

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT TASK GROUP held at SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM at 7.30 pm on 26 AUGUST 2004

Present:- Councillors R P Chambers, J I Loughlin, D J Morson and V Pedder (Uttlesford Members), N B Newman, E Planterose and A Watson (Museum Society representatives).

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

MM8 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

It was agreed that Councillor D J Morson be appointed Chairman for the meeting.

MM9 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 20 May 2004 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

MM10 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Best Value

Councillor Morson thanked the Museum Society for providing the Best Value update report.

(ii) Repatriation Request from Te Papa Tongarewa

It was noted that this matter had now been finalised and further instructions regarding the repatriation were awaited.

(iii) Garden at rear of 50 Castle Street, Saffron Walden

At the last meeting of the Task Group it had been recommended that, subject to agreement as to the consideration payable, the Community and Leisure Committee be asked to agree to the sale of part of the garden to the owner of 50 Castle Street. Mr Watson reported on negotiations which had been held and circulated copies of letters received from the owner of 50 Castle Street and the valuation agents.

He reported that the Museum Society had agreed that the offer of £10,000 received for the portion of the plot closest to the house plus £500 towards the Society's legal fees/expenses be accepted and that the remaining land be let to the owner of 50 Castle Street at a rental of £100 per annum. He also reported that the Museum Society had agreed that any proceeds from the sale of this land would be earmarked for use at the proposed Resource Centre.

The Chairman expressed his thanks to all those who had been involved in this matter.

RECOMMENDED that the Community and Leisure Committee be asked to confirm the sale of this land on the terms set out above.

MM11

MUSEUM RESOURCE CENTRE UPDATE

The Curator reported that the Heritage Lottery Fund had awarded the Museum Service a project planning grant of £24,500 to cover 90% of the cost of an audience development study to be undertaken by consultants during the Autumn of 2004. She said that officers would now start giving publicity to the project and engage with the local community. She said that a leaflet was being prepared and officers were looking at funding opportunities.

A copy of the report to the Community and Leisure Committee was circulated and it was noted that the Committee was being asked to make a recommendation to the Resources Committee to allocate a sum in its capital programme for 2005/06 towards the funding of the Resource Centre.

Councillor Morson expressed his thanks to the Curator for all the hard work she had put into obtaining the project planning grant. He said that there were a number of variables still to be determined, such as the amount of any grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund, the amount of sponsorship and the contribution which the Council would make to the project. He hoped that the Council would do everything possible to ensure that the project proceeded.

In answer to a question from Councillor Chambers, Mr Watson confirmed that the Museum Society fully supported the provision of the Resource Centre. Councillor Chambers also asked whether the Resource Centre could be located on the Museum site. The Curator said that this had been investigated, but would not be possible due to the Museum's listed status and being on a site of an ancient monument. There was also a lack of space and any building on the site could prejudice the future development of the museum.

In answer to a question from Mr Newman, the Curator said she would investigate whether the design of the proposed Resource Centre would enable the carved wood collection to be moved from the school room.

In response to a question from Mr Planterose, the Curator said that if the Resource Centre Project did not proceed, the Museum would not be able to house any further archaeological artefacts and existing collections would remain in sub-standard storage conditions. The Task Group emphasised that the project was of benefit to the whole Uttlesford community and would enable people to be involved with their local history and heritage.

It was agreed to urge the Community and Leisure Committee to advance the Resource Centre Project.

MM12

The Task Group received a written report from the Saffron Walden Museum Society. Mr Watson emphasised that the Society were encouraging younger people to become members and said that a fund raising committee would be established. Mr Planterose said that signage to the Museum was still inadequate and also suggested that the Museum should be promoted on the leaflets which were distributed with the Council Tax Bills. Officers noted this suggestion and Councillor Morson said that signage to the Museum was being looked at as part of the Quality of Life Plan and improved signs should be in place by the end of the year.

MM13 **CURATOR'S REPORT**

The Task Group received the Curator's Quarterly report for the period April – June 2004.

She said that the recruitment of additional casual staff had been useful. She also referred to the acquisition of a large collection of over 100 glasses which had been donated by a long time volunteer. Work on updating and upgrading the labels in the ethnography gallery had now been completed and the improvements had been well received by the public. Visitor figures were fairly stable and the Curator also referred to recent temporary exhibitions and a successful reception which had been held on 16 July which had been addressed by Sir Alan Haselhurst MP.

MM14 **BEST VALUE UPDATE**

The Task Group considered a report on progress with the Best Value Review of the Museum Service. Mr Watson said that it was considered that annual and subscription fees needed to be reviewed and he suggested that two members of the Society should meet with two representatives of the Council to discuss this matter further. The Task Group supported this suggestion and the Curator would make the necessary arrangements. All other items in the Best Value Review had been achieved or were ongoing.

MM15 **SECURITY**

Mr Newman asked for details of the security arrangements for the Museum and asked whether there was a plan for dealing with fire and other emergencies. The Curator outlined the security arrangements and said that a security officer was employed for 18½ hours per week. However, his job description was fairly broad and he also dealt with maintenance issues. She confirmed that there was an emergency plan for the Museum and this was tested on a regular basis. She would provide copies of the plan to members of the Task Group.

The Task Group expressed some concern at the safety of some of the elderly volunteers at the Museum and considered that the security officer should have more of a presence in the Museum building. The Curator said that panic buttons were provided, but she would look at ways of improving the system

and said that, in the longer term it was hoped to have gallery stewards in the Museum.

It was agreed that a security update should be provided to the next meeting of the Task Group.

The meeting ended at 8.50 pm.