



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:30 to 15:37

3 September 2024

Present: **City Councillors:**
Huntley (Chair, following
appointment)
Caine
Francis
Kidman
Wright

County Councillors:
Reilly
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting Members:

Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) Felicity Devonshire (Friends of the Norwich Museums), Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) and Councillor Booth (Broadland District Council)
Councillor Graham (South Norfolk District Council)
Councillor Kybird (ex officio member)

Apologies: **Norwich City Councillors** Schmierer, Cllr Francis attended as his substitute.
County Councillors Brociek-Coulton, Birmingham and Rumsby

Also present: Stuart Garner, Operations Manager
Francesca Vanke, Senior Curator of Norwich Museums and Keeper of Fine and Decorative Art

1. Declarations of Interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Public Questions and Petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

3. Minutes

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2024.

4. Norwich Museums Report – May to July 2024

In the absence of the Assistant Head of Museums, the operations manager introduced the report and together with colleagues presented the relevant sections to allow for members to ask questions or comment.

Members noted that the Percival section had been handed over on 22 July 2024. Visitors were now able to use the new entrance and glazed atrium for access. This included the new café and shop. The construction line had been moved back and this provided a more welcoming entrance for visitors.

The operations manager reported that the number of ceremonies taking place at the Castle had continued to remain steady with 657 between August 2023 and July 2024 which had generated an additional footfall of 16,490. From 2 October wedding ceremonies would revert to being held in the benefactors' room. This was a positive mood as guests would no longer have to access the Castle through the building works.

The Operations Manager then presented Section 2, Norwich Learning Team activity, of the report. The Education room had been refurbished and was being fitted out. Once it was completed the capacity would increase from 60 to 120 children per day. The room would include object handling collections that would be stored away ready to be used once the room opened in the Autumn term. The education room would primarily be used for pupils Reception to year 6. A report would be brought back to a future meeting to update the committee.

The Learning Team had been developing dungeon tours in preparation for the reopening towards the end of the summer. The tours would highlight the lengthy history of the Castle's use as a prison and the prisoners' stories.

It was suggested that members could visit the dungeon and have a hard hat tour of the Castle Keep. Dates would be circulated and agreed.

The operations manager presented Section 3 of the report - Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update. During the current phase of the project there had been a total of 2,056 interventions involving 888 individual young people. The majority of the interventions and activities had been shaped and designed by the young people involved. The Operations Manager highlighted that through the project 57 volunteering opportunities had been provided.

A key aim of the current project which was part funded by Norfolk County Council Public Health was measuring the impact on the young people's mental health. The feedback showed that the majority agreed that the Kick the Dust activity had helped them have more positive mental health. The feedback form had recently been updated to include a question on neurodiversity. 52% of participants self-identified as being neurodivergent, this would enable the service to design new activities to account for the additional access barrier of neurodiversity.

The Chair commended the service and noted that the figures paid testament to the hard work of the staff and volunteers.

One member asked about the relationship with Leicester, and it was explained that Leicester had been taking a similar route and had been in touch with NCC as the pioneers of the service.

Members congratulated all those involved in the project noting the mental health benefits and the difference it had made in the lives of young people and hoped the project would continue to go from “strength to strength”.

In response to a member’s question the Operations Manager said that he would find out more information on the funding, including the length and amount available and share this with members in due course.

The Operations Manager presented Section 4 of the report - Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update. Since the last Committee meeting the principal contractor, Morgan Sindall Construction, had handed back the Percival Wing. This included the new entrance, glazed atrium and café and shop for visitors. All of these could be accessed using internal lifts.

The Operations Manager presented section 5 of the report - other activity across Norwich museums. The Operations Manager highlighted the activities at the Museum of Norwich. Several events had taken place around the *Muslims: Norwich* exhibition. The exhibition had been a collaboration between the Community Librarian from the Norfolk Library and Information Service and the photographer Khalil Mitchell. It featured photographs of the community based at the Ihsan Mosque in Norwich and over 200 Muslim visitors had been invited to a number of events as part of this exhibition. The exhibition would tour across Norfolk over the following months. A key activity at the Museum of Norwich had been the ongoing work on the partnership project with Unilever to highlight the history of the Colman family and Carrow Works in Norwich. The Museum of Norwich had hosted a number of Kick the Dust activities and worked with students from the University of East Anglia (UEA) and Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) on a range of projects.

A member asked about tour dates and venues for the *Muslims: Norwich* exhibition and the Operations Manager agreed to provide this information outside of the meeting.

The Operations Manager presented section 5.2, Strangers’ Hall, of the report. He highlighted that Strangers’ Hall had hosted *Bookscapes Collective* to respond to the Victorian Rooms in pieces that were housed in an exhibition. Strangers’ Hall had also had several accessions to the collections. Ongoing maintenance and research around and of the collections was a key activity for Strangers’ Hall and this included the research talks for various groups. A number of events had been hosted at Strangers’ Hall including an event during Refugee Week on the theme of Marmite and a recreation of a Tudor House Party as part of the summer family activity programme. Feedback for these events had been very positive.

The committee noted that Cathy Terry the Senior Curator for Strangers’ Hall had retired at the end of August. She had been an expert on the

history of the building and its collections. The Chair asked that the Committee's thanks and well wishes be passed on to her.

The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums presented section 6, Norwich Curatorial update, of the report. She highlighted that the Curator of Historic Art had been working on a number of activities. A local artist, Gerard Stamp, had recently gifted a watercolour painting, *The Restoration of a Royal Palace (Norwich Castle) 2022*. The watercolour represented an important moment in the Castle's history. As part of her ongoing work into Catherine Maude Nichols the Curator of Historic Art was developing a talk on the artist's work which would be held in October in Bedford. The Curator of Modern and Contemporary Art was developing a major exhibition on the artist Colin Self which would open at Norwich Castle in 2025. The Senior Curator of Norwich Museums and Keeper of Fine and Decorative Art continued to be busy with the work on the *JMW Turner and Changing Visions of Landscape* exhibition which was the forthcoming Norwich Castle exhibition. A number of activities had been planned for this exhibition including a piece of artwork which would be produced in conjunction with English+ service users on landscapes that are meaningful to them. The Curator of the Regimental collection had been working on an exhibition for the King's Lynn Town Hall. She had also been successful in a recent funding bid with the Friends of the Norwich Museums to acquire a photograph album which contained pictures of the 1/6th Cyclist Battalion, Norfolk Regiment in 1914. The Norwich Freemans Charity had approved a grant which would be used to build on the successful pilot project with NUA Fine Art students in the previous academic year.

The Operations Manager then presented Section 7 of the report covering other developments. The works to treat the outbreak of dry rot were progressing well and the external works to the roof of the Courtroom had been completed. The service was working with colleagues from Norwich City Council on additional works to the drainage systems and the additional works required to the Costume and Textiles store. It was hoped the work to the Costume and Textiles store would be completed in 2025 enabling tours of the building.

The Operations Manager presented Section 8 of the report - visitor numbers. The updated figures had been circulated at the meeting. It was noted that visitor numbers for the castle were up on the previous year and both the Norwich Museum and Stranger's Hall were doing very well. Members noted that these figures were indicative of the good work undertaken by both staff and volunteers.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the Norwich Museums Report February to April 2024; and
- 2) ask the Operations Manager to liaise with the Committee Officer to organise a hard hat visit to the castle keep and dungeons for Members.

5. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, addressed the Committee. A written report had been circulated and was available on the Council's website here. After a quiet summer the Friends of the Norwich Museums were looking forward to taking an active part in the celebrations for the opening, with a special reception for the Friends. As part of the Heritage Open Days the Friends would have a presence at Strangers' Hall, it was hoped that this might encourage members of the public to join the Friends. A number of artifacts that the Friends had funded to restore were now back on display at Strangers' Hall.

Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS) addressed the Committee. She reported that prizes had been awarded to Fine Art students and that in June a third round of small grants had been issued for projects and artists. The fourth-round deadline was 30 September.

Amanda Geitner, East Anglia Arts Fund, addressed the committee. The fund had provided small grants of £1000 to seven projects. Major support had also been given to Castle Fine Arts.

The exhibition *Sunlight* by Roger Ackling had been well attended and Amanda Geitner praised the team for making it so successful.

RESOLVED to thank Felicity Devonshire, Amanda Geitner and Danusia Wurm for their reports.

CHAIR