



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:30 to 16:45

6 June 2023

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair – following appointment)
Hoechner
Kidman
Oliver
Schmierer
Wright

County Councillors:

Ward (vice chair – following appointment)
Birmingham

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society), Councillor Booth (Broadland District Council) and Councillor Graham (South Norfolk District Council) and Councillor Kybird (ex officio member)

Apologies:

County Councillors Brociek-Coulton, Reilly, Rumsby and Watkins, Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)

Also present:

Robin Hanley, assistant head of museums
Stuart Garner, operations manager
Francesca Vanke, senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art

1. Appointment of chair

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Huntley as chair for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of chair

It was **RESOLVED** to appoint Councillor Ward as vice chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

4. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

5. Minutes

It was **RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 7 March 2023.

6. Norwich Museums Report – February to April 2023

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 for members to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums presented the first section of the report. A large proportion of the COVID-19 measures were still in place which included CO2 monitoring that could be accessed by staff remotely and in person. The levels of volunteering, both indoor and outdoor, continued to improve. The chair queried whether volunteering had reached pre-pandemic levels. The assistant head of museums said that he would provide the figure within the minutes¹. Additionally there had been a diversification of the types of volunteering, this included online volunteering.

The operations manager presented section 2 of the report. He highlighted that the retail offer in the Rotunda had been enhanced which included stock related to exhibitions at the Castle Museum. He referred to section 2.2 of the report which detailed the number of ceremonies that had taken place at Norwich Castle. The winter months had seen relatively strong numbers despite this usually being the quiet period for ceremonies. In response to a member's question the operations manager said that he was not aware of a particular reason for the low numbers in March and would need to compare the year-on-year figures to identify if this was typical.

The assistant head of museums presented section 3 of the report. He highlighted section 3.1 of the report on the Formal Learning offer. This included the Early Years learning provision, where the service aimed to engage with children as soon as possible, whether this was directly or with other providers. The service also provided a programme for pupils with special educational needs (SEN). Learning events for *The Last Voyage of The Gloucester* exhibition had been adapted for different audiences. This demonstrated that the Learning teams were being embedded with exhibitions as early as possible to develop the learning offering. More events would be rolled out in September 2023. The learning service also worked with trainee teachers to make them aware of the offer, as well as encouraging them to bring pupils into the museum. The assistant head of museums said that as part of the Castle Keep project new spaces for education services were being developed based on the designs of the learning team.

A member commented that the positive feedback was good to see, especially in regard to provision for SEN schools.

¹ The assistant head of museums confirmed that the figures for total volunteer numbers across NMS were 19/20 - 528; 20/21 – 156; 21/22 – 160; 22/23 - 298

In response to a member's question the assistant head of museums said that the learning team engaged directly with a number of different schools and teachers around the formal offer for schools. This included using a network of teachers to test sessions. As part of the work, the service was looking at which schools in the area were not as well engaged with the offer and were looking to understand the barriers that prevented these schools from using the offer. He highlighted the travel bursary that the Norfolk Museums Service offered to schools to help address the cost of travel.

A member queried whether there was a link between children visiting the museums as part of school groups and then visiting with parents, carers or guardians. The assistant head of museums said that pupils visiting on a school trip were vouchers to encourage repeat visits.

In response to a member's question the assistant head of museums said that the service provided bespoke sessions for Home Education groups and provide resources for home educators to use for lessons. He said that an update would be provided to a future committee meeting.

The assistant head of museums presented section 3.3 of the report, Visitor Programme Activities. He highlighted the variety of activities that had been held during the February 2023 half term holiday. These sessions were run in partnership with Norwich Science Festival. He also highlighted the *Anarchy* May half term activities that had been developed through the Norwich Castle Keep activity plan. These innovative activities demonstrated the creativity of the learning teams to provide sessions for visitors of all ages.

A member queried whether there had been any collaboration between the Sainsbury Centre and Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) for the Sainsbury Centre relaunch. The assistant head of museums said that there were good links with the Sainsbury Centre, but this was something to explore further.

In response to a members question the assistant head of museums said that he would need to clarify why the specific time period for the *Anarchy* May half term activities was chosen. There were strong links to the Stephen and Matilda civil war to Norwich, in part because of Henry I, whose visit to Norwich was the basis for the reconstructed castle spaces being created as part of the Castle Keep project.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4 of the report, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update. The initial funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) had ended in March 2023. The report provided a summary of the activities that had occurred. A key focus of the project had been progressing participants through the programme where possible. Participants of Kick the Dust had organised an event to celebrate the end of the NLHF funded project. Representatives from the project also visited the Houses of Parliament to speak about the benefits of the funded project on young people's lives.

As previously reported to the committee the Kick the Dust: Norfolk project would continue through three year funding from Arts Council England (ACE) and funding from Norfolk County Council's Public Health department. This would allow additional data to be captured to measure the positive outcomes on mental health of the

project. NMS, with YMCA Leicester had also recently been successful with a Round 1 application to the NLHF. The joint project team were currently in the development phase of the application which would lead to a Round 2 bid submission. If this bid was successful delivery of the project, *Your Heritage Your Future*, would commence in late 2024.

A member queried whether university students still benefitted free access to the museums. In response the assistant head of museums said that university students would be able to access the museums by showing their university pass. The service had, before the pandemic, hosted events for new international students to inform them of the abilities to do this. He said that Kick the Dust participants were given a pass to be able to visit all NMS museums. This pass was valid for one year but would be renewed upon request by the individual.

In response to a member's comment the assistant head of museums said that Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) had strong links with the museums service. NMS often hosted textiles students for activities. The updated logo had been designed by NUA.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5 of the report, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update. The work in the Keep was ongoing. He highlighted that the committee had been on a site tour in March 2023. This had allowed members of the committee to see the parts of the project that had been handed back to the service, and those still in progress. This included the toilet block and the new pop-up café. The next section to be handed back would be the Percival wing, which included the new entrance, shop and café. The steelworks within the Keep had been installed and the steel for the roof viewing platforms would shortly be installed. Within the Keep, the service was looking at having bespoke fire doors made so that these would resemble medieval doors. There was also work ongoing within the British Museums gallery to complete the fit out of the cases and development of the tapestry that would be on display. NMS were planning for visitors to be able to enter in the Keep by Easter 2024.

The chair commented that it was positive to hear that work was progressing well. The assistant head of museums said that the service would look to provide another tour for members at a later date.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6 of the report, other activity across Norwich museums. He said the report detailed how aspirational the staff for both Norwich Museums were in terms of providing a varied offer for visitors. A key focus of the Museum of Norwich was building on its partnerships with other organisations such as Vision Norfolk, English Plus and the universities. He detailed some of the activities that had taken place at the Museum of Norwich during the school holidays.

As Strangers' Hall would be celebrating its centenary in July 2023 there would be a full programme of activities at the museum which included reworking the window displays to entice visitors into the building. The service was looking at creating a strong narrative based around historic characters linked to Strangers' Hall.

A member queried whether there were plans to remove the graffiti on the sides of the building. The assistant head of museums said that the service worked with the city

council to remove the graffiti. The city council are responsible for building maintenance and were normally quick to respond to reports of graffiti.

In response to a member's question the operations manager said that repairs to the roof had taken place and the rooms that had been affected by damp would be allowed to dry up. These rooms would not be useable until the rooms had dried due to the risk of mould to other parts of the building.

(Councillor Kidman left the meeting at this point)

A member asked about the condition of the Lord Mayor's coach and whether it would be possible for the civics to see the coach. In response the operations manager said that the coach was currently wrapped up and the service was looking at how to future proof the coach against further damage.

The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art presented section 7 of the report. She highlighted that *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester: Norfolk's Royal Shipwreck, 1682* had been very popular with around 30,000 visitors since it had opened. She had held a number of events around the exhibition with more planned which included a session that explored the importance of shipwrecks within art from the Stuart period. She was also working on an exhibition for Norwich Castle for autumn 2024, this would explore landscape in art over time and would include works from Turner and other artists.

The senior curator of costume and textiles had been working on moving the collection for repair works to be completed on Shirehall. The senior curator of natural history and geology had recently left the service to work for another organisation but would continue to be involved with NMS through the book he had written, *Exploring Norfolk's Deep History Coast*. The curator of modern and contemporary art had recently opened a new exhibition in the Colman Project Space called *Wall Existing* which explored Norwich's medieval walls. A new exhibition, *Where Land and Water Meet: Norfolk's Rivers, Streams, Brooks and Broads* had recently opened in the Watercolour Gallery at Norwich Castle by the curator of historic art. This exhibition showcased a range of drawings featuring the county's waterways.

The curator of regimental collections had been working on the new website for the Royal Norfolk Regimental Museum. This work had been done with students from a range of the further education institutions in Norwich. The aim was to encourage engagement by young people in the collection. The senior curator of archaeology was working on the Norwich Castle project and had updated a number of displays within the museum.

The operations manager presented section 8.1, Wider Impact Group, of the report. He explained that this project group looked at facilitating the Keep project. The group was currently working on preparing for the Percival wing to be handed back. This included producing new branding and wayfinding, as the layout of the museum would be significantly altered through the project. The new layout would also contribute to detailing the history of Norwich Castle. He highlighted that the group was looking at the entire customer journey, both before visiting and during the visit to the museum. The group had also been looking at how parts of the museum could be offered as a venue for hire, which would contribute to revenue for the museum.

A member asked whether the intention was still for the shop and cafe would be free entry to visitors. The operations manager confirmed this would be the case, and there would be a ticket barrier between the museum and café and shop area.

In response to a member's question the operations manager said that the Castle would be able to be host musical events.

The operations manager referred members to section 8.2 of the report. This detailed a successful bid to the ACE's Museum Estate and Development Fund (MEND). This funding would be used to upgrade the outdated building management system which controls the relative humidity and temperature of the building.

Referring members' attention to section 8.3, Shirehall Courtroom, the operations manager highlighted that work on removing the dry rot from the building was ongoing. The work had been briefly stalled as the extent of the dry rot appeared to be greater than originally thought. The service was working with a structural engineer to ensure that the roof was supported.

The operations manager presented section 9, Visitor numbers, of the report. He said that the dip in numbers in February for Norwich Castle was due to the de-installation of *The Singh Twins: Slaves of Fashion* exhibition and the subsequent installation of *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester: Norfolk's Royal Shipwreck, 1682* exhibition. The other sites in Norwich were also seeing increases over previous years.

The operations manager gave an overview of the social media performance of each of the Norwich Museums sites. The full report would be circulated to members outside of the meeting. For Norwich Castle some of the most engaged with posts had been commentary on the Harford Brooch across both Instagram and Twitter. The service had started an Instagram page in the 2023/24 financial year for the Museum of Norwich and thus far the post that had been engaged with the most had been about the history of the building. On the Instagram page for Strangers' Hall the most engaged post had been about the annual deep clean.

The members thanked the assistant head of museums and his staff for the report.

RESOLVED to:

- 1) note the Norwich Museums Report February to April 2023 and;
- 2) ask the assistant head of museums to organise a visit of Strangers' Hall before the next committee meeting.

7. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, had provided a written report which had been circulated to members at the meeting and was available on the website [here](#). She highlighted that the Friends were helping with the centenary celebrations of Strangers' Hall. The Friends were reaching out to other organisations to help with improvements such as new front window displays.

Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS), addressed the committee and said that NCAS had held a number of successful talks, and the programme of

talks would continue in 2023. The organisation had been involved in the Norfolk and Norwich 2023. NCAS continued to support NUA students, which included sponsoring prizes for graduates. On the 6 July 2023 NCAS would be holding an auction in the Council Chamber at City Hall to raise money.

RESOLVED to thank Danusia Wurm and Felicity Devonshire for their reports and record the committee's gratitude to the voluntary organisations that support the Norwich museums.

8. Meeting dates

RESOLVED to note the schedule of meetings for the civic year 2023-24, as approved at Norwich City Council's annual council.

CHAIR