



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:20

8 December 2020

Present: City Councillors: **County Councillors:**
Huntley (chair) Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)
Maxwell Clipsham,
Schmierer Ward

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society), Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Councillor Easter (South Norfolk Council) and Councillor King (Broadland District Council)

Apologies: City Councillors McCartney-Gray, Price and Wright
County Councillors Nobbs and Watkins

(The committee noted that at its November meeting, Norfolk County Council had appointed Council Barnard to this committee to take up a vacancy following the resignation of Councillor Brenda Jones. The committee officer apologised to the committee as agendas had been sent to the members listed on the front of the agenda for this meeting and therefore Councillor Barnard would not have received notification of the meeting and an agenda had been sent to Councillor Jones, who was no longer a member of the committee, in error.)

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 8 September 2020.

4. Norwich Museums Briefing – September to November 2020

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 to provide an opportunity for members of the committee to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums presented section 1 of the report, praising the museums staff for their resilience and response to the ever changing situation. Norwich Castle, Time & Tide Museum and Lynn Museum had all reopened following the second lock down on 3 December (Gressenhall was now closed for the winter season). The museums service and activities had been impacted by the pandemic. Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) staff had been involved in supporting key services, in relation to the county council's wider Covid-19 response, including the registrars and trading standards. NMS staff have developed digital resources and this had led to an expansion in social media activity and engagement, whilst also providing resources for those in digital poverty or without access to digital content. There have been regular site checks of collections in the museums. NMS staff were also preparing to welcome limited numbers of school parties, when it was safe to do so.

The operations manager explained the Covid-19 safety procedures that had been implemented to enable the reopening of Norwich Castle to visitors, including one way routes through the museum, the wearing of face masks and social distancing, signage and barring access to interactives. Hand sanitisers were available at strategic points. Visitor contact information was being recorded through the NHS Test & Trace scheme. In January 2021, visitors would be able to visit the Royal Norfolk Regimental galleries, following the completion of works in the rotunda, and there would be a new costume exhibition, *Textile Treasures*. Wedding ceremonies had ceased during the second lock down but had recommenced on 3 December with a flurry of bookings and as many as four to five ceremonies a day. In reply to a question from the chair, the operations manager said that he would be meeting with the coordinators of the costume exhibition before Christmas and confirmed that the exhibition would open on 4 January 2021.

The learning manager for Norwich museums presented the section on the learning team activity. She said that arrangements were in place to welcome school visits in January 2021. A virtual programme had been developed which was available to support the schools programme, whilst there was a limited in person offer, and members were asked to share this information with teachers. As an update to the report, members were advised that bookings for the 'Christmas in the Past' live-streamed sessions had increased to 700 pupils since the publication of the agenda papers. Also news had been received of a successful bid for funding from Festival Bridge for a digital programme to support secondary schools which would be progressed in the spring. The learning team had developed ways that groups could engage with collections subject to Covid-19 security measures being in place. An important part of the recovery was to welcome young people back into the museums as part of the youth engagement programme, where there had been resistance or lack of engagement to the digital offer.

During discussion the chair congratulated the NMS staff for the successful bid for Festival Bridge funding. In reply to a question, the learning manager provided details of how schools were notified of the virtual programme. The 30 minute live streaming events had been well received. Uptake of the virtual schools' programme had been

relatively slow and the team was actively promoting the offer. School visits were valued and this was just a different way of providing this service. She would check to see if all schools in Norfolk had received the e-bulletins promoting the offer.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4 of the report, which updated members on the activities of the *Kick the Dust* programme. The project had adapted its delivery during the pandemic and continued to engage young people, particularly with residents of the YMCA and strengthening the partnership arrangement. Members were advised of an extended offer, in partnership with Festival Bridge, to provide 1800 board games "Trail of Trials" to young people aged 14 to 25. The game had been developed by the Time Turners group in King's Lynn and would be delivered before Christmas. Paragraph 4.3 included data on evaluation of the project and showed how the Norfolk *Kick the Dust* programme compared with other programmes across the UK. The chair confirmed that the committee would appreciate evaluation feedback at future meetings. In reply to a question from the chair, the assistant head of museums confirmed that there was no concern about the programme meeting its targets and that in fact it was likely to exceed them.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5 of the report which updated members on the progress of the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project. Construction works had been permitted during the second lockdown and the works had focused in the rotunda which should be completed in January 2021. Archaeologists had observed the works which had been carried out in consultation with the city council's planning and conservation and design officers. The basement flagstones had been carefully removed and stored safely off site. The contract for the main fit-out of the exhibition had recently been put out for tender.

The learning manager reported on the *Keep Project* activity plan. The partnership with Archant Press had moved to its second phase (section 3.5 of the report) raising the profile of the project by showcasing the main themes of the British Museum Medieval Gallery in the *Eastern Daily Press*, *Eastern Evening News* and via its online platforms, and had engaged a wide audience. Andy Peters had been commissioned to provide cartoon style graphics for the hoardings to promote the collections in Norwich Castle. The project's learning and engagement officer was working on a project to create historical figures with youth groups that would inform the second phase of the hoardings. The focus was on digital engagement. A series of five minute long recordings promoting the museum's objects, *Talking Objects*, had been launched on the Norwich Castle YouTube channel.

The assistant head of museums commented that the hoardings were important to let people know that Norwich Castle was open during the construction works.

Felicity Devonshire asked whether the Friends of the Norwich Museums tapestry would feature on the hoardings or whether a big reveal was planned. Several panels had been completed. The learning manager said that there were ongoing discussions about the promotion of the *Keep Project* through the tapestry but it was not proposed as part of the graphics on the hoardings. The assistant head of museums commented on the outstanding work of the volunteers to continue working on the tapestry throughout the lockdowns.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6 of the report. The Freemen of Norwich had provided a grant for a series of films shared on Facebook to engage a

wider audience with the Museum of Norwich. As part of Black History month, the recent acquisition of a scarf, marking Justin Fashanu's 1980 goal of the season against Liverpool, was highlighted. During discussion, the vice chair commented that the Owen Mathers' design for the *Picturing the Pandemic* logo was excellent and asked whether it could be used again. The assistant head of museums said that he would check on whether this was possible. Members also noted the digital activity at Strangers' Hall, including the virtual tour for the Heritage Open Days this year.

Brenda Ferris said that this would be the last meeting that she was attending as she was stepping down from the committee. She hoped that there would be a place for the Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society when the project had been completed but the society was in limbo at the moment due to the pandemic. The chair thanked Brenda Ferris for her contribution to the committee and the cultural life of the city.

Amanda Geitner, also had to leave the meeting at this point, but said that the East Anglia Arts Fund was looking forward to supporting the Open Art Show *Somewhere Unexpected*.

(Brenda Ferris and Amanda Geitner left the meeting at this point.)

The senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative art presented section 7 of the report and updated members on the curatorial activities. This included the *Textile Treasures* exhibition (4 January to 28 March); the major exhibition to mark the bicentenary of the death of John Crome, *A Passion for Landscape: Rediscovering John Crome* (23 April to 5 September). The Open Art Show would include landscapes with older images superimposed or "ghosted" over them. The Arts Fund had awarded a grant to Keep project curator, Andrew Ferrara, as part of a programme to support young curators. He would be working on an exhibition as part of the *Keep Project*. The success of this award was partly attributed to the lessons learnt from an unsuccessful bid 4 years ago. She also reported that Turner's *Walton Bridges* was on loan to Colchester Castle until March 2021.

The chair congratulated Andrew Ferrara on being awarded an Arts Fund award.

During discussion a member commented that a high quality copy of *Walton Bridges* was on display in Norwich Castle. The senior curator confirmed that the original would be returned in time for the Crome bicentenary exhibition next year. The chair thanked the senior curator and her team for their work on the planned exhibitions for 2021 in the context of the particular challenges of this year.

The operations manager presented the visitor figures for the period covered by the report. Further information about social media engagement would be circulated with the minutes of the meeting. It was reassuring that when Norwich Castle reopened to general visitors on 16 October, visitor numbers increased to up to 160 per day, which was encouraging for the planned reopening of the main temporary exhibition galleries and the Norfolk Regimental Museum in the New Year.

During discussion the operations manager explained that the visitor capacity at Norwich Castle had been reduced to a maximum of 420 during the building works and this had been reduced further to 120, to comply with Covid-19 security

measures. There was a reduced a loss of income but some of this had been planned for during the construction works. Pre-booked admissions had worked well in October, with a number of days fully booked. With regard to museum pass holders, the assistant head of museums said that pass holders had been given three months free to cover the period when the museums were closed. Financial information about the service was kept under review and was a function of the Norfolk Joint Museums committee.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the [report](#);
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to County Councillor Brenda Jones and Brenda Ferris for their contribution to the work of this committee;
- (3) ask the assistant head of museums to:
 - (a) in relation to *Kick the Dust* continue to include comparative performance data with other Kick the Dust projects in the UK;
 - (b) provide a summary of the [social media data](#), to circulate to members of the committee with the minutes of the meeting.

CHAIR