

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT JOINT WORKING PARTY held at COUNCIL OFFICES LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.00 pm on 7 FEBRUARY 2002

Present:- Councillors M A Hibbs, D M Miller and A R Row (Uttlesford Members);
Ms S Kirkpatrick and Mr E Planterose (Museum Society representatives).

Officers in attendance:- M T Purkiss and Ms C Wingfield.

MM15 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN FOR THE MEETING

It was agreed that Councillor A R Row be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

MM16 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Mrs J E Menell, Mr N B Newman and Mr A Watson.

The Working Party expressed its best wishes to Mr Newman for a speedy recovery.

MM17 NOTES OF PREVIOUS MEETING

The Notes of the meeting held on 15 October 2001 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

MM18 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute MM12 (i) – Church Street entrance

Following a meeting with the Property Services Section, it had been agreed that simple stone slab steps would be installed either side of the small pedestrian gate to prevent users from tripping on the raised iron bar along the bottom of the pedestrian gate or slipping on the muddy slope at the entrance. The pedestrian gate would be repainted white to differentiate it from surrounding black iron double gates, which would remain padlocked.

(ii) Minute MM14 – Curator's Report (ongoing IT problems)

Following discussion with the IT section, the matters raised at the last meeting had been resolved. The programme of work for 2002/03 was being progressed. With regard to whether there would be any reduction in IT charges to the Museum it was noted that these would be reviewed towards the end of the financial year and, in relation to projects that had not gone ahead, charges would be adjusted accordingly. In relation to the ongoing day to day service, the end of the financial year review would reflect the level of

service and should account for the general reduction in service, although this was likely to be minimal as the charges included provision of hardware and the helpdesk, which had not changed.

(iii) Minute MM14 – Curator’s Report (Blocked Gutters)

It was noted that the gutters had been inspected in November. This inspection had been undertaken by Roalco and had included checking of hoppers and down pipes and pointing on the walls behind down pipes where water had penetrated last winter. A further inspection would be undertaken in February by the roofing contractors, Courtenay Building Contractors, which would include the laboratory/school room annexe. A further inspection would be carried out by the Property Services Section in the spring.

(iv) Minute MM14 – Curator’s Report (Museum Boilers)

Following the last meeting, Property Services had contacted Aqua Engineers who serviced the Museum boilers. Aqua had reported that one boiler had been renewed 2-3 years ago, the other overhauled and that both were considered to be in good condition. Both boilers had been serviced recently. Some Members of the Working Party felt that, in the longer term, replacement gas boilers would be more efficient and cost effective and the Council should budget accordingly in the future.

(v) Minute MM14 – Curator’s Report (50 Castle Street)

It was confirmed that the parcel of land at 50 Castle Street was included within the lease to the Council. It had been established that the rent had been collected by the Museum Society, but some years ago (presumably around the time of the new management agreement in 1991) the Society Treasurer had told the lessee that he should make the cheque payable to Uttlesford District Council. The lessee had therefore sent a cheque for £20, the current rent, to the Museum Society Treasurer every year but had made it out to the Council and as all had been cashed they appeared to have been entered as Museum income. The next payment was due in April 2002 and it would be opportune to view the arrangement in order that it could be handled by the Council in future to avoid confusion. Mr Planterose also asked if it could be established who was the owner of the access road which ran from Castle Street.

It was considered that the issue of the rent should be discussed in the first instance by the Museum Society and, following their advice, the Council could make a decision on the future of this parcel of land.

(vi) Minute MM13 – Report of the Chairman of the Museum Society Management Committee

Since the last meeting, the Curator had spoken to Malcolm Adams’ widow concerning the possible planting of a tree to commemorate the work undertaken by Mr Adams who had been the Museum Society Treasurer and a desk volunteer. The Natural Sciences Officer had advised that a Hornbeam could be planted near the Church Street entrance and a response was awaited from English Heritage for the appropriate consent. It was likely that

the tree would be planted in the autumn and an appropriate plaque would be attached.

The Chairman thanked officers for the comprehensive response to the matters which had been raised at the last meeting.

MM19 **REPORT OF CHAIRMAN OF THE MUSEUM SOCIETY MANAGEMENT COMMITTEE**

As the last meeting of the Museum Society Management Committee had been cancelled there was no report on this item.

MM20 **CURATOR'S REPORT**

The Working Party received the Curator's quarterly report for the period October – December 2001. In relation to the Strategic Plan, the Curator reported that she had viewed a building at Clavering which had potential for conversion to an offsite Resource Centre for reserve collections. She also advised that efforts were being made to engage BAA in discussions concerning the future of the archaeological archives from excavation at the Airport. The committee asked that the Director of Community Services should pursue these discussions as soon as possible.

It was noted that the Newport Store had flooded on 22 October to a height of 8-9 inches at ground floor level. This had resulted in a lot of work for staff in moving wet objects, boxes and drawers, dealing with malfunctioning equipment, power cuts and alarm system failures, as well as subsequent cleaning and reorganising salvage collection.

Work to the main roof of 40 Castle Street had gone out to tender in December and Courtenay Building Contractors had been appointed. They were expected to start work in February 2002 and would also be carrying out routine clearance and checking of gutters on the Museum and School Room/Laboratory buildings at the same time.

The Working Party was pleased to note that the Documentation Assistant Shirley Miller had completed the cataloguing of 3650 items from the contents of the organic store. During the remaining 1 month of her contract, she would be researching other records in the Museum, enhancing the catalogue with further information where available and assisting in the selection and research of items for display in the furniture gallery.

It was noted that the American Bittern specimen had been accepted by the British Ornithologists Union Rarities Committee as being the first record of the bird for Essex and the second record for the British Isles. This followed 18 months of research by Nick Green of the Essex Bird Watching Society and Sarah Kenyon, the Natural Sciences Officer.

The Exhibition "Flight into the Past – Archaeology of Stansted Airport" was proving popular with all ages, particularly the sandpit of "finds". The exhibition

would run until 7 April 2002. There had also been a good crop of blooms from the Saffron Crocus planted for "Saffron on Show".

(Councillor Hibbs declared an interest in the following aspect of the report)

Hibbs and Walsh Associates had held a successful launch in the main Museum on 13 December. Approximately 30 guests had attended and the cost of staffing and security had been included in the hire fee. Following this successful trial reception it was intended to offer the Museum to the local business community for appropriate corporate entertainment events. The Working Party noted the draft conditions of hire and felt that the condition relating to the list of guests needed to be made more user friendly. The Working Party also noted that a clause relating to testing portable electrical equipment had been included. The Working Party considered that there should be a targeted approach to marketing this facility and every opportunity should be taken to obtain greater publicity.

RECOMMENDED that the Museum be offered for corporate entertainment events, subject to the appropriate conditions of hire and subject to a review in 12 months time.

A number of outreach projects had been undertaken during the quarter including involvement with the "Tales of the Wild Wood" where the Natural Sciences Officer had provided some animal and bird specimens to accompany a wildlife puppet show for children at the Saffron Walden Town Hall. The Museum had also been involved with the late night opening in Saffron Walden and the Farm Club Christmas Fayre.

The Curator said that preparation was already underway for the Best Value Review of Museum and Leisure Services, which would be undertaken during April – November 2002. This would make considerable additional demands on staff time and the Curator would be heavily involved in the project. The Museum Society Committee would need not only to be kept informed of progress with the review but would also need to play an active role. It was suggested that the Society should set up a small Working Group, which could discuss issues with Council staff on a monthly basis.

MM21

MEMBERSHIP OF THE WORKING PARTY

Councillor Hibbs said that at the Council Meeting on 12 February, Members would consider a request that he should replace Councillor Morson as the Council's representative on the Museums in Essex Committee and that Councillor Morson should take his place on the Working Party.

The meeting ended at 8:05 pm.