



MINUTES

NORWICH AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

2pm to 3.30pm

1 October 2013

Present:

City Councillors:

Button (chair)
Bradford

County Councillors:

Bremner (vice chair)
Dearnley
Morgan

Co-opted Non-voting members:

Councillor Bracey (Broadland District Council), Councillor Hornby (South Norfolk Council), Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Arts Society), Charlotte Crawley (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Ceri Lamb (Friends of Norwich Museums)

Apologies:

County Councillors Gihawi and Sands (M)
City Councillor Ackroyd, Boswell and Maxwell

1. DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

There were no declarations of interest.

2. MINUTES

RESOLVED to approve the accuracy of the minutes of the meeting held on 9 July 2013.

3. THE NORWICH MUSEUMS – MEMBERS' BRIEFING OCTOBER 2013

The Norwich museums manager presented the report and together with the head of the Norfolk museums and archaeology service (NMAS), answered members' questions.

The Norwich museums manager said that the analysis of visitor numbers would be reported back to the Friends of Norwich Museums with regards success of additional opening hours at Strangers' June to September, and the potential to continue with the arrangement in 2014. The committee expressed its appreciation of the Friends for the funding and voluntary work which had enabled increased numbers of visitors to Strangers' Hall over the summer months.

During the presentation members noted the proposal for an exhibition on the city's literary heritage, which was in the early stages of discussion and an element in the Writers' Centre Norwich funding bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund. A member

suggested that this would be a good way to connect contemporary writers with the collections in the libraries, museums and the Norfolk records office. Another member suggested that the Norwich Writers' Circle should be approached as it had been established in 1945 and had material which could be used. Members were advised that readings could be held in Strangers' Hall or the other museums as part of the exhibition. Funding was still to be identified for this project, which was expected to have a wide scope like the Wonder of Birds exhibition.

The museums manager advised members that there was a What's On leaflet now available for the Norwich museums for the period from now to Christmas. Events included Norwich City Council's firework display on the Battlements on 8 November.

Members of the committee were invited to attend a conference on 2 October which was showcasing the teaching museums. The head of NMAS said that the teaching museum was unique in this country and that the conference was an opportunity to share this experience as part of a broader conference on skills and young people in the county. There would be a film about the work of the teaching museum with trainees talking about their experience. The experience provided the trainees with skills which stood them in good stead for their careers.

In response to a question the head of NMAS explained that national museums received direct funding from central government and that the majority were located in London. The NMAS was one of sixteen second tier major partner museums which were regularly supported by the Arts Council and a member of the National Museums Directors Council. He pointed out that the introduction of admission charges was being considered by some of the national museums and larger regional museums and that where admission was free at point of most museums charged for special exhibitions. There were opportunities to visit museums in Norfolk free of charge through the heritage open days, special events (such as the RSPB Big Garden Birdwatch event at Norwich Castle in January and Museums at Night in May) and free access for groups, such as the museum club for looked after children and carers. It was also noted that there was the "pop in for a pound" sessions at lunchtime and the end of day for short visits to the museums.

Members noted that from November to January there would be lights projected on to Norwich Castle as part of the city's Christmas lights. This was being funded by the Business Improvement District. The head of NMAS said that Norwich Castle and the cathedral were iconic buildings and provided a memorable image of the city which could be used to market it as a heritage destination. Events such as the fireworks and the Christmas lights at Norwich Castle and the castle mound were a way to promote the city. A member suggested that the introduction of energy efficient lighting would enable more heritage buildings to be lit up at night. The city council had won awards 30 years' ago for its then innovative lighting.

The Norwich museums manager referred to the members' induction scheme and said that she would review it with colleagues with a view to offering more sessions after the half term holiday.

RESOLVED to note the report.

4. HEAD OF MUSEUMS AND ARCHAEOLOGY SERVICES UPDATE

The head of NMAS reported that as part of the development of a five year strategy for the service and a three year service plan, he would be consulting the city council, other district councils and the Arts Council; the chair of the Norfolk joint museums and archaeology committee and the county council's cabinet member; and would like to speak to each member of the committee, either through workshops or on a one to one basis.

He also proposed that as the archaeology service was now part of the county council's environment, development and transportation directorate, it was an opportune time to rename the service. He proposed a workshop of members to include the Norwich University of the Arts to discuss the five year strategy and look at the new identity for the museums service. The refurbishment of the Bridewell was excellent but the museum did not have a clear identity as the Museum of Norwich and therefore it was proposed to rebrand it as such.

The committee was also advised of an ambitious project to enhance the interpretation of the castle keep which was the best surviving example of a Norman domestic interior, built as a royal palace, in the country.

The head of NMAS reminded members that there was an opportunity for them to visit the Curiosity exhibition at the end of the meeting and thanked Charlotte Crawley of the East Anglian Arts Fund for arranging it. He pointed out that the exhibition contained works by Leonardo Di Vinci as well as many other treasures.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) note that members of the committee will be invited to attend the workshop or an individual meeting with the head of NMAS in the next four to five weeks;
- (2) endorse the proposal to rename the service and rebrand it and the Bridewell.

5. FRIENDS OF THE NORWICH MUSEUMS

Ceri Lamb presented the report and answered questions on recruitment of volunteers.

A member praised the excellent gardens at Strangers' Hall which were maintained by the Friends of the Norwich Museums. Members considered that students might be interested in volunteering to work in the museums.

RESOLVED to note the report.

6. NORFOLK CONTEMPORARY ART SOCIETY

Brenda Ferris presented the report and answered questions on the loan scheme that the society operated. She also advised the committee that the society was in talks with the museums staff about reprising the Surprise exhibition of major works from private collections in 2015.

RESOLVED to note the report.

7. SCHEDULE OF MEETINGS

RESOLVED to confirm the schedule of meetings for the committee, approved at the city council's annual meeting, as follows (all meetings to be held at 2pm):

3 December 2013;
4 February 2014.

CHAIR