



## NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**2.00 p.m. – 4.10 p.m.**

**8 March 2010**

Present:	<u>City Councillors</u> Councillor Bradford (Chair) Councillor Banham Councillor Bearman Councillor Fairbairn Councillor Lay Councillor A.Little	<u>County Councillors</u> Councillor Ward (Vice-Chair) Councillor Nobbs Councillor Toms
Co-opted Non-Voting Members	District Councillor Bracey (Broadland District Council) Felicity Hartley (Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society) Rosemary Salt (Friends of Norwich Museums) Charlotte Crawley (East Anglia Art Fund)	
Also in attendance	Vanessa Trevelyan (Head of Museums and Archaeology) John Perrott (Finance and Business Support Manager, Norfolk County Council) Rachel Kirk (Norwich Museums Manager) Vivienne Weeks (Chair of Costume and Textile Association)	
Apologies:	County Councillor Mooney District Councillor Kemp (South Norfolk District Council) County Councillor Dunn (Chairman, Norfolk Joint Museums Committee)	

### 1. MINUTES

#### Feedback from the Living Galleries Exhibition at the Castle Museum

The Norwich Museums Manager said the Art of Living Galleries had been well received with very positive visitor feedback and comments. A written evaluation detailing visitor comments was available for members should they wish to obtain a copy.

#### Cost Examples Exhibition Displays

The Norwich Museums Manager gave examples of costs and funding options for exhibition displays. All temporary exhibitions and improvements in permanent displays were funded from external grants and fundraising. The cost of a flat art exhibition was between £10,000 to £20,000 and object art exhibitions were significantly more due to the more complex designs and the mounting, plinth making,

installation and casing costs. She said there was generally more external funding available for exhibitions of paintings.

The Head of Museums and Archaeology said the costs were so high for 3D exhibitions that they were difficult to justify and that the Art of Faith exhibition had cost £100,000. She said in general the NMAS was now trying to improve permanent displays rather than generate 3D temporary exhibitions as this was thought to be a better investment. For example, £70,000 been raised from external funding to redisplay the Natural History Gallery, thereby enabling them to keep the display refreshed.

In response to questions, the Norwich Museums Manager said the net cost to the Museums Service was in terms of staff time and that funding was raised externally. Extra staff would only be taken on for special occasions and bigger projects but generally they had the same number of staff all of the time.

The Norwich Museums Manager said there was evidence that temporary exhibitions did encourage repeat visits. She said the majority of visitors came to visit the whole museum with just a small percentage of visitors only purchasing tickets for a temporary individual display. In response to questions the Head of Museums said that the only temporary exhibition that was likely to generate a surplus would be one on dinosaurs. One had been staged in the early 1990's and had brought in a lot of visitors. However, such an exhibition now would cost several hundreds of thousands of pounds to put on.

Charlotte Crawley, East Anglia Art Fund referred to the Norfolk Painters and Norwich Castle Open Art Show in Autumn 2008 which had consisted of three been big solo exhibitions from local artists and said they had sold over £20,000 of art, which was then reinvested in subsequent exhibitions. They charged a commission on sales of 30%, which was good value compared to commercial galleries who charged 55-60%.

**RESOLVED to:**

- (1) note the updates as minuted above;
- (2) ask the Committee Officer to distribute the written evaluation of the Arts of Living Galleries to all members of the Committee;
- (3) agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 30 November 2009.

**2. INFORMATION ON TARGETS FOR VISITOR NUMBERS AND INCOME**

As requested by the Committee at the last meeting on 30 November 2009, the Head of Museums and Archaeology and the Finance and Business Support Manager, County Council explained the decisions and processes for setting the targets for the visitor numbers and income.

The Head of Museums and Archaeology referred to the appendices contained in the General Update report. The performance targets for the coming year had been set by comparing them to the previous year's and took into account the effect that Easter variations, the weather, planned works, closures and the possible impact on

some visitor areas (e.g. the Royal Norfolk Regimental Tunnel that could close at no notice due to emergency maintenance works) could have.

She said that by setting realistic targets they could check that they were on track. She gave an example of when school visits to the Time and Tide Museums in Great Yarmouth had been below target, Learning Officers had undertaken a targeted marketing campaign and bookings had increased.

A member expressed concern about the targets and referred to the annual total figures for Strangers Hall and said although the actual visitor numbers for 2009-10 had exceeded the target figure, the 2009-10 target had been less than the actual amount of visitors for the two previous years. The Head of Museums and Archaeology explained that aspirations for each could vary considerably due, for example to whether when Easter occurred. Easter visits accounted for around 5000 visitors at the Castle, so they had to take into account how many Easters there would be that financial year which could range from none to two.

The Head of Museums and Archaeology said there was no consistent upward assent in visitor numbers. Figures from the Association of Leading Visitor Attractions had shown that in 2008 even visitor numbers for many of the larger and top museums in the country were lower including the Tate Modern Gallery in London which had been down by 6%. Best value performance indicators showed that compared with other Local Authority museum services, Norfolk were in the top quarter and were the highest in England for school visits. She said she agreed with members that the Museum Service should not become complacent but that they were doing the best they could with the budget available and would be open to any suggestions that members could make.

A member suggested that the using the word 'target' was mis-leading and be changed to a word such as 'monitoring'. The Head of Museums and Archaeology agreed that this would be beneficial and a word such as 'indicator or estimate' could be used instead.

The County Council Finance and Business Support Manager gave members background information on how in the financial years 2007-08 and 2008-09, they had under recovered on the income targets by £21,000. He said the recommendation had been to take a cautious approach by setting a conservative budget and visitor target for 2009/10 and explained how they had been calculated by taking into account concerns about the impact of (for example) the failure of the Icelandic banks in 2008 and the national economic climate which could lead to fewer museums visitors and a consequential reduction in income.

In response to questions, the Finance and Business Support Manager said they had dealt with and made up the £21,000 under recovery by using a combination of staff vacancies, NMAS reserves and other minor savings. He said the income budgets were set by the Finance Officer and were then agreed with the Museums Management Team. Budget setting and performance indicator setting processes take into account the number of Easters as there can be a variation in visitors and cash receipts, e.g. there were two Easters in 2007/08, none in 2008/09 and one in 2009/10.

The Finance and Business Support Manager said that although they had expected to see a fall in visitors during the economic recession, this had not been the case. The Head of Museums and Archaeology said that although they had an exceptional year last year, they did not want to assume that this would automatically be repeated during a recession. She referred to the success of the Family Focus weekends at the Castle which dramatically increased visitor numbers for January to March. However, she said a lot of the events and activities that were currently funded by Renaissance in the Regions would stop in 2011. They would bid for new project funding from 'New Renaissance' but the loss of funding could result in visitor numbers decreasing by a possible 10%.

In response to a question in regards to how visitor numbers could be increased, the Head of Museums and Archaeology said the current numbers had remained steady. She said there was a good level of visitors at busy times but due to fire safety regulations and the limitations on public services such as toilets, they could not comfortably accommodate any more than 1500 people in one day. Half terms and school holidays were already very busy as they had recently had over 1500 visitors on 3 separate days in the February half term holidays. They were starting to address how they could get people to visit at quieter times and said that a quieter museum could be a selling point in itself.

The Norwich Museums Manager said a Programming Group met to consider how the permanent displays could be refreshed, what temporary exhibitions were currently on display and how the funding was raised for the capital projects. She said that an Events Group also met on a monthly basis and they looked at the everyday activities and events that were going on across all four of the museum sites. They had discovered that families liked doing similar things to schools and events such as Christmas at Strangers Hall had proved popular as the building was more intimate so the experience was more atmospheric.

Members discussed the lack of signage outside the Castle Museum which they said was not enticing for visitors and suggested that the City Council's Conservation Officers be invited to a future meeting of the Committee to discuss the matter in detail.

In response to questions, the Head of Museums and Archaeology said that visits to the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum were counted and reported on in two ways; through its own front door and via the tunnel from the Castle. Including the Castle visitors to the Regimental Museum was not double counting as this was a separate museum. The Norwich Museums Manager said two individual curator posts were currently vacant at the Castle Study Centre.

The Norwich Museums Manager explained how the Castle Museum's cloakroom had been closed recently to accommodate a temporary lunch and crèche area but this had been a one-off event and an alternative temporary facility would be provided in future including more lockers in corridor one. She said tickets for the museums were not currently available for purchase elsewhere or online but they would investigate if this would be a possibility in the future.

A member suggested that the Museum Service could set out its long term aspirations for visitor numbers at each of the museums, which could be considered separately from the indicators set for performance monitoring. The Head of

Museums agreed that this would be a helpful way forward and that this could be part of the development plan brought by the Norwich Museums Manager to the Committee.

A member asked if it would be possible for the Norwich Area Museums Committee to consider the targets for 2011-2012 and to be able to give input and make suggestions. The Head of Museums and Archaeology said that agreeing targets was a function of the Norfolk Joint Museums and Archaeology Committee and the Chair of the Norwich Area Museums Committee represented the interests of the Committee when this matter was discussed. However, it should prove possible to include Norwich Area Museums Committee members in the discussions prior to making a formal recommendation to the Norfolk Joint Museums and Archaeology Committee.

**RESOLVED to:-**

- (1) note the report;
- (2) invite the Norwich City Council Conservation Officers to the next meeting of the Norwich Area Museums Committee to discuss the signage outside the Castle Museum;
- (3) ask the County Council's Finance and Business Support Manager to provide the figures for the Pop in for £1 and the yield per visitor figures as requested;
- (4) ask the Head of Museums and Archaeology to make enquiries as to the possibility of involving the Norwich Area Museums Committee in the early stages of setting the 2011/2012 targets and budgets.

**3. GENERAL UPDATE ON NORWICH MUSEUMS**

The Norwich Museums Manager presented the report and updated the Committee on work in the Norwich Museums over the three months and forthcoming activities.

In regards to the opening hours of the museums, a member asked why the museums opened on Sunday afternoons and not mornings and what could be done to encourage morning use. The Norwich Museums Manager said they had tried morning opening a long time ago but the visitor numbers had been very low. The Head of Museums and Archaeology said the whole issue of museum visiting had changed since shops and restaurants had started Sunday opening in the 1990's and that although morning openings had not recently been tested they had no plans to test it again in the future. She added that they had also experimented with late night opening but this had not been successful apart from one off special events.

In response to questions, the Norwich Museums Manager said they had looked at the possibility of putting the Sunday opening and closing hours back by 30 minutes for the café but they did not have any available staff to do the catering required and that they received very few visitors after 4pm. She said that in addition to utility costs, the biggest cost at the Castle for a Sunday opening was staff and that as per fire regulations, they were required to have eleven staff at all times.

**RESOLVED to:-**

- (1) note the report
- (2) ask the Norwich Museums Manager to investigate the following points and report back to the next meeting of the Norwich Area Museums Committee:-
  - (a) what Sunday opening hours was operated by other Museums Services in the Country;
  - (b) what the costs would be in order for the Museums to open for a full day on a Sunday.
- (3) ask the Norwich Museums Manager to update the Committee on the progress and planned development of the Bridewell Museum to be included as a separate agenda item at the next meeting of the Norwich Area Museum Committee;
- (4) note the thanks of the Committee to the Norwich Museums Manager for all of her hard work at the Museum Service

**4. DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

**RESOLVED to:-**

- (1) note that:-
  - (a) the next meeting on Monday 7 June 2010 will take place at County Hall;
  - (b) prior to the meeting, there will be an opportunity for the Committee to visit Carrow House Costume and Textile Study Centre;
  - (c) the Committee Officer will contact members with further details in due course.
- (2) note the date of the subsequent meeting on Monday 18 October 2010 at 2pm at City Hall.

CHAIR