NORWICH
City Council

MINUTES

Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 16:00 **7 March 2017**

Present:

City Councillors:
Brociek-Coulton (chair)
Davis
Jones (T)
Price
Thomas (Vi)

County Councillors
Hannah (vice chair)
Bearman
Bremner
Morgan
Sands

Co-opted voting members:
Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)
Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)
Ceri Lamb (Friends of Norwich Museums)
Councillor Buck (Broadland District Council)
Councillor Hardy (South Norfolk Council)

County Councillor John Ward (chairman, Norfolk Joint Museums committee) (ex officio member)

Apologies: City Councillor Maguire

1. Declarations of interest

There were no declarations of interest.

2. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2016, subject to item 4, Norwich Museums briefing for period August to December 2016 to insert a resolution (4) to ask officers to include committee members in the development of the environment strategy.

3. Freemen 700

(Nigel Back, chairman of the Freemen's Committee and the Town Close Estate Charity, attended the meeting for this item.)

Nigel Back gave a short presentation to the committee. He explained the origins and objectives of the Town Close Estate Charity. The charity's funding was derived from the sale of land between Ipswich Road and Newmarket Road which had been owned by the Freemen of the City. The trustees had decided that it was in the interests of

the beneficiaries to reinvest the proceeds. The charity was keen to support educational and heritage projects, such as the Keep project, and provided means tested grants to Freemen and their families for educational and welfare purposes. 2017 was the 700th anniversary of the first recorded Freeman of the city in 1317. The charity had produced a newsletter which would be circulated to members of the committee. Events to mark this occasion included school visits to talk about the history of the Freemen of the City and their role in medieval Norwich to the current day. In July, the charity would be funding free open days at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and Strangers' Hall to promote the history of trades in the city. The charity was also keen to promote apprenticeships for young people to take up trades. As part of the 700 anniversary events a database was being created which would list every Freemen of the City since 1317.

Dr Robin Hanley, the head of operations and learning, said that Norfolk Museums Service was very grateful for the support that it had received from the Town Close Estate Charity. Nigel Back said that the trustees recognised that a key part of the museums service was the role of the curators behind the scenes and the trustees welcomed approaches for help.

RESOLVED to:

(1) thank Nigel Back for his interesting talk;

(2) note that a copy of the Freemen's newsletter will be circulated to members with the minutes of the meeting.

4. Norwich Museums Briefing December 2016 to February 2017

Following on from a request at a previous meeting, Dr Giorgia Bottinelli, curator of historic art, gave a presentation with the aid of slides on the discovery made when the René Magritte painting "The Human Condition". was undergoing conservation work in preparation for display in Paris. This led to the discovery that the canvas of the painting had previously been used as one quarter of the artist's painting "The Enchanted Pose" which had been exhibited in 1927. This was an exciting discovery as previously parts of this painting had been discovered under paintings held at the Museum of Modern Art in New York and the Moderna Museet, Stockholm, and the Norwich quarter gave a better indication of the colours used in the original painting. There was still a quarter to be discovered. During discussion the committee noted the need of artists to reuse canvasses for economic reasons. The committee noted that "The Human Condition" was currently in Frankfurt but it was hoped would be displayed at Norwich Castle in July. A member suggested that members of the public would like postcards of the paintings.

The head of operations and learning presented the report and answered members' questions.

During discussion on the exhibitions members commended the Olive Edis exhibition and were pleased that there would be a permanent exhibition at Cromer Museum. Brenda Ferris commented on the current Sixty Years On – Highlights from the Norwich Castle's Collection which opened in September 2016 and said that the collection included an unusual LS Lowry painting of a rural landscape. The

committee noted that the Nelson and Norfolk exhibition, which included loans from the National Maritime Museum and other Norfolk Museums was being curated by Ruth Batterby-Tooke in Norwich. The committee also noted that visitors to the Small Stories : At Home in a Doll's House exhibition would be signposted to the toy collections at Strangers Hall. The head of operations and learning said that the curators would be producing a catalogue for the Rembrandt: Lightening the Darkness exhibition which was expected to sell well. Temporary exhibition programmes like this were critical to encourage new visitors to Norwich Castle, supported the educational programme and were a key part of the service. Officers would be working with partners to promote the exhibition, including to visitors from the Netherlands, and were grateful for the support given by the East Anglian Arts Fund and the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society.

Members of the committee noted that the Rowdy Romans event had been popular with families and children over the February half term holiday. This was an opportunity for the museums service to test out events as part of the Keep project. A member said that his son had particularly enjoyed the interactive elements of the event. During discussion members commented on the RSPB Big Castle Birdwatch event which was hosted by Norwich Castle in January. It was noted that the museums service had hosted similar events at Gressenhall in partnership with the RSPB.

Discussion ensued on the conservation work on the Ensign of Le Généreux (details as set out in 4.1 of the report) and that this was possible because of funding from the Costume and Textile Association, which would be supplemented by a Just Giving campaign; and also a contribution for the lining fabric from the Nelson Society. The committee had an interesting discussion on the remarkable size of the flag and the origin of the saying "nailing your colours to the mast". A member pointed out that the flag had been gifted to the people of Norwich and therefore it should remain in the city. Stuart Garner, the operations manager, said that the museums service was keen to make the flag as accessible as possible. A more detailed presentation could be made to the next meeting.

The head of operations and learning referred to the report and said that the museums service was very grateful to the team of volunteers who carried out the deep clean at Strangers' Hall after Christmas. This included a group of recent asylum seekers as part of the New Routes collaboration with Norwich's City of Sanctuary initiative, which helped refugees with constructive work experience whilst making connections with the local community and provide an understanding of the city's history.

(Councillor Bremner left the meeting at this point on other council business.)

The head of operations and learning then presented the rest of the report. A member of the county council congratulated the museums service on the work that they did with youth offenders. The committee noted that the museums service also worked in partnership with the YMCA and provided activities for young homeless people and looked after children, and its dementia friendly status. The committee considered that this was a good use of resources and asked for a detailed report of the work of the learning team at a future meeting.

The operations manager circulated the attendance figures for the last quarter at the meeting. He pointed out that figures for February were slightly down on the previous year because of the unseasonably warm weather during the half term holiday and a small gap in the exhibition programme. Members also noted that figures were affected by Easter being early last year and later this year which meant that Easter did not fall within the current financial year. The committee was satisfied that taking this into account the visitor numbers were in the right direction.

RESOLVED to:

(1) note the report;

(2) record the committee's gratitude to all the organisations, volunteers and the officers of the museums service for their invaluable contribution to the work for the Norwich Museums, and to invite Ceri Lamb to present a report to the next meeting on the work of the Friends of the Norwich Museums;

(3) ask the head of operations and learning to arrange for the committee to have detailed presentations on the following two items:

(a) the conservation work being undertaken to the Ensign of Le Généreux;

(b) the work of the learning team with hard to reach groups;

(4) ask Dr John Davis for an update on the Keep project at the next meeting.

5. Collections Review and Rationalisation Programme 2015-18

Samantha Johns, the collections development manager, presented the report and explained that the there was a strict protocol in place for the disposal of items from the collections.

During discussion the collections development manager referred to the report and answered members' questions. As part of the rationalisation programme the collections team were undertaking an audit of the collections and updating the database with the relevant information to ensure that items were properly catalogued and that an effective audit trail was in place. In reply to a question about how this was undertaken she explained that they worked to national ethical guidelines and used a tool-kit produced by the Museums Association. The curators were the first point of call and identified items which either did not fit in with the collections or had deteriorated according to the Norfolk Museums Service Collections Development policy. The rationalisation programme meant that retained items were stored in better condition and enabled access to stored collections. There was a hierarchy of organisations which would be approached in order with an offer of an item. If the item could not be disposed of in this way it was often returned back into the store.

Discussion ensued on the deterioration and risk of explosion from the nitrate film. Members were assured that the film canisters had been offered to East Anglian Film Archive and the Norfolk Record Office. Neither could store the film canisters safely and officers had been assured that the film was either a duplicate of film already held or could not be identified and therefore was of little merit. The film would be disposed of safely by the British Film Institution. The collections development manager undertook to ensure that there was no other nitrate film in store.
A member asked if digital photographs could be taken to record items such as the Chinese wedding dress and collar to record before disposal to record that they had been part of the collections. The collections development manager confirmed that that this would be done as part of the rationalisation documentation and resulting audit trail.

RESOLVED to:

(1) approve the rationalisation of the Norwich social history items listed in annex 2 of the report and recommend to the Joint Museums committee the disposal of these items as set out in the report;

(2) ask the collections development manager to report back to the committee on whether the Norfolk Museums Service has any other nitrate film in its store.

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6. The Norfolk Teaching Museum Programme

Sarah Gore, teaching museum programme manager, gave a presentation on the Norfolk Teaching Museum Programme, which included a video. The programme employed trainees on a paid one year fixed term basis and provided an opportunity for them to specialise in a particular role and attend one day a week training on the full range of the museums services activities. There was now a new traineeship in business development in response to the current economic climate and funding in the public sector. Seven new trainees had been recruited and would start in April. The programme had a minimum entry requirement of A' level or equivalent and was therefore open to trainees from a whole range of backgrounds and different ages.

The teaching museum programme manager said that the scheme had received awards both externally and internally. Trainees went on to get good jobs in museums across the country.

Councillor Bearman said that he was a young person's champion and considered that members of the economic development subcommittee would be interested in the programme.

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RESOLVED to:

(1) thank the teaching museum programme manager for the presentation;

(2) note the report.

7. Schedule of meetings

The chair commented that this meeting was the last in the civic year and took the opportunity to thank the members of the committee and officers for their support. Members of the committee also thanked any members who were standing down from the committee. Councillor Hannah said that he had thoroughly enjoyed being on the committee.

RESOLVED to agree the schedule of meetings for 2017 to 2018 (all meetings to be on Tuesdays at 14:00) as follows:

11 July 2017
12 September 2017
12 December 2017
6 March 2018

CHAIR