

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 7.30 pm at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on 23 JANUARY 1997

Present:- Councillors Mrs M R Green, D M Miller, D J Morson and G W Powers (Uttlesford Members); Ms S Kirkpatrick, N B Newman and A Watson (Museum Society).

Officers in attendance:- Mrs C Allison, A Forrow and Mrs S McLagan.

I. APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was agreed that Mr N B Newman be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

I. NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the meeting held on 21 November 1996 were received.

The Chairman commented that he was concerned about the content of Minute MM13 but would be discussing the issues involved with the Council's Director of Community Services in due course.

I. BUSINESS ARISING

(i) MM15 - Admission charges at Saffron Walden Museum

Ms Kirkpatrick asked whether the recommendation of the Working Party that no increase be made in the scale of admission charges at Saffron Walden Museum had been accepted and was informed that it had and that charges were reviewed annually as part of the Council's budget making process.

I. REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MUSEUM SOCIETY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

The Chairman reported on the meeting of the Museum Society Management Committee held on 16 January 1997. It had considered two discussion papers on the Acquisitions and Disposals Policy (which appeared later on the agenda for this meeting) and the Role and Direction of the Society. It had also considered a recommendation for the de-accessioning of two items from the Museum collection. The reports of the Chairman, Treasurer and Secretary had been received as had the accounts of the Museum Society. The Society would also be addressing the question of appointing a further representative to this Working Party.

Mr Newman also referred to the fact that the demand for access to the Museum's collections was resulting in ever greater pressure on staff. Access could not be provided at the drop of a hat. A leaflet/form had been produced which it was considered gave a good idea of what was involved.

Mr Newman also reported that, within the County Council's organisation, responsibility for Museum affairs now rested with the Heritage and Culture Board. The County Council's financial contribution to the Museum had remained at £6,000 for some years. Representatives of the Heritage and Culture Board would be visiting the Museum at 3.00 pm next Monday 27 January and Mr Newman hoped to be present. It was confirmed that the District Council would also be represented.

Mr Newman then referred in greater detail to items discussed at the meeting of the Management Committee. Concern had been expressed regarding the conservation of items out on loan or to which regular access was required (such as the Saffron Walden Town Council Mace). The Society would also like to see the Museum benefit financially from the use of items from the collections in the writing of books. One way of helping the Working Party to carry out its responsibilities would be to achieve greater liaison with Uttlesford's Officers at budget making time.

Serious problems had been experienced with the boiler and the security of the till had also been discussed.

With regard to the future development of the Society, one working party had been set up to consider ways of increasing the membership of the Society. This would entail demonstrating that membership of the Society could be attractive to people of all ages and backgrounds. A second working party would be looking at the social side of membership which could also be used to improve the image of the Society.

I. CURATOR'S REPORT

Mrs Allison submitted a report on the operation of the Museum for the period from October to December 1996. In relation to publications, she informed the Working Party that there was a copyright charge in place which was looked at from time to time and which applied to the book Len Pole was preparing. The Museum would receive a cash payment of £500 plus a number of free copies which would retail at £7.99 each. There followed a full discussion on the arrangements for making copyright and copying charges. Members of the Working Party commented that they had never been aware that such arrangements existed. Mrs Allison explained the basis on which charges were made. When access to the collections was allowed for educational purposes, no charge was made in view of the Museum's educational remit. Where photographs were taken for the purpose of reproduction in publications, a reproduction charge of £20 was levied. There was also a £5 search fee. The amounts charged were not large, nor were there many occasions on which the levying of charges would be appropriate. For example, people working for higher degrees tended not to use images which might generate income by way of reproduction charges, but tended to simply work off documents. Mrs McLagan commented that procedures were being reviewed and the "Access to collection" application form was an example of the result of a review of this particular procedure. Many current procedures were not written down, but it was intended to produce a leaflet in due course. Reference was also made to the amount of staff time taken up by helping students carrying out conservation work.

At this point, Mrs Allison explained the circumstances which had led the Society's Management Committee to agree that two water pumps currently in the Museum's collections should be de-accessioned.

Councillor Powers noted that all school class visits were from primary schools. It was explained that this was mainly due to the constraints imposed at secondary level by the national curriculum. Councillor Morson pointed out that curriculum enrichment days were available in summer and it was explained that the possibility of putting together suitable packages and introducing outreach work to all schools, including secondary schools would be considered.

Councillor Powers said that the success achieved by the Museum in the Gulbenkian awards and other awards relating to access demonstrated that Saffron Walden had a first class museum and the Chairman suggested that it would be useful to have an item on the next agenda on the issue of Publicity and Marketing. Councillor Morson suggested that the use of space in the shop area should be examined and Mrs Allison confirmed that this issue was being addressed.

The Working Party expressed its concern at the way in which the installation of the new telephone system had been carried out. The Chairman commented on the problem of finding suitable accommodation for students working at the Museum, particularly when they were involved in extended research work, and on other related issues. In answer to a question from Councillor Powers about the conservation and security of a picture owned by Saffron Walden Museum on loan to Chrishall Church, Mrs Allison confirmed that the owners were in a position to carry out the work needed.

Councillor Miller queried whether Mrs Allison would have time to carry out both the work involved in the management of the Museum and the growing number of outside commitments she was being expected to fulfil. Mrs Allison explained her attitude to outreach work, commenting in particular that much of it was in an advisory rather than an executive capacity.

Mrs Allison also explained the latest developments concerning the introduction of an automated till. All involved would have a chance to train on the new till before it was formally introduced.

Councillor Powers expressed the Working Party's thanks to all staff and volunteers for the work they had done in the past and were continuing to carry out to improve sales from the shop and for the benefit of the public.

I. ACQUISITIONS AND DISPOSALS POLICY

Mrs Allison stated that the Museums and the Galleries Commission (MGC) had asked museums to reconsider their collecting policies and had set out a uniform approach and layout for museums to follow. The proposed policy now before the Working Party entailed no practical change from the existing policy, but suggested amendments in wording as well as adherence to a form of words prescribed by the MGC relating to the section "acquisition and disposal procedures".

RECOMMENDED that the proposed acquisitions and disposals policy be approved.

I. CASTLE RUINS

Members discussed the issue of the security of the Castle ruins. The matter had been referred to the Director of Community Services who was considering the situation. The issue was essentially one of health and safety, but effective use of resources was also relevant. The situation was potentially complicated by the requirements of English Heritage in relation to work carried out on such sites. It was clarified that, although the role of the Society in relation to the Castle ruins was not the same as that for the Museum proper, it was nevertheless within the remit of the Working Party to make recommendations on the maintenance of the ruins.

In answer to a query from the Chairman about the responsibility for the day to day maintenance of the Museum, Mrs McLagan explained the reorganisation which had been carried out within the Community Services Department, the result of which was that the maintenance of the Museum was the responsibility of the Property Services Section. Procedures, including the preparation of a planned maintenance programme, were being implemented.

I. DATE OF NEXT MEETING

It was agreed that the next meeting of the Working Party would be arranged in consultation with Councillor Powers and Mr Newman.

The meeting ended at 9.00 pm.

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