



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:45

7 September 2021

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair, following appointment)
Everett
Grahame
Maxwell
Schmierer
Wright

County Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (vice chair, following appointment)
Birmingham
Reilly
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Councillor King (Broadland District Council), Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)

Ex-Officio member: Councillor Kybird

Apologies:

County Councillor Rumsby
Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund)

1. Appointment of chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Huntley for the ensuing civic year.

2. Appointment of vice chair

RESOLVED to appoint Councillor Brociek-Coulton 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 2 March 2021.

6. Friends of the Norwich Museums 1921 to 2021

The chair introduced Charles Bingham-Newland, chairman of the Friends of the Norwich Museums, and Francesca Makins, chairman of the Friends of the Norwich Museums 100 committee, and former chairman of the Friends, and welcomed them to the meeting.

Charles Bingham-Newland and Francesca Makins gave a joint speech, which provided a brief synopsis of the first 100 years of the Friends of the Norwich Museums. John Henry Walter founded the Friends of the Castle Museum, which subsequently called the Friends of the Norwich Museums, on 31 December 1920 because of his concern that works of art of local and national importance were being lost to the people of Norwich and Norfolk because there were public no funds to purchase them, used his connections to enrol subscribers from the aristocracy, gentry, businessmen, politicians and antiquarians. Some of the families of the original subscribers continued to support the Friends to the present day. The presentation took members through the growth of Friends of the Norwich Museums from 150 subscribers in 1929 and its many acquisitions, over the second world war and following decades to the present day. It changed from a funding body to one that organised loan and ever-changing exhibitions, working closely with museums' staff to support the museums, and actively sought acquisitions to augment the museums' collections through its subscriptions, and in partnership with regional and national organisations.

RESOLVED to:

- (1) thank Charles Bingham-Newland and Francesca Makins for their interesting and information talk;
- (2) record the gratitude of the committee for the sustained and contribution that the Friends have made to the cultural life of the city;
- (3) record the gratitude for the work that the Friends did for the Norfolk Museums Service and the people of Norwich.

7. Norwich Museums Report – June to August 2021

([The Norwich Museums Report – February to May 2021](#) was available on the city council's website with the papers for this meeting.)

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 to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums said he was pleased to reopen sites as the legal restrictions specific to museums were removed on 19 July 2021. Many of the Covid-secure measures were still in place in the museums to protect staff and visitors. The reopening of sites was in accordance with sector specific guidance issued by the National Museums Directors Council and the English Civic Museums Network. An information graphic was circulated at the meeting which provided an overview of the Norfolk Museums Service's activities for "A Year Like No Other: An Overview of 2020-21".

The operations manager referred to the report and updated the committee on the arrangements for the reopening of the Norwich museums. Visitors to Norwich Castle could now enter and exit through the external door E8 and the one-way system was no longer in use which would improve the visitor experience. The interim catering facilities, as part of the Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England project, were now available within the Rotunda, where there was also an enhanced retail offer. The Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell had reopened on 22 May for three days each week (Thursday to Saturday). Strangers' Hall had opened on 22 August and would be opening on Wednesdays and Sundays. Weddings at Norwich Castle had continued to be busy with up to 6 weddings a day and this would continue into September.

During discussion a member asked that references to bride and groom entrances should not be gender specific. The operations manager apologised and said that he would refer this to the registrars who manage the weddings at Norwich Castle.

The learning manager presented section 3 of the report which highlighted the work of the Norwich Learning Team. The team had managed the visitor engagement programme to support the exhibition of Bernardo Bellotto's painting *The Fortress of Königstein from the North*, on loan from the National Gallery which included specific activities for early years and caregivers. Digital engagement had been developed during the pandemic would continue as it provided a rich programme that benefited visitors and the museums. School visits had recommenced at Strangers' Hall and the Museum of Norwich. Nearly 1,000 children attending facilitated activities from the beginning of June to the end of the summer term at the three Norwich museums. All available school visits were booked until mid-October at the three museums. The schools digital and virtual programme continued to be provided for all schools, as well as digital resources for schools to use before and after the museum visit. Public guided tours for groups of no more than six people had recommenced. Four webinars had been held in conjunction with the Crome exhibition, each attended by approximately 100 people during a period when Covid restrictions restricted the numbers of people who could have attended an in-person talk. In conclusion, the learning manager said that members were welcome to observe any learning sessions and to contact her if they wished to do so.

During discussion a member asked if there was any information about the other activities that schools engaged in combination with a visit to the museum, for instance visiting Dippy the Diplodocus at Norwich Cathedral, to make the most of the cost of coach hire. The learning manager said that most school visits were from 10:00 to 14:30 to fit around the school day and coach hire. Visits to the prehistory and natural history collections at Norwich Castle complemented the Dippy the Diplodocus exhibition.

In reply to a member's question, the learning manager said that they had not received any feedback on the Bellotto Boxes yet. The member said that a Holiday Afternoon Fun Session had been held at a community centre in her ward where the children had enjoyed the activities.

A member commented on the interesting learning programme and asked whether any activities around Norwich City Football Club's history and its move into the premiership were planned. The learning manager said that this was an interesting idea and could involve maths and history.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4 of the report, *Kick the Dust* and for the benefit of new members on the committee summarised the background to the project as follows:

- Funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund;
- One of 12 Kick the Dust Projects in the UK;
- Working in partnership with YMCA Norfolk;
- Working with a target age of 11 to 25 year olds, but focussing on 16 to 25 year olds to engage with the museums.

The report contained statistics and an update on the project activities. The assistant head of museums suggested that the Christine Marsden, the project co-ordinator, attended the next meeting of the committee to give a presentation on Kick the Dust and provide more detailed information on individual projects and statistics. Members noted that the Kick the Dust project had continued to perform well and was ahead of other Kick the Dust project nationally.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn and updated members on the project. Members were assured that the wooden floor in the Rotunda had been carefully reinstated. All investigative surveys were overseen by the city council's design and conservation officers and carefully recorded. Dates for completion of the project were still subject to uncertainty but it was expected that construction works to the Keep would be completed by early 2023, and the new entrance, shop and cafe during 2022.

In reply to a member's question, the assistant head of museums said that archaeological discoveries on site were reported in the Eastern Daily Press on a regular basis. The mosaic floor in the entrance had been lifted and the crest would be reinstated following the completion of the main construction work. Discoveries had included a new understanding of the location of a staircase from the Georgian or Victorian period when the castle was used as a prison, and some of the excavation works revised information about the original castle and walls that had been on the Mound. Regular items in the local press in partnership with Archant and social media raised public awareness of the project.

The assistant head of museums presented the section on the Museum of Norwich and Strangers' Hall. Although Strangers' Hall had been built during the plague era, it was a difficult building to ensure Covid security and therefore had only been able to reopen to the public when restrictions had been relaxed. Preparations for reopening had included the installation of an air purification machine to improve ventilation in the Victorian rooms. The gardens and courtyards have benefited from restoration by the volunteer team during the period of closure. Activities at the museum include showcasing artworks created by local artists as part of the Edible East focus on food sustainability and opening to the public on the Heritage Open Days on 12, 15 and 19 September.

The assistant head of museums then referred to section 7 of the report, Norwich Curatorial Updates. Members noted the work of the curators during this period, including that David Waterhouse, the senior curator of Natural History and Geology had put together a small display to complement the Dippy the Diplodocus exhibition and provided a series of related lectures/talks and events.

In reply to a question, the assistant head of museums said that air handling plant was being replaced in the T galleries to ensure that the correct environment was maintained, and that the museum could continue to receive loans of paintings from other museums and galleries. The project was funded by the county council capital programme

The operations manager presented the visitor numbers set out in section 8 of the report. Under Covid restrictions Norwich Castle could only have a maximum of 126 people, including staff, in at any one time. This had increased to 420 following the relaxation of restrictions on 19 July 2021 albeit reduced because of the Gateway to Medieval England project. Attendances had been at full capacity during June and July. Visitors were encouraged to pre-book but off-the-street visitors could be accommodated.

The assistant head of museums referred to the appendix to the report *Headline Stats for Norwich Museums February 2012 – July 2021* and the range of digital interactions on social media. Members had previously received this with the minutes of the meeting.

RESOLVED to

- (1) note the [report](#) and thank the officers for their presentation;
- (2) ask the assistant head of museums to invite Christine Marsden, project co-ordinator, to give a presentation on Kick the Dust.

8. Reports from Representatives of the Voluntary Organisations

Felicity Devonshire provided an oral update on the Friends of the Norwich Museums which was in its centenary year. The Friends were looking forward to the civic reception and a luncheon, hosted by their patron, Lord Cholmondeley.

Danusia Wurm said that she was pleased to be representing the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society on the committee. The society had strong links with Norwich Castle and would be funding two significant projects next year. The society worked closely with the Norwich University of the Arts (NUA) and provided a fine art prize and free membership to students. The society would be holding its open selling exhibition of artworks of its members in the Hostry, Norwich Cathedral, from 8 November to 5 December 2021 and would be recommencing its programme of talks on 27 January with a talk on Peruvian indigenous art.

RESOLVED to thank Felicity Devonshire and Danusia Wurm for their reports.

CHAIR