



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 16:00

3 March 2020

Present:

City Councillors:

Grahame (substitute for
Councillor Schmierer)
Maxwell
McCartney-Gray
Price
Wright

County Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (vice chair) (in the chair)
Ward

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society), Councillor Easter (South Norfolk)

Apologies:

City Councillors Huntley (chair) and Schmierer; County Councillors Clipsham, Jones, Nobbs and Watkins; and Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)

(The chair welcomed Councillor Easter, who had been appointed to represent South Norfolk Council as a non-voting member on the committee, to his first meeting.)

1. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

2. Declarations of interest

None.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 7 January 2020.

4. Norwich Museums Briefing – December 2019 to February 2020

The assistant head of museums presented the report, highlighting issues which were of particular interest to members.

During the presentation, the assistant head of museums and Dr Francesca Vanke, senior curator, Norwich Museums, referred to the report and commented on the exhibitions at Norwich Castle and the recent acquisitions. Members were advised that during the construction phase of the Keep project, there would be no major exhibitions in the main temporary exhibition galleries, which were being used for school visits and informal learning programme activities. The *Deepening* film

installation was an example in the Boudicca Gallery of using spaces differently. The National Portrait Gallery was unable to extend the loan of the Sir William Beechey portrait of Lord Nelson, the forerunner to the full-length portrait owned by the city council that was displayed at the Halls. The curator updated members on the recent art acquisitions as set out in the report.

The committee also noted there would be a range of activities and events at Norwich Castle to complement the Natural History Museum's touring exhibition of '*Dippy*' the *Diplodocus* at Norwich Cathedral (11 July to 31 October 2020). The Bellamy Quilt would be displayed in the T galleries as part of the Textile Treasures exhibition at the end of July. Members were also advised that the scope of the *Castles in History* exhibition had been extended to include castles from around the world.

The assistant head of museums reported that in January, the annual deep clean of Strangers' Hall had been undertaken. This work was critical given the nature of the building and the collections held there. The museums service was specifically grateful to the volunteers who had supported the museum's staff in this work and made the collections "safe and secure" for another year. The clean had provided an opportunity to revisit the collections and refresh a small display in the Toy Room of children's books and toy characters. Preparations were being made to celebrate the museum's centenary in 2022-2023. Strangers' Hall was the first social history museum in the UK.

Referring to the report, the assistant head of museums referred to activities at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell. Hannah Henderson, curator, had presented a paper to the 6th annual SHARE/UCM Collections Care Conference on the partnership with the escape room operators, History Mystery. Norfolk Museums Service was embracing every opportunity to bring income and new visitors into the museum. The success of this approach was demonstrated by History Mystery's launch of its second game, *Goin' up the City*. The committee also noted the schools' programme, including the sessions on Florence Nightingale delivered in the museum's undercroft, and the work with older people, comprising the monthly dementia-friendly coffee mornings and discussions with the co-ordinators of Friend in Deed about arrangements for a small intergenerational group visit in the spring.

The committee noted the work of the learning team and the management of the changing environment at Norwich Castle. The main exhibition gallery spaces were being reserved for school and informal learning events for children in the school holidays. There had been very good feedback for the Green Man Winter Story Telling activities. The committee also noted that the area for young children and families, 'Make Believe' in the Keep would remain in place until the start of the construction works. The *Songs of Winter* festive vocal workshops were another example of the learning team, in collaboration with Voice Project, to bring singing into the Castle and to using spaces in a different way. The Castle Writers, creative writing workshops for adults, encouraged engagement with the museums and collections. The learning team was currently planning its contribution to the Norfolk Creativity and Well-Being week in May 2020.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and commented on Norwich Castle's partnership with the Norfolk Youth Offending Team and its recent programme to work with young people at risk of offending. He said that this

reinforced the value of engagement with young people in a neutral and supportive setting. The end of programme celebration was an opportunity for the young people to show their families the work that they had done.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and presented the update on the *Kick the Dust: Norfolk!* project. In addition, he reported the following statistics on the outcomes of the project (appended to the minutes of this meeting.) In reply to a question, the assistant head of museums said that each young person could attend unlimited activities and that free museum admission passes had been provided to young people engaging in the project, and evidence from ticket records showed that the passes were being used.

The committee noted that the Museum Club had been relaunched and it was proposed that the group would gain curation experience through the 'Castle on Tour' pop-up exhibition. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, the learning team would have a limited offer for schools at Norwich Castle during the construction phase and would be undertaking outreach visits to schools to maintain connections with schools. Members also noted that, in conjunction with the *Spotlight* exhibition, an A-Level Art Masterclass had been held facilitated by acclaimed artist, Sam Drake, and that the learning team had hosted a training event for 120 University of East Anglia PGCE trainee teachers.

During discussion, members commented that the History Mystery escape rooms were a good use of the facilities and generated income. In reply to a question, the assistant head of museums replied that whilst the Keep had been used for the Victoria Derbyshire programme, it was not considered feasible to hire it out for commercial films or other uses, because of keeping it open to visitors during normal opening hours and also to fit in the investigation and survey works in preparation for the construction phase. In relation to coronavirus, the museums service would be guided by the county council's business continuity plans.

The assistant head of museums referred to Other Developments as set out in section 7 of the report. Members were advised that the contract for the building construction project was about to be awarded. Surveys and investigations had been carried out as part of the pre-construction service agreement. The temporary side entrance and the pop-up restaurant/café were ready and waiting to be used in this next phase. Members also noted the detailed planning work continued on the new exhibition galleries including the case specifications and layouts for the new British Museums Partnership Gallery. Members also noted the Activity Plan development work and that a film of the contemporary dance performance, *Flight or Fight!*, was available on YouTube. Members also expressed gratitude to the Norwich Friends Tapestry volunteer group for their work which had been highlighted in the local press. The new group comprised 52 members working on panels for a tapestry to be displayed in the Great Hall or on costumes and other embroidery. The Friends of Norwich Museums had generously provided a grant to fund the Norwich Friends Tapestry group. A sample section of the tapestry was available to view in the Keep.

The operations manager reported on the Wider Impact Group, which coordinates operational issues arising from the delivery of the main Keep project, including the management of the logistics of being a museum that was open to visitors alongside a construction site, and its operation when the building works had been completed.

During discussion the operations manager answered members' questions. He explained that the museums service was working on the development of designs for the construction hoardings in consultation with the city council's conservation team. The assistant head of museums said that as part of the action plan artists were being employed to create fun images for the hoardings to inform the public that Norwich Castle was open.

The operations manager thanked Councillor Price for arranging for Sgt Clay to attend the last meeting of the committee and said that a positive outcome had been that the museums staff could now report anti-social behaviour direct to the police.

Members noted that this had been a quiet period for venue hire. Norwich Castle had hosted a welcome event for UEA overseas students and private views for *Deepening* and *Spotlight* exhibitions. The Christmas events had been successful at Strangers' Hall with very positive feedback. It was proposed that next year the '*Twas the Night Before Christmas* events would be held every Saturday and Sunday throughout December, and there had been interest in visits from schools and other groups for children visits. Members noted that the capacity for visitors at these events at Strangers' Hall were limited.

Discussion ensued on the visitor numbers, which were circulated at the meeting. The committee noted that visitor numbers for Norwich Castle were as predicted given the reduced offer since September. The Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell had achieved its highest ever visitor numbers, which was in part due to the partnership arrangement with History Mystery. The operations manager explained that visitor numbers for Strangers' Hall during December were down on the previous year. Some of the Christmas events had taken place in November and therefore reflected in the statistics for that month and there had been confusion about the museum's opening hours due to the '*Twas the Night Before Christmas* events not being held on Sundays.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank the assistant head of museums for presenting the report;
- (2) note the committee's gratitude to the Friends of Norwich Museums for its generous grant and support to the Norwich Friends Tapestry group, and ask the chair and vice chair to write to the assistant curator, Agata Gomolka.

5. Reports from Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Norfolk Contemporary Art Society

Brenda Ferris circulated the latest Norfolk Contemporary Art Society newsletter and referred to the minutes of the last meeting. She said that the society had been established 60 years ago and specialised in donating contemporary art to Norwich Castle.

The operations manager said that there was a digital marketing scheme which provided access to the application forms to join the Norwich Contemporary Art Society and the Friends of the Norwich Museums.

Friends of the Norwich Museums

Felicity Devonshire said that the Friends had new application forms which she could distribute and that their website had been updated. Preparations were being made for the forthcoming centenary of the Friends of the Norwich Museums.

RESOLVED to note.

6. Schedule of meetings 2020-21

RESOLVED to approve the following schedule of meetings for the civic year 2020-2021 (all meetings on Tuesdays, commencing at 14:00):

2 June 2020
8 September 2020
8 December 2020
2 March 2021

CHAIR

(At the conclusion of the meeting, Dr Tim Pestell, curator of archaeology, gave a presentation on recent archaeological acquisitions.)

Appendix

Kick the Dust: Norfolk! Project Statistics

Current number of interventions with young people:

A total of 4761 interventions have taken place since October 2018 to the end of January 2020. with young people taking part in 2439 hours of high-quality activity across the region. This represents 59.5% of our target of 8000 interventions to the end of May 2022. In total, 1257 individual young people have taken part in the Kick the Dust programme.

How young people found out about Kick the Dust:

- 13.6% of young people found out about Kick the Dust (KtD) through a friend
- 25.6% had found out through other partner organisations which includes: YMCA, Children's Services, Prospects and On Track, schools and colleges.
- 4.8% found out about KtD through seeing a flyer or poster about the project and 8% through a family member.
- 25.6% have taken part in another activity run by NMS including Work Experience, Saturday Art Club and Creative Collisions with 16% having been involved in another Kick the Dust activity.
- 57.6% had not taken part in any previous activity with NMS before joining a Kick the Dust project or activity.

As part of the feedback, young people are asked how aware they are of the range of job roles available within NMS and the heritage sector and how they perceived museums in terms of being spaces for young people.

- 72% of young people stated they had little or no knowledge of job roles in NMS or the heritage sector.
- 84% felt that museums were a space they could use and would use in the future. 15% however did not feel the museum was a space for them and this is something we need to investigate further, an increase of 10% on the first reporting period.

Other headlines:

- 94.3% of young people had learnt new and interesting things about heritage in a fun way with 84.9% stating that their involvement had been as they thought it would be or better.
- 69.8% of young people felt that heritage reflected them and 81% felt heritage would engage other young people.
- 83% of young people stated that they wished to become involved in another KtD project and would be recommending KtD to their friends.
- 69.8% of young people said they were more likely to become a volunteer as a result of their involvement in KTD.
- 92.4% of young people felt a sense of achievement.
- 100% of young people stated they felt welcomed and respected by staff.
- 96.2% felt that their voice had been listened to and 96% felt they had been able to influence decisions.
- 92% stated they now had a better understanding of heritage having taken part in the programme.