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BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**Held on Wednesday, 15 January 2020 at 10.00 am in
Training Room, Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum, Fakenham Road,
Gressenhall, Dereham, NR20 4DR**

PRESENT

Mr R.G. Kybird (Chairman)	Mr T. J. Jermy
Mr H. E. J. Clarke	Mr M. Kiddle-Morris
Mr P.J. Duigan (Vice-Chairman)	Mr W Richmond

Also Present

Mr D Blackburn
Mr Bill Rhodes
Dr K Robinson

In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums
Dr Robin Hanley	- Assistant Head of Museums
Andrew Smith	- Operations Manager - West (&East), Norfolk Museums Service
Ruth Tudge	- Democratic Services Officer

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1/20 MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 14 October 19 were confirmed as a correct record and signed by the Chairman.

2/20 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillors Brame and Eagle.

3/20 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

4/20 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

5/20 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

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6/20 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM REPORT

The Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums, Oliver Bone presented the report to Members that covered the period from October to November 2019. He explained that the Studio Ceramics exhibition had been well received and the investment through secure display cases showed off the high value items very well. The display included portrait photographs of the potters, and the Chairman commented the narrative explaining the techniques used was highly informative.

In autumn 2018 the Ancient House exhibited Pride of the People: Helping History out of the Closet which was curated by the Museum's Teenage History Cub. The pop-up version had been on tour and gone down very well and in November it was shown at the Provoke conference in London. Learning Officer Melissa Hawker had worked with the young people to curate this exhibition exploring LGBTQ+ history and as an indicator of the national significance and reach of this work, Melissa and one of the young people from the Teenage History Club gave a presentation at the 2019 annual Museums Association Conference in Brighton about the project.

For forthcoming displays The British Museum had agreed to lend a number of items including a selection of items from the late Roman hoard of inscribed silver spoons and gold jewellery. This was limited to 12 items of which they had picked the best and most interesting. This display would run from June to November and demonstrated another example of working together with the British Museum. The Curator commented that Ancient House, enabled by grants, benefits from high security display cases which facilitates loans from national collections.

The Ancient House is part of the Brecks River and Fen Edge landscape project which had been part of a successful bid to draw down two million pounds of National Lottery Heritage Fund support with a number of partners contributing to this five year scheme. The funding would be used for exhibitions around Viking and riverside heritage and provide the opportunity for public access to the latest research in these areas.

The Ancient house continued to look forward to a permanent larger presence of the Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family and were working with partners for a new festival later in 2020. A number of donations had been received towards this project, totalling so far approximately £2,500.

The museum continued to play a part in finding activities with families and children with a Wednesday afternoon for primary school aged children and a Friday after school Teenage History Club. The Curator particularly commented on the efforts of Melissa Hawker who worked well with the children, encouraging them to think of new themes and ideas to explore and had excellent ideas to guide them to take it forward. Melissa also went with a couple of members of the teenage history club and attended a Kick the Dust Takeover Event at the

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national HQ of the National Lottery Heritage Fund at the Museum of London on 22 November which was also a great chance to visit the Museum of London and their new displays.

The textile groups continue which contributes greatly and in addition helps reduce social isolation. The Talks programme, in association with the Friends of the Museum received a recent talk on Voices from the Workhouse by NMS Curator Megan Dennis. Attendances average between 15 and 25.

The museum continues to develop its social media presence and looks forward to the Museum Selfie Day on 21 January 2020 which encourages the general public to go to a museum and take a selfie. The day promotes awareness of great collections, displays and works stored in museums.

The volunteers continue to work immensely hard with children and with the staff behind the scenes photographing and cataloguing acquisitions.

The Friends of the Museum continue to support the Museum through fundraising had been most recently focused on trying to raise the funds to acquire the late David Osborne's postcard collection which comprised over one thousand postcards of areas in and around Thetford from 1870 to present day. They had recently been successful in obtaining a grant from The Lady Hind Trust of £2,000 towards the total. The Curator said that had recently had an offer from the V and A fund to achieve half of the total, also an offer from Thetford Town Council and the Friends had put in an application to the match funding pot through the Norfolk Community Foundation with a support letter from Councillor Roy Brame. Councillor Duigan suggested the Committee put in a letter of support to additionally recommend this application.

Ancient House continues to host a 12 month paid traineeship, provided through the NMS Teaching Museum programme, Paula Murphy is the current trainee. The scheme was a way for trainees to learn how museums work and allowed them to be paid whilst learning on the job which was a well-received scheme and so far had a good record of people moving on to museum work after having participated in the scheme.

Members of the Committee noted the report.

**7/20 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM - KINGS HEAD PLANNING
APPLICATION 3PL/2018/1499/F**

The curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums, Oliver Bone said there had recently been issues with the building next door with problems with the roof junction between Ancient House and the old Public House, The Kings Head. Some of the lead flashing had come away from the junction between the two rooves, damp was seeping in and they were seeking legal action with the current owners of the property to repair this and make it good so Ancient House could

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remain dry. The Chairman suggested that with the ongoing planning application for the renovation of the Kings Head, (Ref: 3PL/2018/1499/F) that the Curator should copy in the Strategic Property Manager at Breckland Council, Ralph Burton to let him know what the situation is.

8/20 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT

The Operations Manager East and West, Andrew Smith, presented the report to Members that covered the period from October 2019 to December 2019. He said the programme of events continued to offer a broad range of activities based around the four key operational models.

He explained that within Special Events Days this seasons Apple Day had been a challenging day with a tremendous amount of rain which made all outside event activity more difficult. Visitors did persevere despite the weather Gressenhall still had over twelve hundred visitors.

The event offer across the October Half Term period, Awesome Autumn, received over fourteen hundred visitors across twelve days with The Norfolk Collections Centre open for three of the event days.

With ticketed events, people had booked to attend the Early Bird Openings but some families did not take up their booking. The tailored event was good but the timings might not be suitable to all so this will be reviewed to see if a change in time slots might improve visitor numbers. The Victorian Family Christmas was a bookable key event and a really vibrant offer across two days with a 250 capacity on site per day. Although the weather was inclement, it was mainly held inside the museum and the reviews were very positive. Tickets sold out a week in advance so next year the events team will increase the capacity to 300 per day and look at a weekend day option as well.

An events review was held at the end of the main visitor season to complete the planning for next year's event programme with a fresh focus on family fun and engagement with a few tweaks to popular events to ensure maximum success. Two events were renamed as it was thought changing the name would improve on line event searching and reflect the feel of the events more. *Forties Village at War* has been renamed to reflect the strong theme of the 1940s which had been diluted and staff are looking at other ideas to improve the event. The Chairman suggested regular bus tours of the battle area and Councillor Duigan suggested that as it was the 80th anniversary of the Americans coming to this region maybe some focus on that element and also to invite some Americans along to the event. The Operations Manager said they would explore these ideas to enhance the event. Once the final programme has been firmed up the new leaflet would go to print.

Gressenhall also organised a number of leisure learning short courses throughout the year, with the *Ploughing Experience* days and the *Apple Tree Pruning* courses both doing very well.

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The temporary exhibition *Once Upon a Time* had now been de-installed and staff had managed to re-cycle many parts of the exhibition including the learning tree which had been sent to a local school for their library.

The 2020 temporary exhibition season starts with *Full Steam Ahead* which opens on 17th February 20. This exhibition is designed to celebrate all things steam.

The *More than Oliver Twist* project continues to move from strength to strength working with five other workhouse museums and after a recent training session and a project meeting at Gressenhall this week, plans for the temporary exhibition presenting the research are underway. A visit from the funders, Arts Council England, was well received and they are happy with the progress on the project.

The Farmers Foundry Company steam engine restoration project now had a revised and improved timetable which will provide a platform to train new young people with the youth engagement team. They are looking at investigating the roll of steam power and how it relates to climate change today.

The re-development of the Adventure Playground was in its final stages with contractors engaged and planning consent has now been secured. It was hoped the new look adventure playground would play a key role in attracting families and repeat visitors. The Operations Manager would give a presentation at the end of the meeting.

Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum continued to maintain and promote strong medial links and had three Social Media Champions who worked hard to update and publish interesting content on Facebook with over five thousand likes and Twitter with over six thousand followers.

The Friends of Gressenhall remain very active and supportive of the work and events at the museum. The Chairman of the Friends, Bill Rhodes, said he was really pleased about the re-tweaking of some of the major events which could only be a good thing. The Friends continued to support both the farm and museum having recently acquired a pair of bridles for the horses on the farm and they fully supported the project to restore the Farmers' Foundry boiler. He also said Friends continue to operate the Gressenhall second-hand bookshop which helps to generate income.

The Operations Manager explained that schools numbers had been good recently and visitor numbers had increased which was testament to all members of staff, volunteers and freelancers who helped to deliver the high quality museum education offer.

The learning team had worked hard on the development of informal learning activities over the past year. One of the Learning Officers, Katie Smith, had led on developing a good family programme which aimed to offer families the chance to explore the site fully and engage in activities together.

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Kick the Dust, a county-wide National Lottery Heritage Fund funded project, was designed to encourage young people to play more of an active role in museums. As part of this Gressenhall was now offering work experience opportunities to young people. Staff from the museum had also been in discussions with The Matthew Project and Enhanced Fostering Services to involve young people further.

The Museum continues to be registered as a care home with NCC and were currently offering funded work-based placements to adults with learning difficulties.

The Operations Manager circulated the visitor figures to the members of the committee and explained that Ancient House numbers had dropped, about 2% down on the month compared to the previous year but were hoping for an improvement over the last few months of the financial year whilst the museum as the museum is still open to the public. Gressenhall Museum was also slightly down by 1% but also hoped to improve and come out around the same as last year as events are planned for February half term when the site is open for five days and Gressenhall will be fully open again from 9 March.

Members of the Committee noted the report.

9/20 GRESSENHALL NEW ADVENTURE PLAYGROUND

The Operations Manager for East and West, Andrew Smith gave a short presentation on the plans for the new adventure playground with slides showing the theme and plans for the area stating it was hoped to be ready for use as soon as practically possible. There was no extra cost for visitors to enter the play area and it would not affect the current admission prices but it was hoped the area would encourage repeat visitors.

It was planned to retain a small kiosk to sell refreshments and there were seating areas for families to use and for parents or carers to watch over the children playing. There would be 2 main playing areas, one for the younger children aged 2 to 5 and a further area aimed at ages 6 to 14.

They had already been contacted by the EDP regarding the opening of the new play area and the museum would investigate a possible launch event.

10/20 NEXT MEETING

The next meeting will be held on Monday 4th May 2020 at 10:00am at Ancient House Museum, Whitehart Street, Thetford.

The meeting closed at 11.30 am

CHAIRMAN