Singh Twins, which had received lots of interest, and would cross reference with the textile and costume collections. Dr David Waterhouse, the senior curator of Natural History, had been interviewed for Open Country on BBC Radio 4 and had referred to the Morpho butterflies, part of the Margaret Fountaine butterfly collection held by NMS. He was also working with Paston College and the Kick the Dust team for a film collaboration about the Deep History Coast. Dr Francesca Vanke, the senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative art had worked on the acquisition of the JMW Turner's *Walton Bridges* which was currently on tour. This would be the first time that a painting by Turner would be on

public display in King's Lynn. Members were invited to an open afternoon at Lynn Museum to launch of the exhibition.

The operations manager confirmed that the Project Refresh capital works had been completed by 14 April 2022 and that NMS was confident that it could continue to host national and international touring exhibitions in the temporary galleries and provide a stable environment. In reply to a member's question, the operations manager explained that the use of CO₂ monitors minimised the risk of Covid 19 for customers and staff in areas where there was no mechanical or natural ventilation. It would be possible to set the environmental control systems to 20 per cent fresh air to mitigate the risk whilst having the capacity to control humidity and temperature. Members noted that works to resolve the infestation of dry rot in the Shirehall Chambers was expected to be completed over the next 12 months.

The operations manager advised members that it was difficult to compare visitor numbers over the last three years because of the lockdowns and museum closures due to Covid-19. There had been a significant uplift in visitor numbers from January to April 2022 which demonstrated that visitor confidence was returning.

The assistant head of museums presented the social media update for the Norwich museums. ([This report is available on the council's website and was circulated to members after the meeting.](#)) The Norwich Museums now have 65,048 followers in total across the four platforms and shows a good level of engagement. Members also noted that there had been 4,000 views of the Norwich Castle blog (that includes stories from Strangers' Hall and the Museum of Norwich) from March to May, and notably included details of Norwich Castle built in Lego built by an enthusiast. During the three-month period there had been over 7,000 views on the Norwich Castle YouTube channel. NMS continued to develop good quality social media. This included celebrating International Museums Day in May and the National Lottery Heritage Fund's *#ThanksToYou* week on social media, as well as on site.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank the assistant head of museums and operations manager for presenting [the report](#);
- (2) note that members of the committee:
 - (a) are welcome to observe learning events and that a schedule of available dates will be circulated;
 - (b) may visit any Norfolk Museums Service site in Norfolk by showing their councillor passes;
 - (c) are invited to contact Christine Marsden, Kick the Dust, for further details of Kick the Dust projects in their wards/divisions;
 - (d) are invited to attend a site visit to Norwich Castle to view the progress of the Norwich Castle – Palace Reborn project, on Tuesday, 6 September 2022 (to be held before the commencement of the committee);

- (3) members of the committee are invited to attend the open afternoon to launch the Turner exhibition at Lynn Museum on 23 June 2022 at 14:00.

7. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

The chair said that Felicity Devonshire had submitted a report on behalf of the Friends of the Norwich Museums. The Friends had held their centenary lunch at Houghton Hall and expressed their gratitude to their patron Lord Cholmondeley and Lady Cholmondeley for their hospitality. The report also detailed the items on loan from NMS which were incorporated into the exhibition celebrating the founding of Houghton Hall 300 years ago. Jamie Jamieson was one of the sponsors and it was considered fitting that his uncle's WW1 medals were on display.

RESOLVED to note the report.

8. Schedule of Meetings

RESOLVED to confirm the schedule of meeting for the remainder of the civic year 2022-2023, as follows:

Tuesday 6 September 2022 at 14:00

Tuesday 6 December 2022 at 14:00

Tuesday 7 March 2023 at 14:00

(At the end of the formal business of the meeting, Samantha Johns, collections development manager, Norfolk Museums Service gave a power point presentation. [A copy of the presentation is available on the council's website with the papers for the meeting.](#))

CHAIR