

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at the SCHOOL ROOM, SAFFRON WALDEN MUSEUM at 6pm on 6 FEBRUARY 2013

Present: Councillor K Eden – Chairman
Councillor D Morson (Uttlesford Member)
R Priestley, P Salvidge and A Watson (Museum Society Limited).

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), R Dobson (Democratic Services Officer), A Webb (Director of Corporate Services) and C Wingfield (Curator).

MM31 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Rolfe and from David Laing.

MM32 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 14 November 2012 were received and confirmed as a correct record.

MM33 CURATOR'S QUARTERLY REPORTS

The Curator presented the quarterly report covering October to December 2012. She drew Members' attention to the following points:

Museum Development Plan

The next stage following the geophysical survey was for analysis of the results by an expert who would be instructed by Essex County Council. The assessment would include recommendations for site management. Officers would investigate possible funding options for the cost of this work which would be approximately £3,000.

Staff training

Training on safe working at heights had taken place, and scheduled maintenance to the Museum roof had now been carried out.

Regarding collections, a sign from *The Crocus Tavern* had been donated earlier than anticipated. It had been stored temporarily in the workshop with the intention that it should eventually be used to contribute to an exhibition on recent social history.

Regarding exhibitions, the *Castle and Community* exhibition had been well received by a local audience and copies of CDs had been requested.

Regarding visitor figures, although income from ticket sales was less than for the previous year, this reflected the greater proportion of retired people paying half price. However, due to the successful schools programme, shop sales were up. The amount of donations had also increased since last year.

The Museum had engaged in publicity of various kinds including assisting production of a programme on Saffron Walden to be broadcast in the BBC *Town* series. A work experience student had set up a Facebook page and Twitter account for the Museum for promotion of its activities.

The education and outreach programme was going well, the Learning Officer having accomplished a record number of teaching sessions in schools during the autumn term.

The Chairman thanked the Curator for her report.

MM34 **MUSEUM SOCIETY REPORT**

Members considered the report of the Museum Society, following its meeting on 29 January 2013.

The report was noted.

MM35 **MUSEUM SERVICE FORWARD PLAN**

Members considered the draft forward plan for the Museum Service for the years 2013-18.

The Director of Corporate Services said the Curator deserved much credit for this report which was a very good document. He drew Members' attention to several points: it was likely that the planning application for the store would come before the Planning Committee on 13 March; officers had negotiated indefinite free broadband with Buzcom, following an initial set-up fee; configuration of the store layout was the subject of ongoing work by the Council's Surveyor, Martin Stocks, as officers hoped the project would continue to benefit from his experience before he retired at the end of March. The tender process for works would then begin.

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said enquiries would need to be made regarding installation of specialist racking for the store's contents, because the expert previously consulted had now retired. Design and supply of racking would be built into the main tender, but enquiries could also be made to find out who had designed the racking at Saffron Walden Library.

Discussion took place regarding timing of the press release relating to the store.

ACTION: the Assistant Director Corporate Services to email the Museum Society Chairman a draft press release to be published at the end of next week.

Members considered the requirement for an area to house and/or display certain horse-drawn vehicles and floor-standing items such as ploughs. These items were currently at risk of deterioration as the person storing them required the barn for other purposes

The Director of Corporate Services said one option was to design the store so that the ground floor was used for this purpose. However, if alternative accommodation for these items could be found, such use would be redundant. Another option could be to build a cart shed located at the Museum itself, to enable these exhibits to be viewed, although such a project would require approval from English Heritage.

The Curator said restoration of the vehicles could itself be of interest to visitors if carried out on site. Regarding the search for other sites, she informed members that in order to house the carts an area of 45 sq metres would be required.

Paul Salvidge suggested funding for a shed could be raised through an appeal.

ACTION: enquiries to continue to be made before designing the store in case suitable temporary accommodation for the horse-drawn vehicles could be found.

The Chairman agreed that the work of the Curator in producing this report was excellent. He said it was essential that the District Council and Museum Society take an honest view of what they could deliver. He therefore suggested that Members email the Curator with any comments on the draft forward plan as soon as possible before the next meeting.

Tony Watson asked whether the recommendations in the Forward Plan needed to be approved by Cabinet.

The Director of Corporate Services said the recommendations reflected the direction the administration wished to move in and the forward plan did not need to be brought to Cabinet.

AGREED Members would email their comments on the draft Forward Plan to the Curator as soon as possible to enable publication of the Forward Plan following the next meeting.

The Curator said she wished to record her thanks to Richard Priestley for his input and to Sarah Kenyon who assimilated much of the data.

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ANY OTHER BUSINESS

Insurance

Members were informed that the Council's insurance tender was due this year and that current arrangements for cover for the Museum would be reviewed. It was the view of officers that the current insurance was neither practical nor fit for purpose. A more realistic type of cover should therefore be considered, and the insurers had offered the advice of an expert in Museum insurance. The timescale was limited as the tender process had to be initiated by the end of March.

AGREED the Director of Corporate Services would consult Members on insurance proposals for the Museum Service by email, due to the limited time available.

Budget

The Director of Corporate Services said the Council's budget for 2013-14 had been the subject of a presentation to Councillors the previous evening. Members had been informed there would be a reduction to one service area, and unfortunately the area which would be affected was to be the Museum Service. The cut represented a major challenge as it meant a Museum service budget reduction in 2013/14 of £10,000 and a further reduction of £31,000 in the year 2014/15. Officers would work closely with the Museum staff to explore the implications.

The Chairman said this situation was very similar for many other local authorities.

Members discussed the prospect of increasing reliance upon volunteers and noted there would be an increased level of work around the move of collections to the new store.

The Curator said there were issues of training and supervision regarding use of volunteers which did not always mean it was practicable for staff to then be freed up to take on other work.

The Chairman acknowledged that administration regarding volunteers was a factor, but said he was aware that a very good cadre of volunteers was successfully used at Saffron Screen.

The meeting ended at 6.45pm.