

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at COMMITTEE ROOM - COUNCIL OFFICES, LONDON ROAD, SAFFRON WALDEN, ESSEX CB11 4ER, on WEDNESDAY, 30 OCTOBER 2019 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor G Sell (Chair)
Councillors B Light

Officers in attendance: A Mawson (Democratic Services Officer), A Webb (Director - Finance and Corporate Services) and C Wingfield (Curator - Saffron Walden Museum)

Also Present: K Eden, R Priestley, P Walker and T Watson (Museum Society)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Gregory.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting were approved as an accurate record.

3 MUSEUM SOCIETY CHAIRMAN'S REPORT

The Museum Society Chairman presented his report.

4 Q2 MUSEUM QUARTERLY REPORT JULY-SEPT 2019

The Curator presented her report for the July to September quarter, and highlighted the following areas;

- The recruitment of new casual museum assistants.
- The continued and valued contribution that the volunteers make to the museum.
- The recent fire risk assessment report, the outcome of which was good and two out of the three minor recommendations have been completed.
- Rundown of the buildings and site works; shire hill store gully clearance and maintenance.

The Curator also spoke of a gold Anglo-Saxon signet ring (known as the North-west Essex ring, museum accession no. 2014.1) that had been requested for loan to an exhibition at the Sainsbury Centre for Visual Arts, University of East Anglia, Norwich from 25 July to 18 October 2020. The Museum Society Board

agreed to this request on 29 October 2019. The exhibition was titled; 'Nara to Norvic: Arrivals and Beliefs at the Extremities of the Silk Roads, AD 500-1000'.

The hoop of the ring was decorated with bird and interlace patterns in moulded low relief, with other motifs the shoulders, either side of the rectangular bezel. The bezel was engraved with a figure holding a cross-headed staff in one hand and a bird of prey on the other wrist; there was a larger bird of prey above him. The ring appeared to reference both Germanic / pagan and late Roman / Christian symbolism and dated from the period of Sutton Hoo and the emergence of regional kingdoms in England under Anglo-Saxon leadership, and the gradual adoption of Christianity. It was a unique object and was likely to have belonged to a king or at least a person wielding significant power.

The Curator said that the 'Take away the walls' exhibition had resulted in new partnerships for the museum.

The Curator went through the visitors' figures for the quarter and advised that the Museum was very close to the notional target of 3,600 and only fell slightly short with 3,387 users for the quarter. It was also noted that the cumulative figure was still above the target for the year.

The Curator went on to highlight the upcoming events.

Councillor Light expressed her gratitude to the volunteers.

The Curator said that she would email them and pass on the appreciation.

In response to a Member question the Museum Society Chairman said that there would be a Christmas Party that the volunteers would also be invited to.

Councillor Sell asked the Curator about the figures as he pointed out that last September's figures were better.

In response the Curator said that each year is different and that the overall figures for the year were not a concern.

5 COLLECTIONS CARE AND CONSERVATION POLICY

The Curator presented the Collections Care and Conservation Policy 2020-2025.

The policy covered both preventative conservation, to minimise damage to or deterioration of collections, and remedial conservations, to stabilise or improve the condition of collections.

The Chairman of the Museum Society advised that they had approved the policy that morning.

In response to a Member question the Curator said that there were a number of approaches which identified which items were in need of conservation and the priority in which they were processed.

The Curator assured the Members that due to the recent moving of items from Newport to Shire Hill that a current inventory of items and their conditions had been done and that she was confident of the stable environment at Shire Hill. The Curator added that they ensured that vulnerable items were kept close monitored.

6 **ACCESS POLICY STATEMENT**

The Curator presented the Access Policy 2020-2025.

The Working Group discussed various access issues;

- An access audit was being carried out by an external specialist using feedback from local groups.
- An access statement would be available on the website following the audit.
- Mobility scooters posed a problem however wheelchair access was possible and the museum had two wheelchairs which were available for members of the public to borrow.
- It was possible for self-propelled wheelchair users to get around the majority of the museum.
- Signage is being tackled to be clearer.
- 'Talking tiles' are being utilised for audio descriptions.
- Redesign is being considered to aid flow and access around the museum.

The Chairman of the Museum Society advised that they had approved the policy that morning.

7 **UPDATE ON MUSEUM DEVELOPMENTS (RESILIENT HERITAGE PROJECT FUNDED BY THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND)**

The Curator said that a start had been made on the project with the consultants. They had met with the Museum team including all the volunteers. A paper is scheduled for the end of November and an additional meeting on the 14th November including a tour of the Shire Hill store.

There would be a list of options available by Christmas, and there would be another meeting in January. The next step would be audience testing and then a final list of costed options by June/July.

The working group discussed ideas on increasing the visibility of the Museum, for example;

- Signage at Swan Meadow car park.
- Heritage Trail inclusion.
- Interactive map.

- Local signage.

8 **ANY OTHER ITEMS WHICH THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS TO BE URGENT**

None

9 **DATE & TIME OF NEXT MEETING.**

The next meetings will need to link with the Cabinet meetings. The next two dates were suggested in preferential order:

- 1) Wednesday 22 January 6-7pm
- 2) Wednesday 29 January 6-7pm

Meeting Close 7pm