



**Norwich Area Museums Committee**

**14:00 to 15:50**

**7 December 2021**

Present:

**City Councillors:**

Huntley (chair)  
Grahame  
Maxwell  
Schmierer  
Wright

**County Councillors:**

Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)  
Ward

**Co-opted non-voting members:**

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Apologies:

City Councillor Everett, County Councillors Birmingham, Reilly, Rumsby and Watkins, Councillor King (co-opted non-voting member) and Councillor Kybird (ex officio member)

**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 7 September 2021.

#### **4. Norwich Museums Report – September to November 2021**

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 referred to the Covid secure measures in place following the end of legal restrictions on 19 July 2021. The site capacity for visitors had increased from the previous average of 30 per cent normal capacity. Booking was still recommended but walk-in visitors could be accommodated depending on capacity. Since 19 July, face coverings had been “expected and recommended”, to be worn when visiting the museums. On 30 November 2021, the government made the wearing of face coverings compulsory in retail and other settings. Therefore, signage in the museums was therefore being amended. All Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) staff members were required to wear a mask, unless behind a screen or seated at a desk. From 4 October, more back-office staff members and curators had come back to work in the museums. NMS had implemented the county council’s smarter working principles across the service, combining home and office working at individual staff member and team level. Given the growing concern about the Omicron Covid variant, NMS would continue to work with the council’s Health & Safety and Wellbeing team and consult with the National Museums Directors Council and the English Civic Museums Network.

The operations manager presented section 2, Reopening at Norwich Museums of the report. From 10 November 2021, all three Norwich Museums had returned to full pre-Covid 19 operating hours. Members also noted that the number of ceremonies remained strong, with an increase in ceremonies taking place at Norwich Castle in September.

The learning manager referred to section 3 of the report and said that the Norwich Museums Learning team were pleased to welcome schools back into the museums. There were strong bookings up until Christmas and the first half of the spring term, mainly at Norwich Castle and Strangers’ Hall, with fewer visits to the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell. Bespoke visits were arranged for secondary schools. The museums had hosted visits and events for 6,000 school children in the autumn term which as an amazing achievement given the current challenges. The most popular theme had been the Egyptians this term and the Romans next term. The online and digital offer was still available for schools unable to visit or to supplement visits. Activities were available for intergenerational groups during the school holidays comprising of self-led activities and performances and providing a blended offer for Christmas. Childminders and parents of early year children had been appreciative of the precautions against Covid infection during activities. The team had been involved with Kick the Dust project and engaged in the planning of the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn activities programme. Members were also advised to view the external projections, in partnership with Norwich Bid on the outside of Norwich Castle portraying the visit of Henry I and Queen Adelaide to Norwich to celebrate Christmas 900 years’ ago.

The assistant head of museums advised members that the report contained performance statistics on the Kick the Dust project.

Hannah Jackson, the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn Project manager, gave a power point presentation on the progress of the project. Several members of the committee had the opportunity to visit Norwich Castle on a “Behind the Hoardings” tour before the committee meeting. ([A copy of the presentation is available with the committee papers for this meeting on Norwich City Council’s website](#)).

The assistant head of museums said that NMS continued to develop its digital offer and the Museum of Norwich had hosted two live webinars on Crome’s Norwich Exhibition and the history of Norwich Trams, aimed at people who wanted to access services remotely or were anxious about onsite visits. This underlined the need to provide a hybrid offer. The museum had received 300 visitors during the two Heritage Open Days (HOD) where entrance is free. Staff members at the museum had supported the Norwich Science Festival and Black History month. Schools were very keen to visit this museum and staff members had developed partnerships with the community-based organisations, proactively offering access to the collections and use of the building. This was an asset to the community and a credit to the team. Jazz, a Kick the Dust trainee, had moved on to another role following the completion of her 18-month traineeship and level 3 qualification, which was a credit to her and the team.

Strangers’ Hall had also been well supported over the HOD, its opening hours had increased and it had a full activity programme. This included activities aimed at combating loneliness and social isolation. Members were advised that although staff members had monitored sites and collections during lockdowns, an unfortunate consequence had been an increase in mould and pest infestations which would be addressed during the annual deep clean in January.

The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial Update and outlined the key activities of the curators. This included the opening of the *Textile Treasures* exhibition, reconfigured for the Timothy Gurney Gallery, and included recent acquisitions of textiles made during the first lockdown in response to the pandemic. The curator of contemporary modern art was working on three exhibitions for 2022 including the *Slaves of Fashion – New Works by the Singh Twins* to open in October. The Regimental Museum collections stores was undergoing a complete refit that would transform the space and the storage of collections. The curator of historic art was preparing an exhibition for the Watercolours Gallery *Where Land and Water Meet* for next year. The senior curator of archaeology continued to work on the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project as well as leading on the curation of the prison display for reinstallation in the Boudicca Gallery. Specimens from the Natural History Gallery had been temporarily removed for treatment of clothes moths by deep freezing. The senior curator of natural history was preparing a fossil display for installation in Norwich Castle’s British Wildlife Gallery, linked to the Deep History Coast project. In conclusion, the senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art updated members on her various activities, including working with Kick the Dust to prepare a workshop for Looked After children and preparing a talk for the Norfolk Community History Club, an online talk on the Norwich Castle collections (available on YouTube) and at the Forum on the Marilyn Theobald teapot bequest as part of HOD. She was working on the preparations for the display of Turner’s painting *Walton Bridges* over the next 3 years at King’s Lynn and Ipswich. She had completed the online exhibition Turner and artists of the Norwich School which will

be available on the Art UK website. The display of the Marilyn Theobald teapots in the Art of Living gallery was proving popular with visitors.

The operations manager updated the committee on the progress of Project Refresh to improve the environmental controls of the temporary exhibition galleries. The Norwich Union gallery environment was very different to that in the Bernard Matthews gallery. Currently a single air handling unit was used for both galleries. New plant would be provided to serve only the Bernard Matthews gallery and enable the two galleries to operate independently. The project also included the provision of insulation in the roof space and external walls. Work was expected to be completed in April 2022.

The assistant head of museums drew members' attention to the visitor numbers contained at the end of the report. He then presented data on the [social media](#) which would be circulated to members with the minutes of the meeting.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) thank the assistant head of museums and officers for [the report](#);
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to Hannah Jackson, for arranging the "Behind the Hoardings Tour" for members and her presentation at this meeting.

**5. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations**

Amanda Geitner, East Anglia Arts Fund (EAAF) said that she was delighted with the attendance figures for its Norwich Castle Open Arts Show – *Somewhere Unexpected* and thanked the senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative art for her assistance. She referred to the Textiles Treasures exhibition and said that members of the organisation enjoyed tea and tours of the textile collections. The EAAF was pleased to support the *Slaves of Fashion – New Works by the Singh Twins* exhibition opening next year.

Danutia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society, complemented NMS on the progress of the Norwich Castle – Palace Reborn Project and despite Covid had continued to provide a service and keep the museums open and accessible. The society had also contributed to the *Slaves of Fashion – New Works by the Singh Twins*.

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, presented her report (attached to the agenda papers) and said in the John Crome Bicentennial Exhibition, where the Friends had been the main sponsor was one of the highlights of their centenary year. An event had been held in the Town Close Auditorium (Norwich Castle) for the volunteer stitchers for the Friends Tapestry and a display of the nine panels which were halfway to completion. The Friends were very grateful for the civic reception, hosted by the Lord Mayor Councillor Maguire, and arranged by Councillor Huntley and Francesca Makin, chair of the Friend's 100 Committee and a former chairman, on 12 November 2021. Arrangements were being made to hold the postponed centenary luncheon, hosted by the Friends' patron, Lord Cholmondeley, at Houghton Hall on 20 May 2022.

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) thank Amanda Geitner, Danutia Wurm and Felicity Devonshire for their reports;
- (2) thank the voluntary organisations for their continued support to the Norwich Museums and NMS.

**6. Kick the Dust – Project Update**

Christine Marsden, project co-ordinator, gave a presentation to update members on the progress of the Kick the Dust project, together with, Rachel Daniel, project worker – Norwich and Sophie Hockaday, design and technical KtD trainee. ([A copy of the presentation is available on the city council's website with the papers for the meeting](#)).

During discussion, Christine Marsden answered member's questions. Kick the Dust (KTD) was a National Lottery Heritage Fund-funded project for 11 to 25 year olds. She explained that part of the legacy of the project was to ensure that young people did not "fall off" at the age of 25, particularly if they had specific needs or disabilities. During the project, partnerships had been developed with the YMCA and institutional change had taken place within NMS. KTD participants could be offered work placements. The issue would be whether young people over the age of 25 were willing to engage.

The vice chair congratulated the project co-ordinator on the success of the project and praised Rachel Daniel and Sophie Hockaday for their enthusiasm.

**RESOLVED** to thank Christine Marsden, Rachel Daniel and Sophie Hockaday for the presentation.

CHAIR