

**MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at THE COUNCIL OFFICES
LONDON ROAD SAFFRON WALDEN at 6.00 pm on 22 FEBRUARY 2008**

Present:- Councillors E Abrahams and **K Eden** (Uttlesford Members); J Bullen and E Planterose (Museum Society).

Officers
in attendance:- C Wingfield (Museum Curator) and R Procter (Committee Officer).

MM29 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors R Chambers, D J Morson and S V Schneider, and from S Hollingworth, D Laing, R Wallace and A Watson.

MM30 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 13 December 2007 were received, confirmed and signed by the Chairman as a correct record.

MM31 HERITAGE QUEST CENTRE PROJECT

Carolyn Wingfield gave a brief verbal report. The outcome of the bid for the Lottery Grant would be known in mid March. A meeting with the case officer, Sylvia Collier, and consultant to HLF Christine Beresford, had taken place to assess the application. There had been constructive dialogue, and discussions with the architect, David Demery, resulting in a changed design to alter the gathering space in the foyer. There had been a series of questions and responses, most of which related to details, rather than fundamentals. It was reported by another museum service that the Lottery Fund had told them that they would not fund new build in the future.

Carolyn Wingfield reported that other fundraising work was progressing to plan, in particular the St Mark's College event. Invitations had been sent out to 150 people, including representatives from local businesses. Unfortunately the number of replies received had been rather few, and the event might not fulfil its target, despite good preparation and publicity. However, the overall target should be achieved, as most money derived from other sources.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, Carolyn Wingfield said that the outcome of the Lottery bid might be available in time for the meeting of Community Committee on 13 March. She said that due to the Lottery Fund's publicity requirements there might be publicity constraints for a week or two after notification.

MM32 SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM SOCIETY

The report circulated with the agenda was considered. Regarding constitutional changes, Edwin Planterose reported that Companies House had now provided a certificate of incorporation for Saffron Walden Museum Society Ltd, company number, 6469141. Carolyn Wingfield said she would need copies of the certificate, which Edwin Planterose said he would ask Tony Watson to forward to her.

There was discussion of the identity of the chairman of the Heritage Quest Trust Company. The Chairman said that the Charity Commission would be able to provide

advice, and Edwin Planterose said that he would ask Susan Hollingworth to look into this point. As Richard Wallace had now moved from the area, it was noted that Edwin Planterose as Vice Chair would take on the role of Chairman of the Museum Society for the time being. However, after the formation of the company he intended to announce his resignation at the following Annual General Meeting.

MM33 **CURATOR'S REPORT**

Carolyn Wingfield referred to the report circulated with the agenda, and said that there had been some significant updates. Regarding buildings, work to upgrade the CCTV had been completed very satisfactorily, with funding from the Museum Society. Cameras now provided improved protection for staff and for exhibits. Coverage was now at full capacity, although logistics meant that the stone coffins in the grounds could not come with the range of cameras.

In reply to a question from the Chairman regarding entry charges, Carolyn Wingfield said that visitor numbers dropped significantly in 1987 when a charge had been introduced, and did not fully recover. In recent years numbers had reached a plateau of approximately 20,000. The Chairman asked about the factors which influenced visitor numbers. Edwin Planterose said that there was no discernible formula, but that exceptional exhibitions, such as the Moorcroft exhibition in 1997 and the American Indian PowWow in 2000, resulted in increased visitor numbers. People were also drawn to events involving animals such as snakes and spiders, and although these events could not be replicated too often, a Pets' Day was planned for next autumn.

In reply to a question from the Chairman, Carolyn Wingfield said she would find out information on nationwide museum attendance during the last year, in order to establish regional benchmarking. It was noted that local factors are likely to have an impact, and Edwin Planterose said that when the grounds are re-designed it would be helpful to have an entrance on the corner by the Common.

The question of publicity was discussed, and the Chairman said that advertising of the Museum should be one of the areas for further consideration now that the TIC had been taken over by the Town Council. Regarding publicity throughout the District, Carolyn Wingfield said that fliers and posters for all exhibitions were sent out to every Parish Council and all appropriate public buildings such as libraries. She would find it helpful to know if any were not receiving these, and said it would be useful to be able to make more use of e-mail and websites. Uttlesford Life was another advertising route. Edwin Planterose said that advertisements or articles in Parish magazines could be considered, and it was

AGREED to pursue this action with Richard Auty.

Carolyn Wingfield said that she was to attend a Local History event in Clavering in April, and would use this opportunity to establish links with Clavering Parish Council.

In reply to a question from Edwin Planterose regarding the site for the Heritage Quest Centre, Carolyn Wingfield said that on the advice of Catherine Nicholson, a report to Full Council in April would be required. This was in hand.

MM34 **EDUCATION OFFICER**

Carolyn Wingfield had produced an updated report for the meeting of the Finance and Administration Committee on 27 March, as events had moved on quickly. It had been hoped that exceptional permission could be obtained in early February to have an Education Officer come in to enable a fast track induction to permit negligible disruption. Unfortunately, the current financial situation and measures taken to freeze recruitment had cut across this process. As the Museum Society was very concerned to keep the post of Education Officer, it had made an exceptional offer. However, since a charity could not legally fund a Council post, a different proposal had been put forward, whereby the Society would make a one-off contribution to building maintenance costs. This would relieve the Council from a level of maintenance costs equivalent to funding the post of Education Officer for one year. It was now not possible to avoid a break when the current officer, Jenny Gibsone, left, but Members were being asked to consider recruiting for the post in April, with the aim of having the new officer in post in the summer holidays. Although school bookings were made throughout the year, the autumn term was usually very busy, and Carolyn Wingfield said that it was envisaged that a full programme would be reinstated after January 2009.

Edwin Planterose said that he was disappointed that the post would be vacant for a period before the recruitment of the new Education Officer, as the Society's offer had been made on the basis that it would help avoid this gap. Janet Bullen agreed, and said she did not understand why the issues surrounding the recruitment had not been addressed earlier.

The Chairman referred to the great extent of the issues relating to the Council's finances which had had to be addressed, and said that the post of Education Officer was unfortunately a casualty of the "blunt instrument" of cutting costs.

Edwin Planterose replied that the post paid for itself in any event, as it brought in income for the Council. Janet Bullen questioned why the Council was now recruiting for other posts, and asked for a guarantee that if the Society were to contribute funds to an equivalent value of this post, that the Council would fund it for a further year. Carolyn Wingfield said that the report referred to a permanent contract. The Chairman said that it was not possible to predict what would happen during the next financial year, but that it was unlikely that this post would not be continued. Janet Bullen repeated her strong objection to the Council's decision to freeze recruitment to the post in view of the fact that it was self-funding. She was dismayed at the delay, as the impetus for the offer was to avoid this gap. The Chairman said that the difficulty was that Members had not been in a position to make a decision any earlier, but that on 27 March he and Councillor Abrahams would encourage them to support the proposal, although they would have to declare an interest.

MM35 MUSEUM FEES AND CHARGES

Carolyn Wingfield referred to the report circulated with the agenda, and produced an updated version, as it contained additional statistics provided by Mary Adams. The draft had been taken to the Museum Society Committee in January, and would go before Community Committee on 13 March.

The report recommended an increase in education charges for schools booking taught sessions and adult groups requesting talks to £2.50 per person. The minimum group rate was recommended to rise to £40, with discretion to waive the charge for small special needs groups. The report also recommended that

admission charges be retained at current level for 2008-09, but subject to longer-term review in the context of the Museum Service's Forward Plan.

Carolyn Wingfield said that the recommendation was dependent on having an Education Officer in post. A benchmarking analysis for other museums in Essex was going to be carried out. Most museums in the area did not charge for admission, and in addition the Lottery Fund encouraged the promotion of museums to a wider range of people.

The possibility of charging a local residents' rate was discussed, as was the impact of price rises on donations. It was

AGREED to support the recommendations as set out in the report.

MM36 **ANY OTHER URGENT BUSINESS**

Janet Bullen asked whether the road to the Heritage Quest Centre had been re-directed. Carolyn Wingfield said that this issue had been a passing matter, which had been resolved with the Planning Service, and the preferred route had been selected. In response to a question from Janet Bullen, the Chairman declared an interest as a Member of the Development Control Committee, and said that the site was to be used only for warehousing and retail, and not for residential purposes.

Edwin Planterose asked about the notice for the Museum near the Church Street entrance. Carolyn Wingfield said that she had drafted some wording, and was looking into the possibility of placing the sign on top of the "Picnic Area" notice.

The meeting ended at 7.15 pm.