



Norwich Area Museums Committee

14:05 to 15:30

6 September 2022

Present:

City Councillors:

Huntley (chair)
Kidman
Schmierer
Wright

County Councillors:

Brociek-Coulton (vice chair)
Birmingham
Reilly
Ward
Watkins

Co-opted non-voting members:

Felicity Devonshire (Friends of Norwich Museums), Councillor Spruce (South Norfolk District Council) and Danusia Wurm (Norfolk Contemporary Art Society)¹

Apologies:

City Councillors Osborn and Thomas (Vi), County Councillor Rumsby, Councillor Kybird (ex officio member), Amanda Geitner (East Anglia Arts Fund) and Councillor King (Broadland District 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 7 June 2022.

4. Norwich Museums Report – May to July 2022

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 for members to ask questions or comment.

The assistant head of museums presented the first section of the report. The Covid-19 measures that had been implemented continued to be in place. These included the use of CO2 monitors to monitor ventilation, regular cleaning and hand sanitiser

¹ The list of co-opted non-voting members was corrected on 6 December 2022.

points across each site. Indoor volunteering was being resumed for the first time since the pandemic.

The operations manager presented section 2, Reopening the Norwich Museums. Members noted that the entrance to Norwich Castle was still taking place via a temporary route. A new pop-up café had been opened in the part of the museum that had been handed back to the Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) by the contractors of the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project. Members noted that the figures on the total number of ceremonies held at Norwich Castle were slightly distorted due to the reporting timelines. In response to a member's question the operations manager said that the August figures for this year were around 10% higher than the previous August. Overall, the figures over the previous 12 months showed that the usually quieter periods for ceremonies had seen the highest increase since the pandemic.

The learning manager presented section 3, Norwich Learning Team activity – highlights report. The committee noted that the number of schools groups was continuing to increase to pre-pandemic levels across all sites. The numbers for Norwich Castle continue to be capped due to the construction work. Schools continued to take advantage of the digital resources created during the pandemic which remained free of charge. Members noted the positive feedback from attendees of the Early Years Foundation Stage events held at the Castle. Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) staff held an A-Level Conference for students and teachers and a History teachers' conference in July. Feedback from attendees had been very positive. The learning manager said in reference to section 3.2 of the report that the digital programme continued to be successful and there had been bookings from schools from outside the county. In reference to section 3.3 of the report members noted that NMS had worked with a range of partners on the Royal Palace Reborn: *Castle 900 – Keeping it Regal* project. Over 240 people from Norwich had had their portraits taken by a photographer and the portraits would be projected on to the Castle walls in the autumn. The committee also noted that NMS had worked with The British Museum and Jarrold's to create window displays for the platinum jubilee. Drama students from the University of East Anglia worked with NMS to create an original piece which was performed at the Sainsbury Centre. Members noted that The Garage had been a key project partner and had also held performances as part of the *Keeping it Regal* project. The learning manager highlighted that the Knight Club had been very popular and had reached 151,000 people through events hosted at sites across the country, including Latitude Festival and the British Museum Festival of British Archaeology. A range of activities had also taken place to support the current exhibition at Norwich Castle: *The World We Live In: Art and the Urban Environment*. These activities were held with a range of different community groups, this included Community Culture Club, The Museum Club and New Routes. A range of other activities had taken place including, a link with *GoGoDiscover* at the Museum of Norwich, Time and Place tours for Norwich Pride at Norwich Castle and there continued to be guided tours at all museum sites in Norwich. Members noted section 3.4 Early Years Visitor Engagement, and the positive feedback that had been received about the monthly Snaplings and Snapdragon groups and the CPD training for Early Years practitioners.

The chair commented that there was a full and rich programme of activities at the museums, and it was good to see positive feedback on these programmes. A member said that she welcomed the use of sign within the Early Years groups, and that it was great to see the positive feedback on this. The assistant head of

museums said that the development of Early Years provision was key in the Norwich Castle Development plan and were using this to take a creative approach for this, and that this could become best practice for other practitioners across the sector.

The assistant head of museums presented section 4, Kick the Dust: Norfolk – project activity update, of the report. Members noted that since the start of the project to 21 August 2022 over 12,000 interventions had taken place. Data from the project showed the positive impact on the participants. The shape of the project had evolved, and this trend was particularly driven by the young people who were involved with the project. 87% of activities now involved young people helping to design and shape the activity. The project was now primarily focussing on older participants, particularly in the age range 16 to 25 year olds. Staff engagement with both Kick the Dust participants and other visitors with access barriers was increasing based on the training provided, with positive feedback received from staff. The assistant head of museums drew member's attention to the breakdown in the figures of the Kick the Dust participants on page 24 of the agenda, in particular it was noted that participants might fall into more than one category and that many of the participants said that they were suffering from mental health issues. Due to the easing of COVID-19 restrictions more of the work could be conducted in person. Feedback from participants highlighted that the Kick the Dust project was helpful in terms of decreasing isolation, increasing confidence and employability. One participant of the project was now employed by NMS. Members noted the comparative figures of the NMS Kick the Dust project and other Kick the Dust projects across the country, the NMS Kick the Dust project scored higher in 9 of the 13 areas. The assistant head of museums said that the service was working with the Y Heritage project in Leicester to develop a funding bid, this would be based on the learnings from the current project. Overall, it was clear from both participants and partners how beneficial the programme was.

A member commented that he had visited, the Retro Games exhibition at the Time and Tide Museum which had been curated by Kick the Dust participants. The exhibition was a draw for people, especially young people, who might not have visited the museum otherwise. This showed the clear benefit in working with young people to develop this exhibition. It was evident that the work with the Kick the Dust project had embedded across the service with regard to working with and involving young people. In response to a member's question the assistant head of museums said he would provide a breakdown of care leavers among participants and that the YMCA was a close partner in this work. Due to this the project funded a post within the YMCA, split across three posts in Norwich, Great Yarmouth and Kings Lynn.

The assistant head of museums presented section 5 of the report: Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn – project update. Members of the committee had been invited to a tour of Norwich Castle which had been held before commencement of the committee, the assistant head of museums said that there would be other opportunities for tours as work progressed and milestones were reached. He highlighted that the new pop-up café had opened the week commencing 29 August 2022. On 6 September 2022 the museum had opened the new toilet block to members of the public. The Changing Places facility would open within weeks and was in line with national specifications and would be listed for members of the public. The intention was that this facility would be free to use for anyone regardless of whether they were visitors to the museum or not. The installation of the steel supports in the Keep was ongoing, and it was starting to become evident where each

floor would be, the next phase would be the installation of the floor joists that would hold each floor. Within the former main entrance, the demolition work had started, and work was progressing in creating new entrances to the museum. Curatorial colleagues from NMS were working with the British Museum to agree long-term loans for the British Museum gallery, this work had been progressing well. NMS were working on an activity plan for Norwich Castle and the branding and marketing materials for the opening and launch events.

The chair commented that he appreciated the progress since the previous tour of Norwich Castle. He asked how it had been possible for someone to gain access to the crane. The assistant head of museums said that NMS was highly aware of the risks of people attempting to gain access to the site, overall, the site did have good levels of security, but these had been reviewed and enhanced since that incident. The service did not condone this action and arrangements had been put in place to continuously review the security of the site to mitigate against the risk as much as possible.

The operations manager presented section 5.2 of the report. He highlighted to members that work was ongoing to ensure that the free use of the Changing Places facilities was advertised to members of the public that might need it. The Wider Impact Group was facilitating the delivery of the Keep project to ensure that the museum continued to be accessible to visitors and that it would be accessible throughout. The group ensured that collections were protected from the vibrations caused by the installation of the steels. Work had also progressed regarding the content and visual displays for a new Dungeons Tour. This new Dungeon Tour would be fully immersive and recreating a Turnkey's room as it would have been in the late 1800s, including sounds. A punishment display would also be created showing objects that would have been used in the Castle's history as a prison. The committee noted that a new case would be displayed in the Rotunda in due course to inform visitors of the Castle's 500 year history as a prison. With regard to the new restaurant NMS were still working on agreeing a colour scheme for the furniture but crockery for the museum had been purchased. The new ticket barrier system was also being worked on that would allow visitors to visit the shop and restaurant without visiting the museum. In response to a member's question the operations manager said that visitors to the restaurant, who subsequently wanted to visit the museum, would need to go back to the entrance to purchase a ticket. A member asked whether the Changing Places toilet facility would require a RADAR Key. The operations manager confirmed that this would be the case and visitors should make staff aware that they need to use the Changing Places facilities and would be given access to these.

The assistant head of museums presented section 6.1 Museum of Norwich. Members noted that the Museum of Norwich had taken part in a number of events. This included the *Dominoes* event as part of the launch of the 2022 Norfolk and Norwich Festival, an exhibition for the 2022 Norfolk and Norwich Festival, Norwich City of Ale and the *GoGoDiscover* Dinosaur Trail. The Museum of Norwich staff had also been engaged with several different community groups on a range of events detailed in the report. Members also noted section 6.2 of the report, Strangers' Hall. Strangers' Hall had hosted events with school groups and family groups. The staff from the museum had also been engaged with *Kick the Dust* participants as part of their curatorial programme of selecting objects that showed the museum's first opening as well as more contemporary items for the centenary celebration. Staff at

Strangers' Hall had been working on bringing out some of the larger collections to clean these, which was constrained due to the building's history.

The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative arts presented section 7, Norwich Curatorial update. Members noted that the curator of historic art was working on reworking the Rembrandt exhibition for the Time and Tide Museum and was also working on an exhibition for the Colman Project space. The curator of historic art was also working on reorganising the art stores and had recently received a donation from the Arts Fund which included historic prints, drawings, and water colours, some of these were sketches of paintings that were in the NMS collection. The curator of contemporary art had worked on *The World We Live In: Art and the Urban Environment* exhibition including the workshops held at the Castle and would be working with the senior curator of costume and textiles on the forthcoming exhibition, *The Singh Twins: Slaves of Fashion*. This exhibition would be held in the refurbished temporary exhibition galleries at the Norwich Castle and would have a multimedia project and further updates on this exhibition would be reported to the committee. The senior curator of costume and textiles was also working, with partners, on the exhibition *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester, Norfolk's Royal Shipwreck, 1682*. Members noted that the curator of regimental collections had been on a tour of historic battlefields. She was also working on repacking and photographing the collection to ensure that it was accessible. The senior curator of natural history had worked on a range of different projects, which included the deep freeze of artefacts to ensure that these can be redisplayed following an outbreak of clothes moths, he had also been involved in the Steppe Mammoth trail for *GoGoDiscover*. The senior curator of natural history had been interviewed for a range of radio shows and TV programmes that had either already aired or would be airing in future. Members also noted that the senior curator of archaeology was heavily involved in the Castle Project which included working with the British Museum and working on the prison display. He had also been working on research projects. The senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative art had been working on *The Last Voyage of the Gloucester, Norfolk's Royal Shipwreck, 1682* exhibition with the senior curator of costume and textiles. She had also worked on the exhibition at Lynn Museum, *JMW Turner and the Moods of Water: Rivers, Estuaries and the Sea* which had recently opened. The senior curator of Norwich Museums and keeper of fine and decorative art had created a film to accompany the exhibition. She had worked with *Kick the Dust* participants on the exhibition over the school holidays in the summer, participants had also volunteered at the opening session.

A member commented that that he had been to an evening showing of the film that had been produced for *The World We Live In: Art and the Urban Environment*. Clips of the film had been used throughout the exhibition but it had been good to see the entire thing, following the showing there had been an question and answer session with the director and their assistant. In response to a member's question the senior curator of Norwich museums and keeper of fine and decorative arts said that she would ask the curator to find out whether the film or any of the relevant documentation was available to members of the public.

The operations manager presented section 8, Visitor numbers, of the report. He highlighted that there had been a jump in the numbers attending which reflected that people were more comfortable visiting inside spaces. During the particularly hot period in July visitor numbers had decreased slightly The Museum of Norwich had

The chair paid tribute to Brenda Ferris who had recently passed away. He said that Brenda Ferris had been a significant cultural presence within Norwich. Danusia Wurm, Norfolk Contemporary Art Society (NCAS), addressed the committee to say that the full programme was now in place, the next talk that would be held was with celebrated photographer H  l  ne Binet on 21 September 2022. The society was hosting more events geared towards younger people. She thanked the curator of *The World We Live In* for the exhibition and for the talk on the exhibition. She said the society was looking forward to *The Singh Twins: Slaves to Fashion* exhibition as the Norfolk Contemporary Art Society had contributed to the exhibition and it was likely to attract a broad audience. Danusia also paid tribute to Brenda Ferris who had

been the previous representative from NCAS on the committee. She said that Brenda Ferris had been a pillar of NCAS and would be sorely missed.

Felicity Devonshire, Friends of Norwich Museums, presented the report from Friends of Norwich Museums (the report had been circulated to members and is available on the council's website). She said that it had been a relatively quiet period for the Friends. She thanked the assistant head of museums and his staff for the tour of the Castle, she said it was interesting to see the progress of the works. Felicity Devonshire said the group were looking forward to the completion of the Friends' Tapestry. The Friends were looking to increase their membership; previous membership drives had been successful. Felicity Devonshire said that comments had been received on the reduced offer at the Castle Museum.

The chairman of the joint museums committee said that a panel of the Friends' Tapestry had been at the Royal Norfolk Show in the summer and visitors were encouraged to add a stitch.

RESOLVED to thank Danusia Wurm and Felicity Devonshire for their reports and record the committee's gratitude to the voluntary organisations that support the Norwich museums.

CHAIR