



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:25

1 March 2022

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair)
Grahame
Maxwell

County Councillors:

Birmingham
Reilly
Watkins
Ward

Co-opted non-voting members:

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

Apologies:

City Councillors Everett, Schmierer and Wright; County Councillors Brociek-Coulton (vice chair) and Rumsby; and Councillor King (co-opted non-voting member), Councillor Kybird (ex officio member) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) (co-opted non-voting members)

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 December 2021.

4. Norwich Museums Report – December to February 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 for members to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums presented the first section of the report during which he commented that despite the ending of legal restrictions, many Covid-secure systems were still in place to manage a safe environment for visitors and staff. Visitors to the museums and staff were “expected and recommended” to wear face

coverings and abide by “respectful distancing” to minimise the risk of transmission. The development of digital resources during the pandemic was a tribute to the Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) teams who had learned new skills. An evaluation had been carried out and online content would continue to be provided. (A copy of the [Social Media – Headline Stats for Norwich Museums 1 December 2021 to 28 February 2022](#) is available on the city council’s website with the agenda papers for this meeting.)

The assistant head of museums commented on the arrangements for the “behind the scenes” officers to return to work on site and the current restrictions on occupancy levels. He pointed out that many volunteers, who worked indoors, also wanted to return on site. Their health and wellbeing would also need to be managed.

The operations manager reported on the section 2, Reopening the Museums. It was noted that the number of ceremonies taking place at Norwich Castle continued to be on track with around 600 ceremonies expected to take place by the end of March 2022. The high level of ceremonies was attributed to a backlog of ceremonies that had been postponed or delayed during the pandemic.

The assistant head of museums presented the section 3, Norwich Learning Team activity, on behalf of Dr Helen Lunnon, the Norwich learning manager. Dr Lunnon would be leaving the service at the end of March 2022 and had been a very effective learning manager during her three years in the post, which was reflected in the creativity and ambitions of the team. In reply to a member’s question, the assistant head of museums said that NMS recognised the importance of learning for the service. There were transitional arrangements in place, pending an appointment to cover this key role.

The committee noted that school visits continued to be fully booked for the rest of the Spring term and that this underlined the value that schools gave to visits, especially as many children had not had opportunities for outings during the pandemic. The schools offer had been maintained during the outbreak of the Omnicron variant. There was a strong demand for the Roman and Ancient Egyptian offers and activities at Strangers’ Hall, which reopened to schools after the February half term holiday. The layout of the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell was more challenging for school visits. It was interesting to note that instead of being an alternative, the digital offer now supported on-site school visits. The Norwich learning manager had been pleased with the number of visitors attending the February half-term activities.

The assistant head of museums referred to the report and said that regretfully the *Christmas at the Castle* activities had been affected by the Omnicron variant. Norwich BID had led on The *Christmas Crowns Trail*, which celebrated the royal visit of King Henry 1 and Queen Adeliza to the city at Christmas 1121, by a trail of sparkling crowns displayed in shops, restaurants and other buildings across the city from 16 November to 5 January. Members were also advised that the Christmas Light Projections had been filmed and the animations were available to view on the Castle’s YouTube Channel.

The committee was reminded of the wider interest in Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project outside the county. Lee Warden, Keep Project Learning and Engagement Officer had taken the *Knight Club* to Tendring Technology College.

Over 1000 students took part over the week and with 6 teachers training to be providers, the college looked set to become a provider itself. Members were asked to contact NMS if they were aware of a school or group that would be interested in a *Knight Club* session or becoming a *Knight Club* provider.

The assistant head of museums presented the section on the Kick the Dust project. This included data to the end of January 2021. Funding for the project would end in November 2022 and NMS wanted to retain the momentum of Kick the Dust and the NMS Youth Engagement Strategy. There had been a meeting with Leicester's Kick the Dust project colleagues and potentially there could be a funding bid for specific projects, engaging young people, through the National Lottery Heritage Fund. During discussion, a member referred to the evaluation where 80 per cent of young people felt there were jobs for young people like themselves, and 81 per cent said that they were more likely to become a volunteer because of their involvement in the project and asked if this had happened. The assistant head of museums said that GDPR made it difficult to track individual young people once they left the project but at the heart of the project was the progress that young people made from player to shaper to leader, as they engaged and developed their skills. Young people had made significant progress through opportunities to participate in the steering group and paid traineeships. This demonstrated that they had the skills to take forward to longer term opportunities. In reply to a members' suggestion that there would be follow-up tracking for young people at the end of the project, the assistant head of museums agreed that the available information would be collated and reported back to members.

The assistant head of museums provided an oral update on section 5 Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project. The "WC block area" would be available to visitors from the end of May 2022 and was currently undergoing the final fit with the implementation of electricity, plumbing and internal partitions. This was a key part of the project. The improved facilities increased the capacity to accommodate large numbers of visitors. The facilities would be available for all visitors to use but there would be an adjacent dedicated entrance for school visitors. Members were advised of the construction works and that consideration was being given to the position of steelwork and where it would fit into the historic fabric of the building. Further surveys and investigation had been undertaken, as the underlying fabric of the building was not always as anticipated in this complex historic building. The project team and contractors were continuing to work closely with the city council and Historic England.

Members noted that the Museum of Norwich continued to offer a wide range of community activities. Members were advised that they could access the podcasts, produced by the 'Unlocking Our Heritage' Podcast Project volunteers, on *The Great Flood of 1912*, *Superstitions at Sea*, *Rationing during the Second World War* and *A Good Local Pub*, which were available to listen to on YouTube, via the links in the committee report.

It was also noted that there had been a positive story in the local press on the annual deep clean at Strangers' Hall. The deep clean had been carried out by a smaller team than usual because of the restrictions due to the Omnicron variant.

The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial Update and the activities of each of the

curators, as set out in the report. The chair thanked the senior curator for the tremendous amount of work that she and her team did.

The operations manager presented section 8, Project Refresh at Norwich Castle, which was funded through the county council's capital programme to improve the environmental management of the temporary exhibition galleries. This work was due to be completed by 15 April 2022.

The operations manager presented section 9 of the report and said that visitor numbers at Norwich Castle continued to be impressive despite no major exhibitions being hosted during this period. There had been 2,500 visitors during half term week. In reply to a member's question, he explained that the high visitor numbers between July and October were due to the Crome exhibition and related learning activities, and that 10,000 visitors were attributed to the increased ceremonies which took place since May over the summer. A member asked how the figures compared with two years ago. The operations manager said that it was difficult to make a comparison because of the closure of the Keep and construction work, and the impact of Covid. The peak visitor numbers had been 222,000 due to the Nelson and Rembrandt exhibitions that year, but it was anticipated that projected figures, when the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project was completed, would increase by 30 per cent to around 300,000.

In reply to a member's question the operations manager said that in the long term there would be interpretation covering the history of the castle as a prison from the medieval period to the Victorian era, as an immersive experience. In the short term, there would be a display case in the rotunda, which had been the prison governor's house in the Victorian period and the centre of the prison. The dungeon tours would also incorporate the prison stories, which included tales of murder, hangings and deportation. It was noted that the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell was also a former prison. During discussion a member commented on the harsh sentences people received for petty crimes or dissenting and asked if there was any commemoration of Robert Kett and the rebellion. It was noted that there was a plaque near the entrance to Norwich Castle commemorating Robert Kett. The senior curator said that the only artefact from that period was ironically the Mace that had been given to Augustine Steward for putting down the rebellion. The operations manager advised members that there would soon be a virtual reality based exhibition on Robert Kett at the Museum of Norwich, using interactive displays previously located at Wymondham Heritage Museum, in partnership with South Norfolk Council.

Councillor Maxwell spoke of her personal experience as a member and chair of the committee, and a former Lord Mayor and the work of the NMS and thanked the officers and other members for their support. She had enjoyed being on this committee and hoped to continue her connection with NMS in a voluntary capacity.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank the assistant head of museums and officers for the [report](#);
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to Dr Helen Lunnon, Norwich Learning Manager for her contribution to the service;

- (3) continue the discussion on Robert Kett and potential monuments at a future meeting;
- (4) record the committee's gratitude to Councillor Maxwell for her service on the committee as both chair and member.

5. Reports of the Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire presented the report on behalf of the Friends of the Norwich Museums which updated members on their activities. (A copy of the report is available on the council's website.) The Friends had been very pleased to receive a certificate to commemorate the Friends of Norwich Museums' 100 anniversary signed by Councillors Waters, Huntley and Ward, and she asked that their thanks could be recorded. The Friends were preparing for the Friends Centenary Luncheon at Houghton Hall, where it was hoped that two items, a silver Georgian soup tureen and a portrait of Robert Walpole and his hounds, which had originally been gifted from Houghton Hall would be on display. The Friends had reinstated the Talks in the Town Close Auditorium. The next one would be a talk from the local writer and biographer, Phyllida Scrivens on "The Great Thorpe Railway Disaster of 1874" on 17 March 2022 at 15:00. The Friends were also keen to recruit new members.

During discussion the senior curator said that there was another painting by Walpole that the Friends might consider to be more appropriate to display at their luncheon.

The chair acknowledged the gratitude of the Friends and said that the certificate had been designed by NMS.

Janey Bevington addressed the committee on behalf of the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society. The society continued to work closely with Dr Rosy Gray, the curator of modern and contemporary art, on The Singh Twins exhibition, and Amanda Geitner, East Anglia Art Fund and the Norwich University of the Arts (NUA). The society aimed to encourage young artists and students and provided a series of talks.

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

6. Schedule of Meetings

RESOLVED to agree the following schedule of meetings, subject to approval at Norwich City Council's annual council:

Tuesday 7 June 2022 at 14:00
Tuesday 6 September 2022 at 14:00
Tuesday 6 December 2022 at 14:00
Tuesday 7 March 2023 at 14:00

CHAIR