

**MUSEUM MANAGEMENT TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN AT 7.30 pm on 26 OCTOBER 2004**

Present:- Councillors J I Loughlin and D J Morson (Uttlesford Members),
J Bullen, E Planterose and R Wallace (Museum Society
Representatives).

Officers in attendance:- P J Snow and C Wingfield.

MM16 STATEMENT ON BEHALF OF MUSEUM SOCIETY

Mr Planterose made a short statement on behalf of the Museum Society. He said that although it was customary for a member of the Museum Society to chair meetings held at the Council Offices, he would ask for Councillor Morson to take the chair on this occasion. He explained that Mr A Watson had now been elected as Chairman of the Management Committee of the Society and that Mr Watson had asked Mr Planterose to act in this capacity until early December while he was overseas. Mrs Bullen and Major Wallace had also been nominated to attend this meeting and the Museum Society would notify the Council of its permanent representatives in due course.

MM17 APPOINTMENT OF CHAIRMAN

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

MM18 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor V Pedder (Uttlesford Member) and Mr A Watson (Museum Society Representative).

MM19 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 26 August 2004 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

MM20 BUSINESS ARISING

**(i) Minute MM10 (iii) – Garden at rear of 50 Castle Street
Saffron Walden**

It was noted that the Museum Society had now consented to the sale of land at the rear of 50 Castle Street. The proceeds from the sale of this land would be held in reserve for a use to be determined at a future date.

(ii) Minute MM12 – Report of the Saffron Walden Museum Society

The Chairman referred to delays in the provision of new signage for the Museum which had been for operational reasons. He hoped that the improved signs would be provided early in the New Year.

(iii) **Minute MM14 – Best Value Update**

It was noted that no further progress had been made towards arranging the proposed meeting between two representatives of the Council and two members of the Museum Society.

(iv) **Minute MM15 – Security**

Mr Planterose raised his concerns about the lack of a satisfactory panic button system for use by staff and volunteers at the Museum. It was generally agreed that a better solution needed to be found and the matter would continue to be monitored.

MM21

MUSEUM RESOURCE CENTRE PROJECT AND OUTCOME OF RESOURCES COMMITTEE DECISION

The Chairman reported on the decision of the Resources Committee not to support the Community and Leisure Committee's recommendation to make a capital contribution of £60,000 to attract Heritage Lottery Fund grant funding. This was the minimum sum that would be needed to progress the HLF grant application. Instead, the Resources Committee had resolved to establish an officer-member working group, with the support of the Museum Curator and with the full involvement of the Museum Society, to identify and evaluate options for securing long term financial viability for the Museum. As part of the resolution, the Community and Leisure Committee had been authorised to draw up to £30,000 from reserves or other available budgets to support this study.

The Chairman expressed his disappointment with this decision. The matter would now be referred back to the Community and Leisure Committee at its meeting on 2 November 2004. He suggested that one way forward would be for the Resource Centre Project Team to be given fresh terms of reference to enable it to evaluate the needs of the Museum service and to re-examine the whole question of storage capacity. He stressed that the decision of the Resources Committee had not necessarily closed the door on future funding applications and it might be possible to resurrect the project in time for an application to be submitted during the next available period.

Members of the Task Group discussed possible ways in which this matter could be taken forward. The general feeling was that the Best Value Review had already settled the Council's relationship with the Museum but that wider issues of funding still remained to be resolved. The Chairman said, that as far as he was concerned, there would be no diminution of interest in the Museum by the District Council. It was the case that a clash of interests had resulted in the Resource Centre project being stalled.

Mrs Bullen asked how it was proposed that the £30,000 would be spent. The Chairman said it was his understanding that the money had been set aside for

use if required and there appeared to be no need or wish to allocate funding at this stage. The next step would be for the Community and Leisure Committee to explore the options that might be available including the possibility of redirecting the Resource Centre Project Team so that the wider picture could be examined. It was recognised that the Museum could not continue to operate on a viable basis if no proper storage area was available.

Major Wallace said that it was possible for small villages to raise large sums of money in support of particular projects and there was no reason why the Museum service should not be able to achieve something similar. More time was needed to look at what could be done. The Curator commented that it was not possible to guarantee levels of funding from the HLF in the long term. Projects with access to higher levels of matching funding were more likely to be successful. She had already made arrangements to visit BAA together with the Executive Manager (Environment) and the Planning Policy and Conservation Manager and it was hoped that organisation would be prepared to offer some funding towards the Resource Centre Project.

The Chairman endorsed this approach and said that it was important to continue to explore possible external sources of funding. If funding could be secured from alternative sources, this would help in making a future approach to the Resources Committee a more viable proposition.

The Curator commented in detail about the particular problems that had been encountered in providing safe and secure storage and said that she was concerned about the possible effect of adverse weather conditions. A question was raised about the possible effects on the storage area at Newport of any future work on the River Cam by the Environment Agency and the Chairman said that he was happy to discuss the implications of this with environmental health officers.

In conclusion, the Task Group agreed to support the recommendation of the Resource Centre Project Team being submitted to the Community and Leisure Committee meeting on 2 November 2004.

MM22

REPORT OF THE SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM SOCIETY

A written report was submitted from the Saffron Walden Museum Society. Mr Planterose said that the sum for the sale of land at the rear of 50 Castle Street had not yet been settled. It was anticipated that a working party would be established to consider future admissions and charging policy. The Executive Sub-Committee would be looking at ways of speeding up decision-making and how to make the Museum more accessible to younger people.

The Working Party discussed ways in which younger people could be encouraged to play an active role in the management and funding of the Museum. It was agreed that any publicity campaign should be targeted principally at the forty plus age group who would be more likely to have experience of business principles and fund raising.

The Curator advised Members that the Charities Age Foundation might be in a position to provide funds to boost the Museum Society's management

structure and provide advice. In certain circumstances, this could involve the secondment of business people with specific expertise to committees of charitable organisations where recruitment had proved to be difficult.

MM23

CURATOR'S REPORT

The Task Group received the Curator's quarterly report for the period July to September 2004.

She praised the valuable contribution that continued to be made by Museum volunteers. There had been a major phase of work carried out by contractors at the Museum. A rupture in the water main had been repaired and a new gas meter would be installed shortly. The outdated heating in the schoolroom had now been replaced.

Ms Wingfield also reported that a number of new acquisitions had been made, but a strict policy now had to be operated in some areas because of the lack of available storage space.

She also referred to difficulties concerning the potential loan of horse drawn vehicles and a hayrick to Priors Hall Barn in Widdington. The owner's insurers had declined to insure the Museum's horse drawn vehicles, but the Curator had now been able to arrange a suitable insurance premium with a specialist company called Blackwell Green. This would involve a contribution from the revenue budget of £400.

Members discussed other means of obtaining suitable insurance cover and it was agreed that the Curator would proceed with the company concerned unless a better offer could be found.

Members congratulated the Curator on her comprehensive report and on the varied and valuable programme of events that continued to be carried out.

MM24

SECURITY UPDATE

The Curator submitted an oral report of the existing security arrangements at the Museum. She emphasised that no regular security staff were available for security duties and these had to be carried out by the Museum staff generally. She explained the arrangements for locking and unlocking the Museum itself and the store at Newport. As a result of advice received from the police staffing cover had been increased on Sundays.

The Curator said that she would like to improve the CCTV coverage at the Museum by providing a new monitor for staff working in the desk area. A programme of upgrades to the system was already in place.

Reference was also made to the Museum's Emergency Plan which was a bulky document and consequently difficult to transport. Members were anxious to have the opportunity to view this document and it was agreed that it would be made available at the next meeting of the Task Group which would be held at the Museum.

In conclusion, there was a brief discussion about the procedure to be adopted in the event of an emergency at the Museum such as a flood resulting from a rupture of the water mains. The Curator confirmed that there was a stopcock in the Museum itself that could be shut off quickly if necessary. However, if a problem occurred outside the Museum building the water authority would have to be called to shut off the water supply. She confirmed that there was a fire hydrant in the drive outside the building and that there were fire alarms, linked to smoke detectors, in all of the Museum's premises.

The Chairman thanked the Curator for her comprehensive report.

MM25

DATES OF FUTURE MEETINGS

The Task Group agreed the following dates for meetings to be held in 2005:

Monday 7 February
Monday 23 May
Monday 22 August
Monday 31 October.

The meeting ended at 8.45 pm.