



**Norwich Area Museums Committee**

**14:00 to 15:25**

**6 December 2022**

Present:

**City Councillors:**

Huntley (chair)  
Kidman  
Wright

**County Councillors:**

Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)  
Reilly  
Ward

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

Councillor Kybird (ex officio member), Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Apologies:

City Councillors Osborn, Schmierer and Thomas (Vi), County Councillors Birmingham, Rumsby and Watkins, Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Councillor King (Broadland District Council) and Councillor Spruce (South Norfolk District Council)

**1. Declarations of interest**

There were no declarations of interest

**2. Public questions/petitions**

There were no public questions or petitions.

**3. Minutes**

Subject to noting that Councillor Spruce was present at the meeting, it was:-

**RESOLVED** to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 6 September 2022.

**4. Norwich Museums Report – August to October 2022**

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 ventilation, cleaning regimes, hand sanitisation points and the option of pre-booking tickets. The

museums were now at their pre-pandemic levels of capacity. Air purifiers were being used in a small number of specified locations as appropriate. Across the Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) larger numbers of staff were working in person. Indoor volunteering was nearly at pre-pandemic levels across Norwich Museums and other locations.

The operations manager presented section 2, Norwich Museums operations. Due to the 'Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn' project exit E8 was still being used as the entrance and exit for all visitors. Since the publication of the report the use of the external lift had been lost due to vandalism. The replacement of the glass lift was difficult due to the location of the lift and the glass panel that had been smashed.

In response to a member's question the operations manager said that there was an external camera that covered the lift, however the images captured were of the glass pane shattering and individuals running away in the view of another camera. A member queried whether the service had advertised that the lift was out of action. In response the operations manager said that signage was displayed at the site, details were also displayed on the website and via the service's social media.

The chair queried whether it was possible to reposition the CCTV cameras so that these would cover the area where the incident occurred. The operations manager clarified that in order to move the cameras a data protection impact assessment would need to be undertaken. Data protection legislation was clear that cameras should only cover areas needed for their intended purpose but the operations manager said that he would consider contacting the service's data protection officer to discuss this.

The pop-up café offer in the rotunda was now the permanent installation and the retail stock within the rotunda had also been enhanced. In reference to section 2.2, Norwich Castle ceremonies, he said that numbers were remaining strong, and the service was still seeing increases due to ceremonies that had been delayed or cancelled during the pandemic. In response to a member's question the operations manager clarified that the footfall discussed in section 2.2 was the additional footfall due to ceremonies. Visitor numbers were detailed in section 9 of the report.

The learning manager presented section 3, Norwich Learning Team activity – highlights report. There had been a number of activities during the Autumn term for schools. One activity had been revised to include a letter that had been written by one of the Strangers that arrived in the 1560s. This helped to give additional context for pupils in relation to Strangers' Hall and the plight of refugees in Norwich. The learning team had been working hard at adapting learning activities for students with Special Educational Needs and Disabilities (SEND) such as the 'Made in Norwich' session. The SEND specialist had also worked on adapting other learning activities, and the feedback from these had been positive.

For the opening of *The Singh Twins: Slaves of Fashion* exhibition the learning service had invited teachers from across Norfolk to a private viewing which included a talk from the curator. An A Level environment conference had been held at Norwich Castle in October with the Tyndall Centre. The students looked at a range of topics including soil chemistry, natural history and how to communicate environmental issues. The feedback from the conference had been very positive from both students and teachers. The learning manager highlighted that the digital

resources that had been developed during the COVID-19 pandemic were still available to schools. These were also used by schools to prepare for a visit to the museums.

The learning manager referred members to section 3.3 of the report and highlighted the *ST\*ART Saturdays*, a programme that was being funded through a successful bid to the Town Close Estate Charity. Working with partners this three-year programme would start in February 2023 with the first session called *Making it in Norwich* which would look at Norwich's industrial history. The sessions would be held at the Museum of Norwich. The Norwich Keep Activity Plan, which supported the re-development of Norwich Castle, continued to be delivered both at Norwich Castle and other museums and venues in Norwich.

A number of events had been held across the Norwich museums during half-term which included the *Murder at the Museum!* event at Norwich Castle, two events at St John Timberhill, one called *Remember Me*, and one called *St John Timberhill: A gateway to medieval Norwich*. An event at Strangers' Hall involved ink making workshops for children in the garden.

The chair commented that it was very encouraging that the feedback from all sessions was so positive. A member commented that the events that were offered by the Museums service were exciting and engaging for children and young people and asked whether the budget deficit of schools was likely to make an impact on school bookings. In response the learning manager said that there were a number of impacts, these included the increased cost of transport and parents less able to contribute to the costs of a visit. He said that the service had a transport fund available to schools to help with the cost of coach travel to museums.

A member commented the *Remember Me* event was encouraging to see as sometimes people find it hard to access services to help after losing a loved one. She added that it was positive to see that a BSL tour was being held at the museums and asked where this was being advertised to members of the public. The learning manager said that it was being advertised on the service's social media. A member commented that it would be useful to advertise this in conjunction with local groups for Deaf and hard of hearing people. The assistant head of museums said that the tour had been developed in partnership with groups which had also involved staff training and help to develop that partnership and make the offering at Norwich Castle more accessible.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update. The report was the regular update report on the National Lottery Heritage Fund funded project. The project had surpassed the target of 8,000 interventions and to date there had been 13,022 interventions which showed how wide-reaching the project had been. Through the lifecycle of the programme participants had moved through the various stages of the programme, with 72% of activity in October and November having involved young people leading and designing projects.

The report also highlighted that NMS staff had taken part in training since the beginning of the project to better engage with young people. A number of participants had completed the bursary traineeship programme which had led to employment within the heritage sector. The service was currently modelling a pre-

traineeship programme which would look at helping young people who are in receipt of benefits and helping to enhance their employability.

The project continued to track its progress against the other 12 projects, outlined in the report. The Heritage Fund-funded Kick the Dust project would be coming to an end in March 2023 and therefore the service was looking at the future progression. A funding bid was being put together with YMCA Leicester. If this bid was successful, the project would have a wider reach around improving young people with access needs' employment within the heritage sector.

The assistant head museums presented section 5, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update. He suggested to members that another site tour could be arranged for 2023 before the next Norwich Area Museums committee meeting, which the chair agreed would be helpful. The report showed images of the parts of the project that had been handed back to the service, which included the toilet block and pop-up café within the rotunda. The toilet block included a Changing Places facility which had been registered with the national scheme to ensure that members of the public were aware of the facility if they needed it. The toilet block also highlighted the fabric of the building with the original Norman foundations being exposed on the ground floor.

Within the Keep, the principal and British Museum gallery floors had now been installed and staff from the British Museum had visited to view the marking out of the proposed case locations for the British Museum gallery. Progress was being made on the Percival wing which would be the location of the new visitor entrance.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6, other activity across Norwich museums. The Museum of Norwich had held a pop-up exhibition: *Start-Rite: Celebrating 230 years*. This exhibition ran from 26 September to 12 November 2022. Staff organised a preview to celebrate the company's success with a range of individuals who played a part. The museum has also created a new permanent display with pairs of shoes from the company's birthday collection. The national Heritage Open Days that were planned for September coincided with the passing of Her Majesty, Queen Elizabeth II. The open days still took place but were adjusted to take the mourning period into account.

The Museum of Norwich had recently launched the new Kett's Rebellion Virtual Reality (VR) experience which had been gifted to the museum by South Norfolk District Council and Wymondham Heritage Museum. Coinciding with the launch of the VR experience staff had hosted a tour which was led by a tour guide linked to the book *Tombland* by C J Samson.

Strangers' Hall staff were always looking at ways to display the collection in new ways. An event in August had taken place within the garden with the senior curator of natural history to showcase how to improve biodiversity within people's gardens. The events and activities at the museum that had taken place were detailed in section 6.2 of the report. A highlight for Strangers' Hall had been the addition of a furnished Victorian Dollhouse, donated by local families, to the Toy Collection. This would be displayed as part of Strangers' Hall centenary year. Kick the Dust participants had been involved with activities both in the Museum of Norwich and Strangers' Hall and further details of these would be brought to the next committee.

The chair of the Norfolk joint museums committee commented on the exhibition within Museum of Norwich called *Threads of Connection*, which was launched around the same time as a book, *The Devil's Dye* by Jenni Neill, a local author. This book was set around the weaving and the textile industry in Norwich in the 1500s.

The assistant head of museums presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial update. He said that each of the specialists within the service were always looking at making sure that the collections are accessible to people. The report showed the projects that each of the curators were working on at pages 38 to 43.

The operations manager presented section 8, other developments. He highlighted to members that the Castle Mound cut had been facilitated by Norwich City Council. The mound was classified as a Scheduled Ancient Monument and this cut was important to help the stability of the mound as vegetation and root growth could erode and damage the mound. The recommended schedule, by Historic England, was a twice annual cut, however due to lockdowns these had not taken place. Therefore, this cut had taken a month to complete. The area directly around the Keep was yet to be completed but this was due to the construction work for the Keep project, once this had been completed the area would be cut. The chair asked whether the delay in completing the mound cut would have an impact on the area. The operations manager said that they were using contractors to cut the saplings where possible as they could not currently safely cut the bramble and grass.

In regard to the Shirehall Courtroom, the operations manager said that the service had appointed T.C Garrett as the contractor to complete the remedial work due to the outbreak of dry rot. As the city council had given the relevant listed building and planning consents this work could now start. The work would likely be completed within six months. A member commented that most cases of dry rot were due to poorly maintained gutters. The operations manager said that they would take this forward, he said it was believed that the dry rot was likely due to a historic roof leak. Due to the site and architecture of the building it was difficult to gain access to the roof to maintain this, however, as part of the remedial works the service was looking at access to the roof to ensure it could be better maintained. In response to a member's question the operations manager said that the crack in the wall was part of the remedial works, along with other historical issues within the building.

The operations manager presented section 9, Visitor numbers. He highlighted to members that the annual visitor numbers were down which was consistent with levels nationally. He believed this was due to a number of issues including cost of living pressures. A member asked whether there had also been a drop in the number of Norfolk Museum passes. In response the assistant head of museums said that there had been a decline at the beginning of COVID-19, which was a reduction of around 40%, but many remaining pass holders then stayed with the service. The service had rolled out a number of campaigns to increase the number of pass holders, and rebranded the pass. He said that the service had seen the long tail of COVID-19 and the pressures due to the cost of living, but the Museums pass remained a cost effective way for members to visit museums.

The operations manager presented the appendix, Norwich Area Museums Committee social media report. He said that Norwich Museums had seen an increase of 2% in the number of followers across the key social media platforms. The YouTube channels had also seen increases. The figures for each of the social media

platforms were at pages 47 to 49 to of the report. He highlighted that the Norwich Castle blog had earned over 4300 views.

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

**RESOLVED** to:

- (1) Note the Norwich Museums Report August to October 2022 and;
- (2) ask the assistant head of museums to organise another site visit of Norwich Castle before the next committee meeting

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

Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS), addressed the committee and congratulated the service for *The Singh Twins: Slaves to Fashion* exhibition and said that NCAS was looking forward to supporting similar challenging exhibitions.

NCAS had planned a number of talks in 2023 including Maggi Hambling on 20 February 2023 and would hopefully be holding a talk by the director of the Sainsbury Centre for the Visual Arts. Further details for all NCAS events were available on the organisation's website.

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of the Norwich Museums, said that the Friends were keen to support Norwich Museums as they had done by helping to fund the commissioning of the work by the Singh Twins for the exhibition. The Friends had also helped to fund the Paston pietre dure tabletop to become a part of the NMS collection. The organisation was hoping for additional publicity around the tabletop and its relation to Norfolk.

**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.

CHAIR