

MUSEUM MANAGEMENT WORKING GROUP held at , on WEDNESDAY, 13 JULY 2022 at 6.00 pm

Present: Councillor G Sell (Chair)
Councillors A Armstrong, R Freeman, N Gregory and B Light.

Museum Society: K Eden (Chair of the Museum Society), P Salvidge and C Sharpe.

Officers in attendance: C Edwards (Democratic Services Officer) and C Wingfield (Curator - Saffron Walden Museum)

1 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE AND DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST

Apologies for absence were received from R Auty, R Priestley and T Watson.

2 MINUTES OF THE PREVIOUS MEETING

The minutes of the previous meeting held on 27th April 2022 were approved as an accurate record.

3 MUSEUM SOCIETY CHAIR'S REPORT (VERBAL)

The Museum Society Chair said that he had two things to report: -

The first private viewing in over two years would take place on Friday 15th July for the Lost Language of Nature exhibition.

Secondly, he said that a decision had been made to delay the National Heritage Lottery Fund (NHLF) application. He said that Historic England had questioned whether the Museum, Castle and Tennis Club had been properly considered together as an entire site.

He said that a meeting with the Estate Manager of Audley End would take place to understand their vision.

Councillor Freeman said that there were three pieces of land which were under different management, the Castle by Historic England, the Museum by the District Council and the Museum Society and the Tennis Club by Audley End Estate. He said it would be helpful to have a shared vision for all three.

The Museum Society Chair agreed and said that the Castle and Museum were working well together but he said that it was a good idea to add in the views of the Audley End Estate.

MUSEUM CURATOR'S REPORT

The Curator presented her report and highlighted the following: -

The quarter one report had not included the final income and visitor figures, she said the full report would be circulated next week.

The Museum had a busy Easter but was quieter in May and June with the exception of the Platinum Jubilee weekend and was still behind pre-Covid visitor numbers, although total income remained strong.

The decision to delay the Stage 1 Lottery Fund process had been made in order to deal with financial and planning risks and to ensure that the budget and risk assessments were more secure.

The NHLF had raised concerns about certain financial aspects of the bid process including the pricing by consultants undertaken in 2020. Their advice was to add an additional 10% inflation and 10% contingency to the costings.

Two further Heritage Impact Assessments (HIAs) would be commissioned before the application went ahead. The first would be conducted by a historic building expert to study the effect of post development on the Museum. This would then inform the second study which would involve the engagement of an archaeological specialist to look at the ground works, associated costs and to review the potential for buried archaeological remains.

The Curator said that the studies would involve upfront costs but once they had been carried out the bid would be more secure in terms of the budget and risk assessments.

The new Museum Society Director, Douglas Kent, would engage a cost consultant with experience in historic buildings to look at the costings again.

6:20pm Councillor Gregory entered the meeting.

In response to concerns raised by the Chair about the continued rise in inflation, and the possibility that the Museum would need to amend their development plans, the Curator said that the current scheme did have inflation included up to 2023 although not at the high level that it had reached or was predicted to reach in the future. She said that the schemes would be reviewed and the plan for the Museum might change, which meant that the overall cost of the bid could be kept at realistic levels.

She said that there was a Plan B which related to the Historic Buildings advice that had been received which was strict on the size of the extension to the East. She said that if the Museum could not build a big enough extension for the learning and outreach suite and an exhibition gallery, then the plans could be changed. She said that in this scenario the learning and outreach suite would go

ahead and an existing gallery would be used for the new special exhibition gallery, this would have some effect on space for other collections.

The annual thank you event for volunteers had taken place on the 28th June.

Large areas of the Castle site had remained unmown and, in a survey undertaken, two relatively rare species of plants had been found. Other surveys would be completed to see what the site produced without artificial sowing.

Epping Forest District Museum and Saffron Walden Museum had received an Arts Council National Lottery project grant of £100,000 to work in partnership on the Greater in Spirit, Larger in Outlook project.

The Museum was supporting displays in Saffron Walden library on Black lives in the Uttlesford district.

The All Fired Up exhibition had been replaced by the Lost Language of Nature.

Visitor figures currently shown as 1,500 were expected to increase to at least 2,000 users, (visitors plus off-site and remote users of the Museum's services), once the full set of figures were collated.

The indication was that income was good at £3.5k gross.

Income from Learning and Outreach totalled £943.

The Platinum Jubilee events had been successful with a live outdoor screening of the Buckingham Palace concert. The Museum had remained open until 10pm and gave visitors the opportunity to enter for free.

Members made the following comments: -

- Pleased that the unmown grass had worked well.
- Excellent synergy between the Museum and Castle.
- Suggestion that the Portfolio Holder for Sports, Leisure, Education and the Arts be invited to the 'thank you' event for volunteers in the future so that he could meet them and add his thanks.

5 **FORMAT OF FUTURE MEETINGS**

Members agreed to continue with meetings on zoom.

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

The next meeting was agreed for Wednesday 19th October 2022 at 6.00pm.

The meeting ended at 6.40pm