

**MUSEUM MANAGEMENT TASK GROUP held at COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 7.30pm on 31 OCTOBER 2005**

Present:- Councillor D J Morson – Chairman

Councillors J I Loughlin and V Pedder (Uttlesford Members) and
D Laing, E Planterose and A Watson (Museum Society)

Also present:- Councillor J P Murphy

Officers in attendance:- P Snow and C Wingfield

MM18 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 22 August 2005 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

MM19 BUSINESS ARISING

(i) Minute MM12 (i) – Signage

In response to a question, the Curator said that it was her understanding that improved signage at the Museum could now be installed. The collective funding available for this project would benefit both the Museum and Bridge End Gardens.

MM20 UPDATE ON MUSEUM RESOURCE CENTRE PROJECT

The Curator referred to the successful launch of the Resource Centre Project and said that the brochure produced would be sent to all councillors and parish councils in the district together with a handout illustrating the district-wide nature of the work carried out at the Museum. A letter had been sent out by Sir Alan Haselhurst MP inviting County Councillors to attend a meeting at the end of November and it was hoped that support would be forthcoming from the County Council.

Together with Martin Shaw, the Curator was continuing to investigate all possible sources of funding for this project. She had made contact with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport in an effort to raise awareness at government level of the problems faced by smaller local authorities and had contacted, among other organisations, the Sainsbury Family Trust and BAA. A number of unsolicited donations had already been received.

Mr Laing explained the difficulties faced by the Museum Society in passing on funds raised because of the implications of charity law. Advice had now been received from the Charity Commission and various ways of overcoming these difficulties were being explored. One possible option was to form a new trust for the Heritage Quest Centre with the District Council acting as Trustee. The Council's legal section was in the process of drafting an agreement for use if it

was decided to pursue that option. Members of the Task Group generally supported the formation of a new charitable trust along these lines.

Members discussed a number of other options for raising pledges of money to enable the Heritage Lottery Fund application to be made. The Curator commented that there was no rigid date for the submission of an application and it was likely to be made in 2007 at the earliest.

MM21

MUSEUM SERVICE FORWARD PLAN

The Curator presented the draft Forward Plan from October 2005 as already submitted to the Community and Leisure Committee. She said that the document would be needed for the proposed accreditation scheme in March next year and would set the tone of the Museum's future strategic direction. The plan would be due for review in October next year and annually thereafter.

She referred, in particular, to the two-stage development plan for the Museum Service set out in the document. Stage one referred to the development of the Heritage Quest Centre whilst stage two sought to develop the Museum site, including the Castle and grounds, to increase the number of visitors and maximise income generation. She said that one of the opportunities for future development was presented by the Olympic Games being hosted in London in 2012.

In this context, the Chairman referred to the granting of the sum of £30,000 by the Resources Committee for the development of Museum Services. Members discussed possible opportunities to increase the income stream at the Museum by selling merchandise in tandem with the organisation of exhibitions.

It was noted that one idea being explored was the relocation of the Tourist Information Centre to the Museum site to incorporate an entrance area to the Museum with refreshment and shop facilities. Arrangements were being made for a feasibility study to examine this idea. Members supported this idea in principle and were keen to exploit all possible opportunities to maximise income generation.

Mr Watson said that the Museum Society Management Committee had asked the Curator to strengthen the background information in the document to clarify the Society's role in relation to the Museum's buildings and collections and had welcomed the suggestion to incorporate the Tourist Information Centre. The Society would make arrangements to commission an architectural study once a proper brief had been prepared.

MM22

EDUCATION POLICY

The Curator introduced a report outlining the Museum's Education Policy as one of a suite of policy documents required to be in place for accreditation purposes. She emphasised that education was not just about the work

undertaken for schools and underpinned the whole purpose of the work carried out by the Museum service.

The Chairman congratulated the Curator on the preparation of the policy document and advised the Task Group that the policy had already been welcomed by the Community and Leisure Committee.

MM23

REPORT OF THE SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM SOCIETY

The Task Group received the report of the Museum Society and Mr Watson said there was little to add to the report.

Reference was made in the report to informal liaison with the Historical Society and the Royal Society of St George and the Chairman asked whether those organisations and the Museum Society had many members in common. Mr Watson commented that there was a tendency for long established organisations to seek to retain their independence but he felt sure that it would be possible to achieve stronger links between the bodies concerned in the future. In this context, Councillor Pedder made reference to the Local History Group in Stansted and said that she would pass on details of this organisation to the Curator.

MM24

CURATOR'S REPORT

The Task Group considered the Curator's Quarterly Report for the period from July to September 2005. The absence of the Education Officer for three months' sick leave had inevitably affected some school visits and associated income. However, the Task Group were pleased to note that the Education Officer had fully recovered and resumed a wide programme of teaching and other activities.

The Curator referred to the East of England Hub Partners' project and said she hoped that this would help to attract new funding that could be spread throughout the region. One of the project partners was the Fitzwilliam Museum in Cambridge.

Members were reminded that permission had been sought from English Heritage to display horse-drawn vehicles at Prior's Hall Barn in Widdington. English Heritage had now indicated that they intended to revise local management agreements and were not therefore in a position to give permission for this project to proceed. The Curator had explored other options and had been offered a possible location owned by Mr Haylock at Hempstead. This was unlikely to provide a viable long-term solution and a further option was to disperse the horse-drawn vehicles to other museums as part of a long-term loan arrangement.

The Task Group also discussed the possibility of obtaining joint publicity for exhibitions in conjunction with museums in other areas and the Curator confirmed that reciprocal publicity had already been exchanged with the museum at Peterborough in conjunction with the Fighting Napoleon exhibition.

It was intended to send publicity material to other relevant organisations in London and the East of England for the forthcoming Chinese Costume exhibition. Members also discussed briefly the impact on visitor numbers of the free admissions trial month in August. This had resulted in a sevenfold increase in donations (aided by a suitable sound effect fitted to the donations box) but had not covered all the income lost on ticket sales.

In conclusion, the Curator was congratulated on her comprehensive and interesting report.

The meeting ended at 8.45pm.