



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:40

2 March 2021

Present: City Councillors: **County Councillors:**
Price Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)(in the chair)
Maxwell Barnard
Schmierer Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

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

Apologies: City Councillors Huntley (chair), McCartney-Gray, and Wright
County Councillors Clipsham and Nobbs

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 December 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 ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums updated members on the arrangements to reopen the museums following the government's road map out of lockdown. Norwich Castle had been one of three sites reopened on 3 December and closed effectively on 24 December, before the third national lockdown was confirmed. Museums would not be permitted to reopen until 17 May 2021, at the earliest. The exception in Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) was Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, as an outside attraction only from 12 April. Wedding services would be able to resume at Norwich

Castle from 29 March with limited attendees. NMS staff were engaged in checking buildings and collections, and extending the digital offer to access objects and collections, whilst museums were closed. Some staff had been deployed to assist trading standards, the registrars and the NHS, as part of the county council's wider response to Covid-19. Preparations for the reopening of the museums was being made, in line with the county council's health and wellbeing team and best practice from the National Museums Directors Council and the English Civic Museums Network, to ensure that premises were Covid-secure and that staff were adequately trained and comfortable with the arrangements.

The operations manager outlined the arrangements that were being put in place for the Norwich museums to reopen on 17 May. Norwich Castle would reopen in line with the plans for Covid-secure restrictions as before but with the visitor experience enhanced, as the hoardings had been removed from the Rotunda following the completion of the drainage works, therefore allowing access by lift or the staircase to the upper floor galleries and the Royal Norfolk Regimental collection. The Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell was set to reopen on 20 May, with a pre-booked ticket option as only 30 people would be allowed in the museum at any one time, and only for 3 days a week initially. It was proposed to open on an additional day one day a week for school group bookings, as it was not possible to permit public visitors at the same time as schools. Strangers' Hall was set to reopen to the public later in the summer and initially only for school groups or permitted pre-booked groups. The layout of the building made it difficult to introduce a one-way system. Wedding ceremonies would recommence at Norwich Castle from 29 March, 7 days a week. There would be about eight exceptional circumstance weddings taking place from now until 28 March.

In reply to a member's question, the assistant head of museums said that NMS would await clarification that normal services could resume from 21 June at either national or local level, and that whilst he would be delighted to open all museums, would be guided by the county council and national bodies. He encouraged members of the committee to pre-book visits when the museums were reopen. NMS was alert to any opportunities to increase visitor numbers, staff were experienced and would adapt the operations of all sites accordingly, and would respond quickly when restrictions were lifted. It was not anticipated that all restrictions would be removed by the end of June.

The learning manager for Norwich museums updated the committee on the learning programme which had continued during the lockdowns and children learning from home. Despite the challenges, teachers had been resilient, there had been a gradual take up of the NMS digital offer and teacher resource packs for live stream events. This was challenging as for safeguarding reasons children often did not have cameras on. There had been 650 pupil engagements during December and January, with fewer pupils engaged in February, as it was a shorter month and due to half term week. There was a good number of bookings for March and as schools returned to the classroom, it was hoped that teachers would be looking to NMS to augment classroom teaching. NMS had received a grant from Festival Bridge *Moving It On* scheme, along with other museums such as the Fitzwilliam Museum at Cambridge, to provide a digital programme to support GCSE level history students through revision and exams, and meet the curriculum. It was recognised in the sector that it was difficult for secondary schools to visit or engage in museums but her colleague, Jenni Williams had worked hard to encourage links with secondary

schools and despite the current challenges. The project would be in partnership with history teachers at Dereham Neatherd and would be rolled out to other schools. The learning team had also received positive feedback on its annual programme for PGCE trainee teachers at City College and University of East Anglia, which this year had been a digital offer this year due to Covid-19, on how they could use the collections in their teaching. The visitor programme had been adapted to provide a digital offer. The What's On page on the website set out what was available. Activities included *Scribe School*, inspired by calligraphy, marginalia, the power of words and an exploding king! With regard to youth engagement, small groups of 10 young people were working digitally with Rachel Daniels, the Norwich Kick the Dust coordinator and curators on the Keep Project, to select objects and text to be exhibited in the Keep. The chair complimented the learning officer for the outstanding work of the team where there was always something new and different.

Christine Marsden, Kick the Dust Norfolk project coordinator, gave a presentation on the activities and performance outcomes of the Kick the Dust Project. The project had exceeded its target of 8,000 quality interventions, with another 18 months of the project remaining, which despite the current restrictions from Covid-19 demonstrated the hard work of the project workers and the resilience of young people to engage with the project. (A copy of the [presentation](#) is available on the council's website with the agenda papers and circulated to members.) The project was on course for its third year. A total 54 per cent of activities were led or designed by young people participating in the project, including peer evaluators and mentoring roles. Rachel Daniels, the Norwich Kick the Dust project worker, was successful in recruiting and engaging young people to high quality programmes, falling into the "leader" and "shaper" categories. Members were cautioned to note that whilst only 25 per cent of activities were in Norwich, the project workers in the west and east had the benefit of established youth groups and additional support. 32 per cent of all activities were with YMCA clients which explained the higher age group that the project was working with and were often at "player" level. There was also a lot of work with secondary education and further education establishments. The project was addressing the needs of all the Kick the Dust groups, including running events for young people with special needs who have missed the opportunity for work experience, and providing support and access to wellbeing services to address mental health. In addition, the external evaluators had reported that NMS had achieved all but eight of its 29 recommendations from the 2020 evaluation report on institutional change, and the remaining targets such as young people working with front of house staff, could not be achieved due to the restrictions of the lockdown. The areas of focus for institutional change, included: the establishment of a stakeholder's group and long term links with children's services to provide sustainable creative and heritage, arts and culture opportunities for young people; involving young people in the co-design of temporary exhibitions; training for curatorial and exhibitions staff; bursary traineeships; and, leadership roles and ensuring that young people were aware of opportunities.

In reply to questions from the chair, the Kick the Dust project co-ordinator said that Kick the Dust had been asked by Active Norfolk project to provide digital resources to accompany holiday food boxes for children eligible for the free school meal scheme. The resource packs only could be made available to other groups, such as the volunteer groups providing food boxes for families that were not eligible under the free school meal scheme. The project co-ordinator acknowledged the barriers to

young carers participating in activities and whilst the project was inclusive, it was something that she would share with colleagues so that they could address it. In reply to a member's question, the project co-ordinator confirmed that data on ethnicity and nationality was collected as part of an annual evaluation submitted to the National Heritage Lottery Fund. In terms of engaging in issues which young people were drawn to such as Black Lives Matters and colonialism and LGBTQ+ history, she said that Kick the Dust groups were working on their perspective of rural racism to produce a play at the Sheringham Little Theatre, with a view to tour schools, and regarding LGBTQ+ a Kick the Dust group in the west had hosted an Outing the Past conference as part of LGBTQ+ History month.

The assistant head of museums updated members on the Norwich Castle Royal Palace Reborn project, which was making good progress despite the impact of Covid-19. The main contractor had confirmed the detail of the building project, which included mitigation for the impacts of Covid-19. The contractors were working closely with colleagues at the city council, as landlord and planning officers, and Historic England. Archaeologists were working on the site and some discoveries had been made that related to the prison period. The drainage connections had been completed so the Rotunda was being reinstated for use, and flagstones removed in the basement to facilitate further drainage works. Preparation was being made for piling for the foundations work. The removal of the roof structure from the former café and corridor from reception to the Rotunda had opened up the prospect of the east face façade of the Keep, providing a glimpse of what the completed project would look like, as it would be viewed through the glass atrium. A "hard hat tour" would be arranged for members of the committee when it was possible to do so.

Members noted that the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and Strangers' Hall had been closed for the duration of the pandemic period. NMS staff had worked hard to make collections accessible to both existing and new audiences, and had sought opportunities to celebrate and share the collections with other organisations. The Museum of Norwich had worked in partnership with the UEA, city council and Good Gym Norwich on Fine City Neighbours, to celebrate social cohesion, and had also provided a Christmas quiz, available to download and share. Stranger's Hall had been the focus of Christmas activities over the last two years and this year staff had worked with the learning team to provide a digital offer this year.

The senior curator and Keeper of Fine and Decorative Art presented section 7 of the report and highlighted the activities of the curators amongst the challenges of working remotely and little physical access to collections. Members were advised that contained in the report were links to the two Talking Objects videos on the NMS YouTube channel. Preparations were being made for the John Crome bicentennial exhibition, *A Passion for Landscape: Reimagining John Crome*, which was supported by the Friends of the Norwich Museums as a key part of their centenary celebrations in 2021. There had been uncertainties about loans from the British Museum but these had now been confirmed. Conservation work had settled some questions about attribution. A concurrent exhibition of photographs would be held at the Museum of Norwich, *Crome's Norwich* with images of the past and present of the same areas of Norwich. The East Anglia Art Fund's Open Art Show, *Somewhere Unexpected* topic was designed to complement the John Crome exhibition. For the first time entries were being invited in the form of new media and performance. There had been over 100 subscribers. Other activities included preparation for *Slaves of Fashion* exhibition in autumn 2022, which included fund raising for the

acquisition of commission from the Singh Twins, and an exhibition of the work of artist Yelenda Popova, focusing on landscape, geology and nuclear histories, with reference to Sizewell. Dr David Waterhouse, the senior curator natural history, had conducted teacher training sessions on Zoom, and appeared on *Escape to the Country* and Radio Norfolk. He had written a blog post entitled *Queer Nature* for LGBTQ+ History month. The senior curator was preparing for the loan of Bernardo Bellotto painting *The Fortress of Konigstein from the North* from the National Gallery. It would have been part of the *Castles* exhibition that had been cancelled due to the lockdown. The painting would be displayed, accompanied with an online of the version of the cancelled exhibition. The *Textiles Treasures* exhibition that had been due to open in January had been deinstalled and it was hoped that it could be remounted later in the year. The textile curators were using the time to upgrade and update storage facilities. The Curator of the Regimental Collections was updating the website and responding to an increased number of enquiries as people researched their family trees.

The operations manager shared [statistics](#) of visitor numbers and statistics on digital participation with the committee. Norwich Castle had 750 visitors over the 23 days that it was open in this period, averaging 32 visitors per day, which considering that this was in the midst of the Keep project, a traditionally quiet month and Covid, was encouraging. The numbers of followers on social media had increased. In reply to a question, the assistant head of museums said that the art collections came under the Norwich Castle Facebook page. He would check out that a former account was no longer in use. Members of the committee welcomed the use of Twitter and Facebook to increase access to NMS.

RESOLVED to

- (1) note the [report](#) and thank the officers for their presentations;
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to the NMS staff for their dedication and commitment to the museums service despite the challenging circumstances of the pandemic;
- (3) note the success of the Kick the Dust Norfolk project.

5. Reports from Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire provided an oral update on the Friends of the Norwich Museums which was in its centenary year. The celebration lunch with Lord Cholmondely, Patron of the Friends of the Norwich Museums, at Houghton Hall had been cancelled. The Friends had intended to arrange a family trail between the three Norwich museums as part of its celebrations but this would now be postponed to 2022. The Friends had welcomed the projections celebrating their centenary on Norwich Castle at around 5:00 pm each evening.

RESOLVED to note and thank Felicity Devonshire for her report.

6. Schedule of Meetings

RESOLVED to approve a schedule of meetings, subject to approval at Norwich City Council's annual council, as follows (all meetings to be at 14:00):

8 June 2021
7 September 2021
7 December 2021
1 March 2022

7. Norwich Area Museums Committee - members

The chair read out a message on behalf of Councillor Nobbs who was unable to the meeting because of technical IT reasons and that it would have been his last one. In his message, he wished the NMS "the best possible future and look forward to the re-opening of the Keep very soon". Councillor Nobbs had been a long-standing member of the committee.

The chair then took the opportunity to thank other members who were not seeking re-election or were standing down from the committee in the next civic year.

CHAIR