



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:00 to 15:30

11 December 2018

Present:

City Councillors:

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

County Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (substitute for
Councillor Jones (B)
Rumsby
Ward

Co-opted non-voting members:

Brenda Ferris (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society) and County Councillor
Buck (Broadland District Council)

Apologies:

County Councillors Nobbs (vice chair), Clipsham, Jones (B) and Watkins;
and, Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Amanda Geitner
(East Anglia Arts Fund) and Councillor Hardy

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 September 2018.

4. Norwich Museums briefing: September to November 2018

Jenni Williams, learning officer Norwich Castle, gave a presentation on the work of the Norfolk Museums Learning Team and its engagement with secondary schools and teachers. As a qualified history teacher, the learning officer had increased the number of school visits to the museums and ensured that events were relevant to the national curriculum at key stages 3, 4 and 5, by liaising with examination boards and teachers. (Copies of the learning programme were circulated at the meeting.)

During discussion members noted that the teachers' conference had been well attended. The costs had been kept to a minimum by hosting the conference at Norwich Castle and the key note speakers kindly giving their time for free. In reply to a member's question, the learning officer said that the teachers' feedback was encouraged after school visits and the learning programme was flexible so it could

be changed to reflect changes to the national curriculum and teachers' recommendations. A member suggested that there should be natural history events for schools. The learning officer explained how the major examination boards had selected places for its historic environments for key stage 4. Norwich Castle (Anglo Saxon and Norman) was the historic environments for the SHP examination board. A lot of schools in East Anglia were already with this board or were switching to it.

The assistant head of museums circulated copies of the Norfolk Museums Service Review 2017-18 to members at the meeting.

The assistant head of museums (head of service delivery) explained that he was now the director of the Keep project following the retirement of Dr Davies. The Heritage Lottery Fund would shortly be confirming permission to start the delivery phase and the project was on target. Recruitment was underway to fill vacant posts in the project team. The project design team would have assembled as much information as possible in the New Year for the next phase, with construction expected to commence in April or May 2019 and completion by the summer of 2020. The assistant head of museums referred to the action plan for the Keep project and said that he would bring further information about outreach work to local communities to the next meeting. This was where members could support the process with their local knowledge and connections and help develop new and existing links to engage the community with the project. The chair said that she would be addressing members of the city council at full council in January 2019 about the project. Discussion ensued on the practicalities of maintaining access to collections and office accommodation during the construction phase. The operations manager would be leading on this aspect of the project and the Viking exhibition would be critical. A member suggested that Norwich Access Group was consulted about the parking arrangements on the mound and access during the construction phase. A member suggested that activities could take place outside the castle during the construction phase but was advised that people attending pilot events on the Castle Green had not necessarily led to visits to the museum. Councillors Maxwell and Bradford said that the city council's planning applications committee had been unanimous in its decision to approve the planning application and listed building consent for the Keep project and that the presentation had been excellent. Members also considered that the televised Children in Need event had been an excellent showcase for the castle keep.

The assistant head of museums presented the report and highlighted areas of specific interest to members. The *Paston Treasure: Riches and Rarities of the Known World* had been one of the most complex exhibitions held at Norwich Castle, bringing together loans from over fifty national and international lenders. It had received critical acclaim and positive media coverage. Eight hundred copies of the affordable exhibition guide (priced at £9.99) written by Dr Francesca Vanke had been sold.

Members were advised that the assistant head of museums had visited the *Viking: Rediscover the Legend* exhibition at Nottingham, where it was a very popular indeed.

During the presentation, a member said that there had been a Girlguiding event to mark the international day of the girl on 13 October and suggested that there was potential for the museums service to coordinate the events in future years.

Members noted that the *Architecture Day: Grand Designs* on 3 November had attracted high levels of engagement and that there was potential to further develop this event in partnership with students and staff at Norwich University of the Arts. The *Could it be Magic* event held during half term in October had been successful. It was themed around magic and had links with the Science Festival, including an activity facilitated by the natural history curator, Dr David Waterhouse, around magic in creatures of the world and a performance by Neil Paris telling the *History of Magic*. The next *Knight Club* would be starting in January. In reply to a member's question, the assistant head of museums said that the learning team did work in partnership with PhD students and used their specific skills, for events like *Crazy Chemistry*, in addition to the existing programme. The Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell had offered a range of science-based activities during the October half term week.

Members welcomed the news that the Town Close Estate Charities would be funding the ST*ART club for the next three years. Members appreciated that the Freeman's charity had also funded the free open days at Strangers' Hall and the Museum of Norwich at the Bridewell in the summer.

The assistant head of museums said that Councillor Trevor had met with Christine Marsden, the project coordinator, to discuss engagement of young people with the *Kick the Dust* programme through her connections with community groups in her ward and city college. He suggested that the project coordinator be invited to the future meeting of the committee to update members on development of the project.

A member said that she had seen the statue of Samson at Gressenhall and considered that its restoration was "amazing". The assistant head of museums said that a case was being created so that the statue could be exhibited.

The operations manager presented the remainder of the report. He reported that the number of weddings held at Norwich Castle in the period September to November had plateaued at 139, but was still at a greater number than performed by the Registrar's service at its former venue, Churchman House. Weddings would continue to be offered at Norwich Castle during the construction phase of the Keep project and would include an enhanced offer which included a new entrance and facilities for wedding parties and guests. Members noted that the *History Mystery Escape Room* games at the Museum of Norwich now included sessions on Friday evenings and that it was about to introduce sessions on Sundays. In reply to a member's suggestion that merchandise associated with the museum or escape games be available to purchase, the operations manager said that there was potential to develop the partnership with Mystery History. Players were currently offered 15 per cent off museum admission and the games were linked to the museum's collections. The chair said that people liked dressing up and that this could also be considered. He said that he would take on board members' comments.

Members noted that the external lift would be closed from 11 February 2019 to allow for its refurbishment and was due to reopen on 15 April 2019. Members were reassured that there would be signage to the alternative routes during this period.

The committee also noted that September to November had been a busy period for venue hire and events at Norwich Castle, which had included a private view of the Armistice exhibition by the Royal British Legion following the culmination of the torch

relay on 21 October 2018. Norwich Castle had also hosted the city council's Big Boom fireworks display which had been very well attended. Members were advised that due to the construction works it would not be possible to host the fireworks at Norwich Castle next year. As mentioned earlier in the meeting, Norwich Castle had hosted the BBC Eastern region's live coverage of Children in Need.

The committee noted that a Wider Impact Group had been established to ensure that disruption to the operation of Norwich Castle was kept to a minimum during the construction phase of the Keep project. This group would be chaired by the operations manager, with support from Artelia, the project management consultants working on the Keep project.¹

The operations manager then circulated copies of visitor numbers to members. The hot summer this year meant that visitor numbers were less than last years. There was an enhanced offer at Strangers' Hall with the *Night Before Christmas* and the *Deck the Halls* events and it was hoped that visits to these popular events would exceed last December's visitor numbers at Strangers' Hall.

RESOLVED to

- (1) thank the officers for the report;
- (2) ask the assistant head of museums to invite Christine Marsden, the *Kick the Dust* project coordinator, to a future meeting of the committee.
- (3) note that the assistant head of museums will provide more information on how members can support the outreach element of the Keep project at the next meeting of the committee.
- (4) note that as agreed at the last meeting, the assistant head of museums will invite Charles Wilde, the county council's marketing manager to a future meeting of the committee.

5. Date of next meeting

RESOLVED to note that the next meeting of the committee will be at 14:00 on 5 March 2018.

(Following the conclusion of the meeting members of the committee took the opportunity to attend an informal tour of the Armistice exhibition facilitated by Jenni Williams, learning officer at Norwich Castle.)

CHAIR

¹ "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."