



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 16:00

5 March 2019

Present:

City Councillors:

Fulton-McAlister (E), (chair)
Bradford
Maxwell
Price
Trevor

County Councillors:

Nobbs (vice chair)
Clipsham
Jones (B)
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

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

Apologies:

City Councillor Huntley and County Councillor Rumsby; and, co-opted non-voting member, Councillor Hardy (South Norfolk Council)

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 11 December 2019, subject to the insertion of text to penultimate paragraph of item 4, *Norwich Museums briefing: September to November 2018*, as follows:

“The committee asked that customer satisfaction was monitored throughout the period when the Keep was closed and that it received regular information during this period.”

4. Norwich Museums briefing: December 2018 to January 2019

(Members of the Kick the Dust project team were in attendance for the first part of this item: Rachel Daniel, project worker Norwich Area; Rachel Duffield, project worker West, Rachael Williams, based at Stories of Lynn in King's Lynn, Tricia Hall, youth engagement worker for the east (interim); and, Jade Prentice, youth engagement officer YMCA.)

Christine Marsden, the project co-ordinator for the Kick the Dust Project gave a presentation on the progress of the project and introduced the members of the team. The project worker for Great Yarmouth would be taking up her appointment in April. The project was a four year project being delivered in partnership with YMCA Norfolk and Creative Collisions which aimed to engage young people in a range of structured heritage activities that will develop their skills, experience and confidence. Members were advised that the embedded youth engagement officer working within the YMCA was unique and provided an opportunity to work with youth groups and develop skills such as learning how to conduct a tour of an exhibition and talk about it. Members of the committee were invited to contact the project co-ordinator with ideas of activities or information about groups of young people who could engage with this project.

During questions, the project co-ordinator confirmed that there was no cost to young people engaging in the project as it was fully funded. She explained that where young people gave a tour as part of their personal development, for instance the *Norwich in 1959* exhibition, friends and family members would receive a special invitation as it was an opportunity for them to celebrate the young person's personal achievement. Members were advised of other activities in Thetford which engaged the younger age group and that family days had been held. There should be something for everyone. The team was working with Children's services and providing activities that would help young people with English and maths skills. Members were advised that young people were initiating and developing ideas which were creative and included issues such as poverty and taboo subjects, such as menstruation.

The assistant head of museums updated members on changes to the Heritage Lottery Fund which was a key source of funding for the Norfolk Museums Service (NMS). A new funding strategy to 2024 had been developed and the funder would be known as the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Further details would be circulated with the papers for this meeting.

The assistant head of museums then presented the report and said that because of the committee timetable it covered a shorter period than normal. The *Viking Rediscover The Legend* exhibition had opened on 9 February 2019. This was a significant exhibition and had been put together by the same partnership as the Roman Empire exhibition a few years ago. There was a visitor events programme to complement this exhibition as well as activities for schools. There would be a regular programme of exhibitions in the Timothy Gurney Gallery. The current exhibition *Visible Women* (to 28 April 2019) showcased the work of women artists in the NMS art collections. The sector led *Excellence Learning Framework*, which was used by the learning team to develop and evaluate the informal learning programme was continuing to evolve and now included the Arts Council's *Creative Case for Diversity* and key environmental categories based on the county council's environmental policy and the Green Tourism Award scheme. This ensured that the programme offer had a strong focus on quality and was an exemplar of good practice. The learning team was also developing a new strand of programming, *Taboo* in response to the Arts Council's *Creative Case for Diversity*. The first of these, *Colonialism and the Decorative Arts*, would be launched in March. Members also noted that the Kick the Dust project would also be developing this strand.

Members noted that the Winter Wildlife weekend (19 to 20 January 2019) had 2,500 visitors over the two days, with free admission for children and a special price (£2.00) for adults. The chair referred to the high attendance at the event last year and asked how many of these had been “return visitors”. Stuart Garner said that there was a legacy of return visits from free and discounted events, such as the Heritage Open Days. He also noted that visitor numbers were currently constrained to no more than 860 visitors at a time in the Castle due to fire safety restrictions.

The assistant head of museums said that the second Knight Club course had been completed and had received excellent feedback. It had been covered by local television news and was available to watch on line:

(<https://www.itv.com/news/anglia/2019-02-17/knights-at-the-museum-arise-sir-seb-and-friends/>)

The operations manager referred to the report. There had been a 157 per cent increase in visitors to the Christmas events at Strangers’ Hall, increasing from 610 in 2017 to 1,570 in 2018. Building on this success, consideration was being given to enhance the offer and increase the number of days that the event was available. This would include reviewing the online booking facility to enable sales on the day of the event rather than having to close online bookings in advance. In reply to a question, the operations manager said that secondary spending on items from the shop and refreshments was important income. A member suggested that a line of Christmas items, in addition to the photos and mulled wine already being made available should be considered. Members were advised that there had been some initial expenditure for the event this year, for the purchase of decorations, and a small profit had been made. In reply to a question, the operations manager said that the *Twas the Night Before Christmas* event had been featured in the Norfolk Magazine.

Discussion ensued on the Strangers’ Hall annual deep clean. The assistant head of museums said that this was a joint effort of staff, teaching museum trainees and volunteers, including 17 volunteers from English+, a local charity which supports newly-arrived residents in Norwich. Discussion ensued on the Lord Mayor’s coach which was stored at the museum. The operations manager and the assistant head of museums advised members that the coach was closely monitored because there was an ongoing risk to its soft furnishings. An update on the conservation of the Lord Mayor’s coach would be given to the next meeting.

The committee noted that Dr Helen Lunnon had been appointed to the post of Norwich learning manager and would be taking up her new role in April.

The assistant head of museums gave a verbal update on the progress of the Keep Project. He explained that formal “permission to start” had been received from the Heritage Lottery Fund and that recruitment would shortly commence on key posts for the project, including a curator, learning engagement officer and marketing officer. The project architects were now working up the detailed designs. He advised the committee that the building works would be complicated given that access to the mound was constrained to the bridge. A detailed programme of works would be reported to a future meeting of the committee. The project team was working closely with the city council to ensure the discharge of the planning conditions.

The assistant head of museums said that the Keep Project was a strong catalyst that would engage different people. Preparation was being made to interpret what was going on during the construction works to visitors. The Activity Plan action plan was a key element to ensure that visitor numbers were retained during the works and, following discussion with the chair, would be reported to the September meeting of the committee. This would give the learning manager and the learning engagement officer an opportunity to settle into their posts and for new streams of work such as the Kick the Dust project and the reality of the commencement of the building works to be incorporated. Councillors had a key role in sign posting people to the action plan and engagement with NMS. The Activity Plan action plan would run for 4 years which was beyond the construction period. It would include all aspects of engagement from early years and preschool age, schools work, informal engagement with young people (including Kick the Dust), health and well-being through a community café and herb garden and work around dementia on the lines of the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell, in partnership with Age UK and Norwich Mind. Councillors were asked to help make connections with the Keep Project and people in their wards and divisions. The action plan would be flexible and a live document and would benefit from input from this committee.

The operations manager then presented part 7 of the report, *Other Developments*. Venue hire at Norwich Castle had brought in 300 additional visitors over the festive period. Strangers' Hall had hosted another successful *Fright Nights* paranormal investigation event.

The committee then considered the report on the Wider Impact Group, which was chaired by the operations manager. He advised members that the museum's café was currently scheduled to close in July as part of the preparations for the first phase of the building work and an alternative catering unit would be available. In September the temporary entrance and ticket desk for museum visitors would be constructed in preparation of the closure of the current reception and visitor entrance. The proposal was to facilitate the phases of building work so that Norwich Castle could remain open to the public. Communication was key to ensuring that people were aware that Norwich Castle was open for business and it would be important to manage the process.

During discussion about the decanting of collections during the building phases, the chair said the city council would make arrangements for its civic regalia. In reply to a question from a member, the operations manager said that whilst no changes were proposed to the Egyptian gallery, the collection would be moved for safekeeping and to prevent the risk of damage from vibrations during the construction works.

The committee noted that, as reported at the last meeting, the external lift would be closed from 18 March to 17 May 2019 for refurbishment and was funded by a capital grant from the county council. During discussion, the operations manager referred to the report and the refurbishment of the basement toilets and the Rotunda area in general with funding from WREN. The toilets had been refurbished and were about to become available to the public. In answer to a member's question, the operations manager said that the smell that was sometimes reported was thought to come from a disused sewer pipes under the Rotunda and the Natural History galleries which could not be dug up but could be masked or contained. The Rotunda basement toilets were inaccessible to wheelchair users, however, it was noted that there would be two new and accessible toilet blocks delivered as part of the Keep Project.

Members were advised that the replacement furniture for the Rotunda comprised hard wood trestle tables and benches which would be the same as that used in the café. The works included painting the whole of the Rotunda, and new furniture and planting, to complement its 60's architecture. The new design would focus around the centre and people would walk around the side rather than through the centre of the Rotunda. Following the Keep project, most visitors would access the Rotunda from the Keep, coming out at balcony level. The operations manager said that the procurement of a new public address system was planned but was not part of this phase of works. Brenda Ferris said that this was very much needed for openings and events.

Discussion ensued on the visitor numbers which were circulated at the meeting. Members noted that the Viking exhibition was already having a positive impact on visitor numbers. Members commented on the detrimental impact of the hot weather during July and August on visitor numbers. The History Mystery and Christmas events had enhanced visitor numbers. In reply to a member's question, the operations manager apologised for the figures for the other Norfolk museums not being available, due to a technical error and said that these would be available at the next meeting. Members were advised that visitor numbers to Norwich Castle during the unseasonable sunny weather last month had remained high and bode well for the success of the Viking exhibition.

Members then discussed engaging young people and it was noted that most school children in Norfolk visited a museum at some point whilst at school with over 20,000 school visits per annum. The range of exhibitions needed to target all ages and engage families and young people. The Kick the Dust project was specifically targeted at an under-represented age group, 16 to 25 years, and to incorporate this group in the core offer. A member said that whilst it was important to look at increasing visitor numbers in general, it was equally important to consider the targets.

RESOLVED, to:

- (1) thank the assistant head of museums and the operations manager for the report;
- (2) thank Christine Marsden and the members of the Kick the Dust project team for the presentation and attending the meeting, and note that members are invited to contact Christine Marsden about engagement with the project;
- (3) ask the assistant head of museums to provide an update on the conservation work on the Lord Mayor's coach at the next meeting;
- (4) note that Charles Wilde, the county council's marketing manager will be attending the next meeting of the committee.

5. Norwich Collections Rationalisation – Items for consideration

(Members were advised to disregard pages 31 to 43 as these items had been considered previously for disposal and the committee officer had included the items

the report to the committee, 7 March 2017, in error. A revised annex 2 is available on the website with the papers for this meeting.)

Samantha Johns, the collections development manager, presented the report and explained that the items for consideration were set out on the table from page 44 to 50. In reply to a member's question, the collections development manager, acknowledged that acquisitions were through bequests and that the NMS collections' review and rationalisation programme sought to find alternative homes for objects which were not deemed suitable for future display, in accordance with the Arts Council England's Museums Accreditation Standard and the Museums Association's Code of Ethics. Members were assured that the objects would not be disposed of until an alternative home could be found for them. The only exceptions were where the objects was made of a hazardous substance or had an infestation, or where there were ethical reasons not to retain the objects. Rationalisation reduced storage costs provided better access to the collections that were useful and beneficial to the public. The items for rationalisation were considered by an internal committee, the area museums committees and the Joint Norfolk Museums committee.

The collections development manager then presented the list of objects for rationalisation in the Norwich area, starting with the set of Rees encyclopaedia and explained the reasons for disposal of the items set out in the report. Several of the items, comprising metal horseshoes, timber posts, carts, metal trap had been found in the undercroft of the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell.

A member asked how often did the rationalisation process take place given that the clearance of the Keep project might similarly uncover objects that were not suitable for display. The collections development manager explained that this was an ongoing process of accreditation and auditing of the collections. Members expressed an interest in regular reports on the work of the collections development team, including information on acquisitions and loans to other museums.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) recommend to the Norfolk Joint Museums committee the rationalisation of the items listed in Annex 2 (as revised);
- (2) ask the collections development manager to report regularly to the committee on the work of the collections development team.

6. Friends of the Norwich Museums – update report

Felicity Devonshire presented her report on the recent activities of the Friends of the Norwich Museums and its preparations for the celebrations of its 100th birthday. This included the promotion of a trail between the three Norwich museums for families and highlighting a hundred objects that the Friends had helped purchase over its 100 years. The Friends had helped fund the digital information touch screen for the display of the Samson, and provided financial assistance to support a number of other objects including the Sceatta Hoard of silver coins, a Middle Bronze Age gold torc that was found at Great Dunham, financial underwriting of a stature of St Anthony and the embroidered tapestry being made for the Castle Keep. She had also visited the Anglo-Saxon Kingdoms exhibition at the British Library where objects from Norwich Castle had been on display.

During her presentation, a member suggested that the 100 objects CD should also be available on other social media platforms, such as You Tube and Facebook. As the father of a young family, he considered that this would help encourage younger members and families to join the Friends.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank Felicity Devonshire for her report;
- (2) record the committee's gratitude to the Friends of the Norwich Museums.

7. Committee Schedule of Meetings

RESOLVED to agree the schedule of meetings of this committee for the civic year 2019 to 2020, all meetings at 14:00 on Tuesdays:

4 June 2019;
10 September 2019;
10 December 2019;
3 March 2020.

8. Councillor David Bradford

The chair led the committee in thanking Councillor Bradford, who was stepping down from the council after 40 years as a councillor for the Norwich City Council, for his contribution to the work of this committee as both a chair of the committee and a member for several years.

RESOLVED to record the committee's gratitude to Councillor Bradford for his services to this committee and the Norwich museums.

(Following the conclusion of the meeting members of the committee took the opportunity to attend an informal tour of the Viking – Rediscover the Legend Exhibition facilitated by Dr Tim Pestell, exhibition curator.)

CHAIR