

**MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at SHIREHILL STORE  
SAFFRON WALDEN at 6pm on 13 APRIL 2016**

Present: Councillor R Chambers (Chairman)  
Councillors B Light and G Sell (Uttlesford Members)  
Mr R Priestley, P Salvidge and A Watson (Society Members).

Officers in attendance: R Auty (Assistant Director Corporate Services), A Rees (Democratic and Electoral Services) and C Wingfield (Curator).

**MM26 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Wells, Mr Walker and the Director of Finance and Corporate Service.

**MM27 MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 27 JANUARY 2016**

The Chairman thanked the Curator, Museum Society, Museum Committee, staff and volunteers for all their work on the store move

The minutes were received and signed by the Chairman as a correct record subject to the moving the following wording up to the end of the previous paragraph "officers and Society representatives were working together to move to a position where Society funding could be used to support individual projects in the museum, rather than support general revenue costs."

**MM28 MATTERS ARISING**

**(i) MM21 – Curator's Quarterly Reports**

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said the Museum would be providing digital images of objects from the collections as part of the celebrations for the Queen's 90<sup>th</sup> Birthday. Much of the Council's work would be surrounding day centres and people who were turning 90 throughout the year.

The Curator added that photographs of items with captions would be supplied for day centres to use. In response to a question by Councillor Chambers said the Museum had a part of the Queen's coronation dress, which was going to be displayed as the Museum's object of the month.

**MM29 MUSEUM SOCIETY CHAIRMAN'S REPORT**

The report was taken as read.

Members discussed the move to Shirehill store and ways of increasing public interest in the collections held at the store. In response to a question by the Chairman about holding an open day at the store, the Curator said that it would

not be possible to hold an open during the week because street services operated at the site during the week. At weekends there would be difficulties with having enough staff to also keep the Museum open.

Mr Watson noted that most interest in visiting the store so far had been from special interest groups. The Assistant Director Corporate Services expanded upon Mr Watson's point. Currently it was not known how many of the public would be likely to attend. If there was public interest funding could be found to get the necessary casual staff in place. The evacuation of the school room was still taking place and was expected to be completed by the end of May. This was a time consuming piece of work so if an open day was to take place, holding it later in the year would be preferable.

In response to a question by Councillor Sell, the Curator said that how the Museum made items available for researchers depended on the item and staffing levels on any given day. Research enquiries at the store would be directed to Mondays as far as possible, as curatorial staff will soon be working entirely at the store on Mondays when the museum is closed.

Members discussed fully utilising the store as an asset. Councillor Sell said that visits to the store needed to be encouraged as there were a number of items which the public would never see.

The Chairman spoke in response to Councillor Sell. The Museum faced a decision as to whether it should focus on the Museum, or whether it should diversify and provide a wider range of services. He reiterated his earlier point about holding an open day for the public.

It was agreed that holding a one-off open day would be beneficial and would allow the public to see items that were almost never placed on display at the Museum. The interest generated by an open day could help the Museum attract new volunteers.

Mr Watson said that the main reasons for moving the store were to ensure that items were adequately preserved and to make items more accessible to staff.

The Curator moved discussions onto digital access. Grants could be available to help facilitate this transition, but a considerable amount of staff time would also need to be invested. Digital access would enable members of the public to search for items online. This was required as part of the accreditation process. Transferring items to a digital archive required people with specialist knowledge of collections to help guide volunteers through the archiving process.

In response to concerns raised by Councillor Light that the Museum had been closed, the Curator said that it had been a one off incident caused by a staff shortage on the day. The Assistant Director Corporate Services added that the Museum's staffing level was dictated by its budget and that further staffing would not be possible unless the Council increased the budget.

The Curator presented her report. Staff had worked hard in order to maintain the normal services of the Museum whilst the store move had been taking place. The store volunteer team had been nominated for an award at the SHARE Museum Volunteer Awards.

Most of the work on the Museum in the previous quarter had been routine, but there had been some issues with heating at the Museum and in the School Room. The IT switch box in the Museum's workroom had nearly come off the wall and was now going to be set up in a cabinet.

The Curator said that Bakers of Danbury were being hosted whilst they worked on the castle site. On Friday the Newport store would be completely vacated.

The four remaining Cipriani paintings, which had been displayed in the Ceramics Gallery had been loaned to English Heritage to be displayed at Audley End House. This completed the six part frieze as the other two paintings had been on display at Audley End House since 1997.

The walls in the Ceramics Gallery needed repairing and this work would be carried out by Bakers of Danbury at a later date, when storage space in the Museum could be identified sufficient to take the exhibits, and staff time could be allocated. How the Gallery was used needed to be rethought in the longer term.

In response to a question by Councillor Chambers, the Curator explained that the Museum never purchased the paintings and English Heritage would not be able to provide a donation. Instead it was hoped that English Heritage would help promote the Museum at Audley End House.

The Curator then spoke in response to a question by Councillor Sell. She said that the literature about the Museum should be available at Audley End House. Councillor Light added that she had recently visited Audley End House. During the tour, the guide did mention that the paintings were on loan from the Museum.

The Curator said that Object of the Month had continued. The second round of Uttlesford: A Community of Collectors had run until 7 February. The Ocean World exhibition had opened had showcased various aquatic based artefacts. The Museum had also managed to maintain a full activity programme.

Councillor Chambers suggested that the Chairman of the Council wrote to all the volunteers thanking them for their work. The Assistant Director Corporate Services said that previously, thank you events had been held at the Museum. Mr Watson then suggested holding the event at the store.

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said he would look at how the Council could thank volunteers for their work during the store move.

The Curator said that visitor figures in the previous quarter had been very good, but it was worth noting that this also included most of the Easter period. The

number of school visits continued to be lower than the previous year due to the absence of a Learning Officer at the Museum. Shop takings did continue to improve, despite the lower number of school visits which normally provided the most income. Hayley Wilson had played a significant role in this as she had improved the content of the shop and had brought in stock based on current exhibitions. Ticket sales and donations were up slightly.

The new financial year had started and the Museum's new charges were now in place. There hadn't been any issues so far with the new charges.

The Assistant Director Corporate Services noted that the donation total for March was considerably higher than usual and asked whether a large donation had been received. In response, the Curator said she would find out why the donation total was so high, but thought it was at least partly due to having a second donations box in the main gallery on activity days.

The Curator clarified that holiday activities for Egyptian door hangers, Roman cone people and Greek Olympic medals had all taken place in February. There had been around 250 visitors at each of the three events. The Museum continued to exceed its Local Performance Indicator targets.

#### **MM31 SHIREHILL STORE – VERBAL REPORT**

The Curator said that IT setup at the store had almost been completed. The heating system at the store was being looked at with the possibility of boosting night time store heating being explored.

#### **MM32 SCHOOLROOM EVACUATION – VERBAL REPORT**

The Curator said that it was expected that the evacuation would be completed by the end of May with most of the collections already having been packed and moved. Larger items would be moved out by 19/20 April. Volunteers would be able to help with some elements of the move and most other elements could be done in house. There were some chemicals in the School Room which would have to be moved by the Council's health and safety team. After May, all the major building changes would be complete and staff would be able to focus on the Museum.

The Assistant Director Corporate Services said letting options for the School Room were being looked at.

#### **MM33 DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

It was agreed that the next meeting would be held on 20 July at the Shirehill Store.

The meeting ended at 7pm.