

**MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at 10.00 am at
COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN on
7 NOVEMBER 2000**

Present:- Councillors Mrs J E Menell and G W Powers – Uttlesford
Members; Ms S Kirkpatrick, N B Newman (in the Chair),
E Planterose and A Watson - (Museum Society Representatives).

Present at the invitation of the Chairman:- Mr M Adams – Treasurer of the
Museum Society.

Officers in attendance:- Mrs S McLagan, Mrs C Roberts and Ms C Wingfield.

MM12 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs S V Schneider.

MM13 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The notes of the meeting held on 31 August 2000 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman, as a correct record.

MM14 REPORT OF THE CHAIRMAN OF THE MUSEUM SOCIETY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE

Mr Newman reported on the last meeting of the Society and explained that he had invited the Treasurer, Mr Adams, to attend the Museum Management Joint Working Party in view of the preponderantly financial content of the agenda. Mr Adams described the progress and plans for the Museum's portfolio of shares. Mr Newman described events and correspondence since the last meeting.

MM15 CURATOR'S REPORT

The Working Party considered the Curator's report for the period July – September 2000, a copy of which had been circulated to all Members.

(i) Museum Management

The Curator informed the meeting that a recent Internal Audit report would make a recommendation for more resources to tackle the outstanding documentation backlog. She added that the closure on 11 December for electrical circuit testing was essential. It was intended to operate the new electronic till from the new financial year.

(ii) Collections and Research

The Curator emphasised the importance of accepting archaeological archives from excavators, the housing of which would not impact upon the Museum for some time. She also drew attention to the grant of £1,000 from Essex Heritage Trust for remedial conservation work to an 1815 net dress.

(iii) Displays

The Curator reported the gift of an historically accurate replica of the medieval hat from Little Sampford Church.

(iv) Education

The Working Party was informed that story telling sessions at the Museum had proved very successful and that topic sessions had also been extremely popular.

In answer to a question from the Chairman, Ms Wingfield described the effects of slight flooding at Newport Depot store. It was noted that the construction of the building was poor and that capacity was inadequate. The construction had previously been described by the MGC Security Advisor as 'appalling', and also commented on by Zurich Municipal's risk assessor during a recent inspection

MM16 CLOSURE OF MUSEUM TO PUBLIC – 11 DECEMBER 2000

It was agreed that the Museum be closed to the public on 11 December 2000 to enable electrical circuit testing to be carried out.

MM17 IMPLICATIONS OF A 10% CUT IN THE MUSEUM SERVICE BUDGET

The Chairman congratulated Head of Leisure and Community Services upon the quality of the report.

The Head of Leisure and Community Services explained that the Council faced a budget cut of about £1.5m and that the Chief Accountant was present to explain this to Members. The cut was to be phased over five years. A 5% reduction of all budgets was required at the first stage and in addition officers had been requested to consider the implications of a further 10% cut to the Museum's budget. The officers had considered the effect of reducing or cutting elements of the service under the following headings – (a) a reduction in service levels, (b) a reduction in staff costs, by redundancy, and/or a reduction in staff hours, (c) closure of the Saffron Walden Museum for a number of hours/days, (d) increased income.

The Working Party reviewed possible methods of reducing service levels and it was noted that archaeological archives which were acquired had a better

standard of documentation and conservation than in the past and consequently should not be a liability to maintain.

Since volunteers were used extensively, it seemed unlikely that there could be savings in the management of the Museum.

Building maintenance was a contractual obligation and since the main buildings were Grade II Listed, they had to be maintained to a high standard. It was agreed that all Councillors should be appraised of the nature of the legal agreement with the Council affecting the Museum building.

The Chairman also stressed the importance of the Museum's work in taking on board large bodies of evidence from fieldwork in order to preserve the integrity of the finds. It was generally agreed that no saving would be made by not collecting.

It was felt that closing the Museum was not a realistic option because of the effects on income, visitors and registration/grants and that reduction to visitor services would likewise affect income.

As regards potential staff cuts it was stressed by Councillor Powers that the Leisure and Cultural Strategy for Uttlesford for 2000 – 2005 made reference to the Museum, and that it would be contrary to the spirit of that document to stifle the Museum's services.

Members considered Appendix B of the report listing the potential consequences of staff cuts and it was noted that maintenance of Museum registration was essential for almost all sources of public and government grant funding, as well as being a badge of the Museum's professionalism.

Members felt that the gradual introduction of modest charges would be acceptable if supported by concessions to local residents and family tickets.

The Members discussed the desirability of providing shop premises at the Museum and the possible uses of 40 Castle Street.

Carolyn Wingfield drew attention to the excellence of the Museum's ceramics collection, which had been commented on very favourably by a former member of staff at the V&A.

A historical bar chart of the Museum's budgets was circulated and Members expressed the view that since service and staffing budgets had been decreasing for a number of years, the requested cut would require dismantling and reconstruction of the service.

In answer to questions, the Head of Leisure and Community Services explained that the internal charges were predominantly for computer facilities, the budget for which was £15,000 in the coming financial year, without provision for further developments.

It was agreed that the Head of Leisure and Community Services and the Curator would present the report to the Amenities Sub-Committee and that the Chairman of the Community Services Committee would be approached with a view to encouraging all Members of the Community Services Committee to attend the meeting of the Amenities Sub-Committee when this item was debated.

RECOMMENDED that having regard in particular to the recently published Leisure and Cultural Strategy for Uttlesford for 2000 – 2005, Members await the outcome of the Best Value review of the Museum Service prior to determining which element of service they wish officers to pursue with a view to achieving any required reduction in 2001/02.

The meeting ended at 12.20 pm