



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 16:10

4 June 2019

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair, following election)
Maxwell
McCartney-Gray
Price
Wright

County Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (vice chair following election)
Clipsham
Jones
Nobbs
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums) and
Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Apologies:

City Councillor Schmierer; and, co-opted non-voting members, Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Councillor Hardy (South Norfolk Council)

1. Appointment of chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Huntley to the chair for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of vice chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Brociek-Coulton as vice chair for the ensuing civic year.

3. Public questions/petitions

There were no public questions or petitions.

4. Declarations of interest

None.

5. Minutes

RESOLVED to agree the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 5 March 2019.

6. Norwich Museums Briefing February to May 2019

Visitor profiling

Charles Wilde, NMS marketing manager, gave a presentation on visitor profiling. It was a condition of Arts Council for England funding agreements that visitor profiling through one to one surveys was carried out. It did not include the visitors to the museums through the work of the learning team and other outreach work. The data was collated by the Audience Agency and comparative data was available. Members were interested in the audience spectrum used by the agency (<https://www.theaudienceagency.org/audience-spectrum>) A third of museum visitors were first time visitors, with a high proportion of tourists or people who have moved into the area, and two-thirds were repeat visitors (with half of these being regular visitors). The visitor profile broadly matched the population with a slight bias to over 65s and more female visitors than males. In relation to geographical location, 28 per cent of visitors to the Norwich museums lived within the city boundaries followed by 16 per cent from the Greater Norwich area, and 22 per cent within 30 minutes' drive of the city. The percentages then dropped down to the rural areas of the surrounding counties and clusters in the Midlands and London areas. Data for Norwich Castle was closest in comparison to the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge, although the latter had a higher number of student visitors.) Data showed that 78 per cent of visitors would recommend a visit to the museum to other people and this coincided with comments on Trip Advisor. There were around 3 per cent of detractors who had not enjoyed their visits. The NMS marketing manager said that the museums service was doing very well in comparison with other museums.

During discussion members considered the data response and noted that the museums service followed up Trip Advisor comments. A member said that he considered that there should be research into why people did not visit the museums. All Norfolk County Council tax payers contributed to the running of the service and he considered that the entrance fees deterred people from visiting the museums. The NMS marketing manager advised members that whilst the admission price for an adult was £9.95, the average entrance fee was £3.37 when various discounts had been applied. There were events where museum entrance was free and people were good at passing on information through social media. The price of museum admission was low in comparison to other visitor attractions such as the National Trust properties. The museums service received a third of its funding from income and reducing entrance fees or making it free would impact on the resources available for the service.

Discussion ensued in which members noted that the improvements to the entrance of Norwich Castle would ensure that all visitors had a valid admissions sticker, and that consideration was given to tightening up the use of museums passes, such as photographs, to ensure that the passes were only used by their owners.

Lord Mayor's Coach

Sarah Norcross-Robinson, senior conservator, gave a short presentation on the conservation work on the Lord Mayor's coach. The coach which was kept at Strangers' Hall was built in 1850. Its upholstery was prone to infestation from the clothes moth, particularly as it was stuffed with horse hair. In 2007, the coach had

been fumigated using CO² to suffocate the moths and this had been repeated on a five to six year cycle. However, this meant that there was damage to the upholstery within these periods and it was not a sustainable means of addressing the problem. In November 2018, the coach was taken off site for restoration and because of the risk of further infestation, the original upholstery had been removed so that it could be deep frozen and stored at Gressenhall. Members had an opportunity to view the materials that would be used for the replacement upholstery, replicating the original colours and using foam instead of horse hair. It was noted that these furnishings, including external trims, would be removable and could be treated in the walk-in-freezers at Gressenhall. The city council had indicated that it had no plans to use the coach which was last used 8 years' ago. The work was nearing completion and was expected to return to Strangers' Hall in July. No specific publicity was planned around its return but social media would be used to publicise that the coach had been restored.

Briefing report

The operations manager welcomed members to the Court Room (the venue for the meeting) and explained that there was a tunnel linking the castle to the court room which had been used to take prisoners from the castle. (There would be an opportunity for members to see the tunnel after the meeting.)

The operations manager presented the report which had been circulated with the agenda for the meeting, and highlighted the following:

- Viking: Rediscover the Legend – This exhibition featured a number of iconic and significant Viking objects. New members were welcome to attend. The learning and development team had a number of related activities for schools which tied in with key stages.
- Lines of Sight: Sebald's East Anglia – Members were advised that there was a comprehensive programme of talks to complement this exhibition.
- John Sell Cotman in Norwich and London – Members were advised that the exhibition, comprising late the artist's late watercolours and rarely seen drawings, was running to 9 June.
- Tor Falcon – Rivers of Norfolk – This exhibition of drawings of Norfolk rivers would commence on 12 July. This exhibition was the outcome of a three year project funded by the East Anglia Art Fund.
- Norwich Castle events – The committee noted the programme of visitor events at Norwich Castle. This included the "Legend" programme of crafts activities and trails for families during the school holidays and linked to the Viking exhibition; Museums at Night on 18 May, where the museum opened its doors out of hours for free; the Norwich Castle "Knight Club"; the ST*ART Club had an art masterclass facilitated by Karl Foster for children aged 8 to 12 years; Broadening Audiences – Open Doors - There was an event in April as part of the museums service's commitment to broadening participation and access and inclusion for all and had received press attention and a mention on BBC Norfolk on the day of the event;
- Taboo – "Colonialism in the Decorative Arts" would be held in June as part of the programme which addresses issues central to the Arts Council England's Creative Case for Diversity agenda.

- Strangers' Hall - Members were advised about staff changes in that Tracey Mavor had been appointed to the role of building services supervisor and Wednesday Batchelor, the new teaching museum trainee, was working on an audit of the children's toy collection.
- English + Museum Club – This club has been set up for a group from English + to meet in the Norwich museums on a monthly basis to build confidence for people with limited English and to interact with the museum and its staff. Each session commences with an introductory talk.
- Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell – The statue of Samson had been installed in the museum.
- Snap comes to Life – The statue of Snap, on display at the Museum of Norwich, is the latest of the Talking Statues which tell their own stories. An under 16s competition had been held for the script which had been voiced by Joe Darbyshire.
- Norfolk and Norwich Festival – Will Teathers' globes – The artist Will Teathers had produced two globes for the museums services, based on photographs of the Bird Gallery at Norwich Castle and the pharmacy at the Museum of Norwich.
- Summer exhibition – collaboration with Kick the Dust – The summer exhibition at the Museum of Norwich was "Norwich in 1959" and tied in with the 60th anniversary of twinning with Rouen, featuring contemporary photographs taken by Stefan Ebelewicz set against the story of the city now.
- Learning Team activities – "Snaplings", the new learning programme for 0 to 2 year olds at Norwich Castle had been launched, and a new courtroom activity for schools, KS4 Crime and Punishment, where student re-enact how defendants were court and put on trial had been introduced.
- The Norwich learning team had been joined by George Baines, teaching museum learning trainee in April 2019.
- Kick the Dust programme – Members were advised that the report provided an update on the progress of the report to the presentation at the last meeting of the committee. The museums service was grateful to the YMCA for its collaboration in this project.

During discussion a member asked for an update on what had happened to the original Hercules statue. The operations manager undertook to investigate this and report back to the next meeting of the committee.

A member pointed out that the next event for young carers would be held on 14 June 2019.

The operations manager then referred to the Other Developments section of the report and updated members on the venue hire during the February to May period. This included hosting Norfolk County Council's OSCA's awards ceremony. The removal of collections and cases from the Keep as preparation for the development had provided opportunities to share the "clear view Keep" in order to see the architecture. Signs had been erected to explain architectural features.

The committee noted that the Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England project was preparing for the development works to commence and that tenders had been placed for the main build contractors had been placed. The operations manager referred to the report and said that the Keep was being "decanted" of its collections

which had all been carefully packed, recorded and stored. Refurbishment of the external lift and Rotunda and Rotunda toilets had been completed. It was noted that the Keep development would include accessible toilets with facilities designed for small children and changing facilities.

Discussion ensued on concerns about anti-social behaviour in the Castle Gardens. The operations manager advised the committee that the jurisdiction of the museum stopped at the bottom of the gate and at the external lift entrance. The gardens were in the ownership of the city council. Museums staff had reported anti-social behaviour in the gardens to the police around 30 to 40 times. Members concurred with a proposal from Councillor Nobbs that the chair, together with the chairman of the Norfolk Joint Museums committee, wrote to the Police and Crime Commissioner asking that it was given Safer Neighbourhood Action Panel priority.

During discussion, a member said that he was concerned that there had been negative comments about the new furniture in the Rotunda. The operations manager said that he was sorry to hear that but only positive comments had been received. He pointed out that the upholstery would be replaced frequently and therefore would be changed within 3 to 5 years.

The operations manager circulated the visitor numbers for the period February to May 2019, pointing out that last year had been a record breaking year. Members noted that visitor numbers to Strangers Hall were down on the previous year and that the Museum for Norwich at the Bridewell was experiencing the "Samson effect" with increased visitor numbers to see the Samson on display and the success of the History Mystery events. The number of school visits continued to be strong.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank Charles Wilde and Sarah Norcross-Robinson for their presentations;
- (2) note the report;
- (3) ask the operations manager to include an update on the Hercules statue at the next meeting;
- (4) ask the chair, together with Councillor Ward, chair of the Norfolk Joint Museums committee, to write to the Police and Crime Commissioner about members' concerns about anti-social behaviour in the Castle Gardens.

7. Friends of the Norwich Museums

Felicity Devonshire presented her report which had been circulated at the meeting. At the annual general meeting, the Lord Lieutenant, Mr Richard Jewson, had chaired his last meeting as president of the Friends, and Steve Miller, head of the museums service, gave an address outlining the many activities that the museums had been involved in, including the Friends' assistance in the purchase of the inlaid marble table that had been displayed as part of the Paston Treasure Exhibition. Dr Tim Pestell, curator of archaeology, had provided an update on the Keep project. The Friends were particularly pleased to learn about the progress of the

tapestry/embroidery that the Friends were funding, created by volunteers and would be displayed in the medieval keep. He also highlighted the archaeological finds that have been purchased with the help of the Friends, including the Winfarthing Pendant and coins on display as part of the Viking exhibition. The guest speaker was Andrew Sinclair from BBC East on the “Changing pace of the news”.

She added that the Friends were also preparing for its 100th birthday celebrations in 2021¹ and she would provide updates to the committee during the year.

In conclusion, Felicity Devonshire² said of the illustrated talks in the Town Close Auditorium, Norwich Castle, was on 6 June at 14:30 called “Of Mustard, Boots and Beer – Stories of Norfolk Businessmen of the 19th century”.

RESOLVED to note the report.

CHAIR

¹ Corrected, minutes approved on 10 September 2019

² Corrected, minutes approved on 10 September 2019