

## Norfolk Joint Museums Committee

Minutes of the Meeting held on 2 February 2024 at 14:00 at County Hall, Norwich

### Present:

Cllr John Ward (Chair)	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Tony Adams	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Lesley Bambridge	Norfolk County Council
Cllr John Fisher	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Geoffrey Freeman	Great Yarmouth Borough Council
Cllr Claire Kidman	Norwich City Council
Cllr Robert Kybird (Vice-Chair)	Breckland District Council
Cllr Ed Maxfield	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Saul Penfold	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Simon Ring	Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk
Cllr Robert Savage	Norfolk County Council
Cllr Jeremy Rowe	South Norfolk District Council
Cllr Liz Withington	North Norfolk District Council

### Substitute Members Present:

Cllr Brenda Jones for Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton (Norfolk County Council)

### Also present:

Felicity Devonshire	Friends of the Norwich Museums (Co-Opted Member)
Dr Robin Hanley	Assistant Head of Museums (Head of Service Delivery)
Hannah Jackson	Project Manager, Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn
Steve Miller	Director of Culture & Heritage, Head of Norfolk Museums Service
Laine Tisdall	Committee Officer, Democratic Services
Jo Warr	Head of Development, Norfolk Museums Service

### 1. Apologies and substitutions

- 1.1 Apologies were received from Cllr Julie Brociek-Coulton (substituted by Cllr Brenda Jones), Cllr Martin Booth, Cllr Jacob Huntley, Cllr Martin Schmierer, and John Simpson Wedge.

### 2. Minutes

- 2.1 The minutes of the meetings held on 28 July 2023 and 27 October 2023 were agreed as a true record of proceedings and signed by the Chair.

### 3. Declarations of Interest

- 3.1 Cllr Lesley Bambridge declared an interest relating to Item 7 on the agenda, as she had been appointed as a trustee of True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum in King's Lynn.

### 4. Breckland Area Museums Committee

- 4.1 The Vice-Chair introduced the minutes of the meeting held on the 4 December 2023 to the Committee.

- 4.2 The Chairman visited the English Heritage owned Weeting Castle in December 2023, to view the current progress of conservation work being carried out to the 12<sup>th</sup> Century manor house. Remedial work was also planned for a further English Heritage site in the form of Thetford Warren Lodge
- 4.3 A new exhibition, *Made by the River*, had recently commenced at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life, which featured stories relating to the production of beer, malt, fertilisers, steam engines and pulp ware.
- 4.4 Ancient House was visited in August 2023 by ambassadors from its partner museum in Nagawa, Nagano Prefecture, Japan. The visit related to Stone Age exhibitions.
- 4.5 Ancient House had been successful in its National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) bid, receiving £198,059. The funding would be used to celebrate the museum's centenary during 2024 while creating an exhibition dedicated to the museum's original benefactors, the Duleep Singh family.
- 4.6 The Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the minutes.

## **5. Great Yarmouth Area Museums Working Group**

- 5.1 Cllr Geoffrey Freeman introduced the minutes of the meetings held on the 3 October 2023 and 8 January 2024 to the Committee.
- 5.2 The *Bare Bones* exhibition at the Time and Tide Museum of Great Yarmouth Life closed on the 1 October 2023. It had proven popular with children, particularly during the summer holidays.
- 5.3 The Time and Tide Museum had submitted a bid for NLHF funding towards its Changing Tides - Shaping Our Great Yarmouth project. It was planned to provide a glazed roof over the museum courtyard to create a new community space for groups and exhibitions. A decision was expected in Spring 2024.
- 5.4 *Walton Bridges*, an early work by the painter JMW Turner, was currently on loan to Time and Tide from the Tate Britain.
- 5.5 The opening ceremony for Herring Bridge took place on the 1 February 2024. A souvenir booklet was handed out, which had been produced using paperwork provided by Time and Tide.
- 5.6 A new exhibition, *Dinosaurium*, was due to come on loan in March 2024 to Time and Tide from the Hampshire Cultural Trust. Fossils from the museum's own collection would augment the exhibitions.
- 5.7 Herring Day was held in Great Yarmouth during October 2023, which saw the story of the herring fishery in the area publicised. A "herring girl" was in attendance.
- 5.8 Tolhouse Gaol held a witch trials event in October 2023, which was well received.
- 5.9 The following points were raised and discussed.
- A Committee Member asked if the herring girl was an actor or an authentic person from the fisheries. Cllr Freeman confirmed the person was previously employed in herring fisheries.

- A Committee Member expressed interested in *Dinosaurium* and suggested there could be a tie-up with the Deep History Coast project in North Norfolk. Officers stated there was potential for this to happen, as museums in Great Yarmouth and Cromer already worked closely together.
- A Committee Member asked how many young people were involved with the Saturday Art Club at Time and Tide. Officers stated this club was part of a national network and members had the opportunity to display their work in London. There were currently around 10 to 20 members, however, numbers were fluid due to several factors.

5.10 The Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the minutes.

## **6. Norwich Area Museums Committee**

6.1 Cllr Claire Kidman introduced the minutes of the meeting held on 5 December 2023 to the Committee.

6.2 The refurbishment of Norwich Castle was nearing completion.

6.3 The Area Museums Committee was conducting a package of educational work with harder to reach groups and schools who did not usually get involved with museums.

6.4 The Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the minutes.

## **7. King's Lynn and West Norfolk Area Committee**

7.1 Dr Robin Hanley introduced the minutes of the meeting held on the 8 January 2024 to the Committee.

7.2 Following the meeting on the 8 January 2024, Members of the Area Committee received a tour of True's Yard Fisherfolk Museum, which was well received. True's Yard was currently hosting a paid trainee position as part of the pilot for the new Kick the Dust project, Your Heritage Your Future.

7.3 A new exhibition, *The Moon: Meet our Nearest Neighbour* was due to open at the Lynn Museum next week. Dr Hanley commented that the programme of temporary exhibitions was important as it made a strong contribution to the museum's overall performance figures. Over 20,000 visitors were expected during 2024. Dr Hanley thanked the team at Lynn Museum for their efforts in this area.

7.4 The following point was raised and discussed.

- The Vice-Chair commented that the Borough Council of King's Lynn and West Norfolk funded free opening for Lynn Museum during winter months and asked if this had a significant effect on visitor figures during this period. Dr Hanley confirmed that the borough council had a service agreement with Lynn Museum to offer free admission between October and March, which had a positive effect on visitor figures.

7.5 The Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the minutes.

## **8. Informal Discussion from 27 October 2023**

8.1 The Committee received the annexed report (8).

8.2 Officers introduced the report, which gave an overview of the informal, untelevised discussion held by Committee Members on Friday 27 October 2023 as the Committee meeting was declared inquorate.

8.3 The Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the report.

## **9. Norfolk Museums Service – Finance Monitoring Report for 2023/24**

9.1 The Committee received the annexed report (9).

9.2 Officers introduced the report to the Committee, which covered the Norfolk Museums Service forecast budget out-turn for 2023/24, while detailing the latest monitoring position of the revenue budget, capital programme, reserves, and provisions.

9.3 The service continued to face uncertainty and challenges relating to the return of pre-COVID visitor numbers and patterns.

9.4 A budget overspend was still forecast; however this had reduced since the last update to the Committee primarily due to control of costs and a reduction in business rates. The service had benefited from a revaluation of its sites.

9.5 The following points were raised and discussed:

- A Committee Member stated that the Service was planning to mitigate the budget overspend further by managing costs and asked how this would happen in practice. Officers commented that the Service would take discretionary costs such as maintenance budgets into account, while ensuring there were no detrimental effects to visitors and the programme of events. The Service was navigating through an uncertain time with support from the Council and colleagues. It was planned to appoint a Commercial Development Manager to help rebuild income streams post-pandemic. The Service was also a beneficiary of a national scheme where museums received discounts to their energy bills.
- The Chair asked if any building materials for the Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn project were affected by the Red Sea shipping crisis. Officers stated the project had a robust risk management process and benefited from its main contractor, Morgan Sindall, being one of the largest such firms in the market, which insulated the Service from some of the pressures resulting from the crisis. No key materials were expected to be routed through the Red Sea, but risks to supply chain would continue to be closely monitored.
- A Committee Member asked officers if they were confident that the current quality and quantity of service provision could be maintained given budgetary and outside pressures. An officer stated that at present there was no sign of concern from visitors, but this would continue to be monitored. The team were looking at new ways of fundraising, plus new partnerships to mitigate pressures.

9.6 The Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **CONSIDER** and **COMMENT** on the latest monitoring position of the revenue budget, capital programme, reserves and provisions and forecast outturn for 2023/24.

## **10. Norfolk Museums Service – Risk Management Report**

10.1 The Committee received the annexed report (9).

- 10.2 Officers introduced the report to the Committee, which gave an insight into the key risks that were managed by the Norfolk Museums Service.
- 10.3 There had been no new additions to the risk register and no significant changes in risk profile since the last update to the Committee. There was an ongoing review of risks, managed on a rolling basis.
- 10.4 Having considered the contents of the report, the Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** the following:
1. **AGREED** the proposed changes to risks as set out in item 2.1 in the report.
  2. **NOTED** the active and dormant risks as per appendices A and B of the report.

## **11. Norfolk Museums Service – Performance and Strategic Update Report**

- 11.1 The Committee received the annexed report (9).
- 11.2 Officers introduced the report to the Committee, which provided an update on the performance of the Norfolk Museums Service over the 2023/24 financial year plus an update on major projects.
- 11.3 Overall, there had been 224,581 visitors between the 1 April 2023 to the 30 November 2023, compared to 187,848 for the equivalent period in 2022. Visitor figures across the 10 museums were trending back towards pre-pandemic numbers. The *Gloucester* exhibition at Norwich Castle had contributed over 70,000 visits to the figures, while Gressenhall and Time and Tide had also seen positive performance. The numbers of school visits had returned to pre-pandemic levels, which was another positive development.
- 11.4 The latest round of Teaching Museum trainee recruitment closed on the 4 January. 400 applications were received for five positions, which was believed to be a new record and indicative of the appeal of the programme. Officers expressed gratitude towards Arts Council England for their support.
- 11.5 The Service was delivering an Arts Council England uplift programme, providing support in the Great Yarmouth, King's Lynn, and Thetford areas. Maintaining activity in other parts of Norfolk. A partnership had been formed with YMCA Leicestershire to develop Kick the Dust across the East of England and East Midlands. A meeting was held last week in Cambridge with key project partners and a meeting with the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) was scheduled for April ahead of a funding application submission at the end of May 2024.
- 11.6 The Norfolk Arts Service was pleased to announce the appointment of Niki Braithwaite as the new Arts Development Manager, beginning on the 4 March.
- 11.7 Dr Francesca Vanke, the Senior Curator at Norwich Museums, had been appointed as a member of the Acceptance in Lieu panel, which was an important government panel advising museums. This appointment meant the Service was currently represented on two of the key national committees relating to museum collections and artworks.
- 11.8 The Service was working closely with Brighton and Hove Museums to commence the new southeast museum development programme from the 1 April 2024. Planning was at an advanced stage.

- 11.9 SHARE Museums East was merging with their equivalents from the southeast, which would require new methods of working to be implemented. Previously only two years of funding had been secured from Arts Council England, totalling £1.7m, however, confirmation was received last week that current funding programmes were being extended for a further year, meaning stable funding was in place until 2026/27. Arts Council England were aware of the pressures facing museums nationally and indicated they would be satisfied with a 15% reduction in the delivery of activities in 2024 to reflect inflationary pressures.
- 11.10 The risk rating from Arts Council England had increased by one point to 7 out of 15, which was acknowledgment of budgetary pressures that the Service was facing in common with other organisations nationally. The report confirmed that solid risk mitigations were in place and it was likely the rating would return to 6 out of 15 by the end of 2024. Officers stressed that 7 out of 15 was still a positive rating given the size of the Service.
- 11.11 The following point was raised and discussed:
- A Committee Member asked if the Service gave support to unsuccessful applicants to the Teaching Museum. Officers confirmed that thorough feedback was given to each applicant, to the point that often candidates would successfully reapply the following year.
- 11.12 Having received an update on the 2023/24 Service position to date, the Joint Museums Committee **RESOLVED** to **NOTE** the following:
1. Progress regarding development of the Norwich Castle: Gateway to Medieval England project.
  2. Progress in terms of the Museums Service's key Arts Council England and National Lottery Heritage Fund programmes for 2022/23 and the Service's delivery of its Arts Council England National Portfolio Organisation programme for 2023-26.

## **12. Norwich Castle: Royal Palace Reborn Project Update February 2024**

- 12.1 Hannah Jackson gave a presentation to the Committee illustrating the latest updates to the Royal Palace Reborn Project. The presentation slides could be found on the County Council's website under Committees.

**There being no other business, the meeting closed at 15:34**

**Cllr John Ward, Chair  
Norfolk Joint Museums Committee**



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