



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:40

10 September 2019

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair)
Giles (substitute for Councillor
McCartney-Gray)
Maxwell

County Councillors:

Clipsham
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums) and
Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society), Amanda Geitner (East
Anglia Arts Fund) and Councillor Hardy (South Norfolk Council)

Apologies:

City Councillors McCartney-Gray, Price, Schmierer and Wright;
County Councillors Brociek-Coulton (vice chair), Jones 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 4 June 2019, subject to the following amendments to item 5, Friends of the Norwich Museums, second paragraph, to delete "2012" and replace with "2021"; and to correct the surname reference to "Devonshire".

4. Norwich Museums Briefing June to August 2019

The assistant head of museums presented the report which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting.

During the presentation the assistant head of museums reported on the success of the exhibitions the *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* exhibition which closed on closed on 8 September 2019 after a seven month run. The number of attendances had not diminished towards the end towards the end of the seven month run. The *Lines of Sight: Sebald's East Anglia* had received good reviews. Catalogues for *The Tor Falcon – Rivers of Norfolk*, supported by the East of Anglia Art Fund, were selling well which was a good indication of the success of the exhibition.

Viking: Rediscover the Legend exhibition had been a catalyst for a plethora of events and other activities, including the holiday events programme at Norwich Castle branded as *Legend*. These events had made the most of the opportunity of the clear view of the Keep. The *Shieldmaidens* event was a new style of engagement where people moved through the space with the performers. The *Taboo: Colonialism in the Decorative Arts* was a tour of Norwich Castle which presented non-standard, alternative or under-represented narratives as a means of engaging with Art Council England's Creative Case for Diversity. This had been well planned by the learning team and curators. Councillor Maxwell said that she had been asked by one of the organisers of Norwich Pride to pass on to officers that the *Pride: Queering the Collections* LGBT+ tour had been excellent.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and the activities held at Strangers' Hall, including a *Reinvent, Reuse, Rewear* workshop which encouraged visitors to remake their own garments into something new. The committee noted that there had been an increase in visitor numbers during this year's Norwich Freeman Fortnight, where free admission to the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell and Stranger's Hall was offered. This was attributed to the fortnight coinciding with the extremely hot weather in 2018, but also to the momentum built over the three years that the Freeman of Norwich had supported this initiative. The assistant head of museums agreed that the exit survey results would be shared with the Norwich Freeman. The operations manager said that last year the Freeman Fortnight had taken place in the last week of July and first week of August. This year it had been held in August. The Museum of Norwich had seen the largest spike in visitor numbers. The exit survey showed that 46 per cent visitors during the Freeman Fortnight had not been before and 15 per cent had attended the previous year. The majority of responses were from Norwich postcodes and this showed that the event was reaching local people who had not previously visited the museums but who would be likely to return or recommend a visit to other people. Members expressed their gratitude to the Norwich Freeman for supporting the event for the third year running.

The *Norwich in 1959* exhibition at the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell was a temporary exhibition that included celebrations of the 60th anniversary of the city's twinning link with Rouen; the launch of Anglia Television and Norwich City Football Club's 1959 FA cup win. The exhibition had included Anglia Television's silver knight. It had also provided a focus for the students recruited to the Kick the Dust: Norfolk project, who had curated a display case of 1950's costumes and leading to one student undertaking three weeks of volunteering, assisting with art workshops. Members noted that that Kick the Dust: Norfolk project engaged young people in hard to reach groups and that the project had also helped university students with issues such as confidence and social engagement. A member said that the students had been very well informed and that the exhibition had been delightful.

The assistant head of museums advised the committee that John Newstead, BEM, had died at the end of July. John Newstead had been a pharmacist in Norwich and had been the donor of over 2,500 objects which formed the popular pharmacy display at the Museum of Norwich. Norfolk Museums Service had sent a letter of commiseration to his family and been represented at the funeral.

At the last meeting the committee had noted that the original Samson figure had been restored and was on display at the Museum of Norwich and had asked for

information on *Hercules*. The assistant head of museums reported that unlike the Samson figure, which dated back to 1657, Hercules was a Victorian replica. It was stored in the Collections Centre at Gressenhall where it could be viewed as part of regular tours but there were no immediate plans to display it at the Museum of Norwich.

During discussion members of the committee commented on the Youth Offending Team Castle Project section of the report and the learning team's proposal to hold an introductory session for key workers. In reply to a member's question, the assistant head of museums said that the project was in partnership with the Norfolk Youth Offending Team, and that the support workers provided feedback rather than the participants. The project improved engagement between participants and support workers. Whilst some participants did drop-out, those that engaged were interested in "behind the scenes" activities at the museums and some went on to become volunteers. A report on the project could be made to a future meeting.

The assistant head of museums thanked the East Anglia Art Fund for its continuing support of the ST*ART Club for children aged 8 to 11 years' old.

Members were also advised that *Kick the Dust* programme was almost at the end of its first year of the four year programme. Partnership working had been successful in engaging with young people. In particular the dedicated project worker embedded in the YMCA had contributed to 485 YMCA clients engaging in the *Kick the Dust* project. Three of the young people engaged in the programme from the YMCA were interested in the museum's Teaching Museum programme.

Members noted that the next Museums at Night event would be held at the Museum of Norwich on Saturday, 2 November 2019. This would be publicised through social media and marketing.

The assistant head of museums said that any member of the committee was welcome to observe school sessions and that he would circulate details of suitable sessions to members. Councillor Ward recommended members to take up the opportunity to attend a session. The committee noted that the third annual conference for teachers had been held in July and that the schools' programme was being developed as part of the Keep redevelopment project.

Dr Francesca Vanke, keeper of art and curator of the decorative arts, presented the section of the report on the *Art Department – Recent Acquisitions*. Members were invited to attend the launch for the "Walton Bridges" painting by JMW Turner on 27 September 2019. It was proposed to ensure that the painting was accessible to as many people as possible and it would be displayed in Great Yarmouth and King's Lynn as well as at Norwich Castle, and in the wider region in partnership with Colchester and Ipswich Museums Services. Norwich Castle had acquired a painting by John Opie, *Double Portrait of Amelia Opie*, when the subject was a young woman. The museums service already had a marble bust of the poet and writer Amelia Opie as an older woman. There was currently a fundraising campaign to acquire the *pietre dure* which had once belonged to the Paston family. There were further acquisitions in the pipe line, including paintings by contemporary artists Eva Rothschild and Maggi Hambling which would be displayed in the Timothy Gurney Gallery.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and updated the committee on progress on the Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England (Keep redevelopment project. Hannah Jackson, Keep project manager, was introduced to the committee. The operations manager updated the committee on the Wider Impact Group (WIG) and its objective to facilitate the Keep project whilst keeping the museum open to the public. Gemma Rayment had been appointed as the WIG project officer. Members noted the location of the temporary visitor entrance and arrangements for weddings to continue during the construction period; and, the arrangements for catering and conveniences. In reply to a member's question, the operations manager said that bridal parties were advised that with the exception of limousines, mini buses and large vehicles, there was sufficient room for vehicles to turn around on the mound. It was hoped that some parking for disabled people would be maintained during the construction period and further information would be available once the contractor was in place. Exhibitions were currently being decanted from the Egyptology gallery at Norwich Castle because of concern about potential damage to objects from vibrations during construction, with key items from this gallery being redisplayed elsewhere in the museum. Temporary storage was being provided at a site in Norwich.

The operations manager circulated the latest visitor numbers which showed a strong performance over the last five years. Visitor numbers to the Museum of Norwich showed the Samson effect with increased visitors following the display and publicity on the restoration of the Samson figure. During discussion, a member asked whether admission fees would be reduced to reflect the limited offer at the Castle during the construction phase. The assistant head of museums confirmed that Norwich Castle would remain open and that consideration would be made to ensure that every opportunity could be made for people to view the various stages of the Keep redevelopment. The operations manager said that it was expected that visitor numbers would be reduced during the major development phase. School visitor numbers would be monitored. The museums service was keen to retain school visitors during this period. The assistant head of museums said that there would be more robust programming in the galleries, including the Timothy Gurney and Norwich Union galleries, that would be unaffected by the construction works, and there would be good quality temporary exhibitions. In reply to a question, the operations manager said that there were fewer weddings during the winter, with the most being on Fridays and Saturdays, and never on Sundays or Mondays.

The committee was advised of the outcome of the chair and vice chair's letter to the police and crime commissioner about the anti-social behaviour in the Castle Gardens. The police had patrolled the area for two days the previous week but this did not appear to have much impact on the anti-social behaviour. Members and officers expressed their concern about the threat to staff and visitors from people engaged in drinking and drug taking, and exposure to violent behaviour. Officers thanked the committee for their support and said that they would pursue the issue with the police and report back to the next meeting.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note the report;
- (2) ask the chair and vice chair write on behalf of the committee to the Norwich Freeman to thank them for their support of the Freeman Fortnight;

- (3) ask the assistant head of museums to arrange for a report on the Youth Offending Team Castle Project is made to a future meeting of the committee;
- (4) ask the committee officer to circulate details of the school sessions to members;
- (5) note the committee's concerns about anti-social behaviour in Castle Gardens ask the head of operations to liaise with the police and report back on progress to address antisocial behaviour in Castle Gardens to the next meeting.

5. Norfolk Contemporary Art Society

Brenda Ferris, representing the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS), gave an oral report to members and circulated copies of the society's most recent programme and newsletter.

During her presentation, Brenda Ferris said that the society was making its events programme available to Norwich University of the Arts and providing free membership for students who registered their details with the society. In October, a brace of exhibitions *Port-2-Port* at Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn, supported by Norfolk County Council and the East Anglia Art Fund, and curated by NCAS. She outlined recent the programme of recent and forthcoming talks. She also advised members that the biennial auction would be held in the Council Chamber on Friday, 1 November 2019 and that they would be welcome to attend this fundraising event.

RESOLVED to thank Brenda Ferris for her report.

(Following the conclusion of the meeting, members undertook an informal tour of the proposed construction areas in the scope of the Norwich Castle, Gateway to Medieval England (Keep) project.)

CHAIR