
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**Held on Friday, 1 October 2010 at 2.00 pm in
Gressenhall Museum**

PRESENT

Mrs J. Ball

Mr R.G. Kybird

Mr M. Fanthorpe

Mrs P.A. Spencer

Mr C.R. Jordan

Mr M.A. Kiddle-Morris (Vice-Chair, in the Chair)

Also Present

Mr D. Blackburn

Mrs C. Walters

Cllr J. Bracey

In Attendance

Mr Oliver Bone

Dr Robin Hanley

Helen McAleer

- Curator of the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life
- Western Area Manager
- Senior Committee Officer

Action By

19/10 MINUTES

The Minutes of the meeting held on 4 June 2010 were agreed as a correct record.

20/10 APOLOGIES

Apologies for absence were received from Mr M Brindle, Mr S Dunn, Mrs D Irving, Mr R Key, Mr J Rogers and Ms V Trevelyan.

Following the meeting, apologies were received from Mr P Duigan.

21/10 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

None.

22/10 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

23/10 DECLARATION OF INTEREST

Mr M Kiddle-Morris and Mrs C Walters declared a personal interest in the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse report by virtue of being Friends of the Museum.

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24/10 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM OF THETFORD LIFE

Oliver Bone presented the report which covered the period from June to August 2010.

The World War II project had been completed and the exhibition was to tour the western area museums, ending up at the Ancient House in 2011. This was the first collaborative project working with colleagues from around the County.

A regular programme group had been set up and among future ideas was an 'American connections' theme to link in with the 2012 Olympics and the 70th anniversary of the 'Friendly Invasion'.

In connection with the Maharajah Duleep Singh's exhibition there had been a special event to highlight his daughter's connection to the suffrage movement and a visit from a South London Sikh Summer School when children were given an opportunity to learn about life 'below stairs' in the Maharajah's household.

In the last year there had been about 2,000 visits from school children and this had contributed to the Museum Service receiving the Learning Outside the Classroom Quality Badge – assuring schools of a high quality service when they visit the museums.

More volunteers had been recruited and they helped to make school visits more cost effective as well as providing a valuable contribution, particularly to costumed events as well as offering a wide range of skills.

Mr Bracey asked how long the travelling exhibition would spend at each venue as he would like to arrange for it to visit venues in Broadland if possible. Oliver advised that it would normally stay for a few months, providing an opportunity for other theme-based activities. When it visited Thetford it would be used as a basis for working with schools and would also involve the Dad's Army Museum.

Mrs Spencer thanked Oliver for a great report about the interesting things going on in Thetford. She asked if he would be willing to publish the highlights in a paper so that others outside Thetford would hear about them.

The Chairman thanked Oliver for his report.

25/10 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE

Robin Hanley presented the report which covered the period from June to September 2010.

The programme of smaller events had been quite successful despite poor weather which had undermined much of the programme for the year, as despite having a lot to offer under cover, Gressenhall was still seen as an outdoor attraction.

Action By

Weather had affected the Village at War event and the Older People's Day with visitor numbers being down, despite new elements being added. However, there had been 846 visitors to the Heritage Open Day (which had been free of charge) and efforts had been made to promote Museum passes. A survey had been carried out to understand why people came and had shown a much broader cross section of visitors. Further evaluation would be carried out at the Heavy Horse Day to see if a new audience was being attracted.

Forthcoming events were the Apple Day in October and the Christmas Experience Day on 5 December.

The new Women's Land Army Gallery was on schedule to open in April 2011 and would be the first of its kind in the country.

Funding had been successfully obtained for various works to improve the site's green credentials and included a change to LED lighting which would significantly reduce energy bills and carbon emissions. A new wood-pellet boiler was also proposed. Such boilers were being rolled out across sites in Norfolk. The boiler would be accessible to visitors as part of the sustainability strand.

There had also been a lot of work on trees and some staff had been trained on tree safety and they were pro-actively monitoring the condition of trees.

The planning application had been submitted for the green gateway building which would provide additional facilities and enable the hiring out of the parking field for vintage car days, etc. Following an upgrade to the facilities of the Boardroom and Chapel these spaces were also being actively marketed for room hire to provide alternative income streams.

The Friends continued to work hard and were considering the purchase of Caspar, one of the two Suffolk Punches currently on loan to the farm. The Friends Newsletter was very effective at promoting Gressenhall and they also had a website.

As part of the Master Gardner scheme it was hoped to develop allotments, possibly working with local schools, with the aim of providing some of the café's requirements.

The Schools team had been very busy and bookings were looking strong. The museum provided a broad range of sessions from pre-school to High school.

The museum had also been awarded £620,000 to offer an extended range of apprenticeships focused on rural skills.

Information on visitor numbers was handed out and Oliver noted that the Ancient House now opened one day less a week, which was reflected in slightly reduced numbers.

Robin noted that Gressenhall year to date figures were also down and

Action By

they were looking at ways to diversify event days to make them less weather dependent.

A Member asked why only Suffolk Punches were used on site and not other breeds. Some visitors had suggested to him that it would be nice to compare other working breeds.

It was explained that when the fund was originally set up it focussed on the Suffolk Punch as that breed was under threat. Monies raised had been for the 'Suffolk Punch Appeal' therefore it was not felt that those funds could be used on any other breed.

At the Heavy Horse day people were given the opportunity to see a range of other breeds such as Cobs, Percherons and Shires.

Robin said that Gressenhall had a particular role in supporting the Suffolk Punch breed. They did not have the capacity to breed themselves, but were crucial in raising awareness about the Suffolk Punch.

It was suggested that a leaflet should be made available to visitors explaining why the museum was supporting the Suffolk Punch breed. Information could also be made available on the website.

A Member asked if there were any placements available for students under the Skills for the Future fund and was advised that there was a programme offering placements but they could not be used by students on other courses. A wide range of work experience was also on offer and the museum was developing a close working relationship with Easton College.

The Chairman thanked Robin for his report.

26/10NEXT MEETING

The next meeting would be held on Friday 17 December 2010 at 2pm in the Meeting Room, Level 1, Breckland House, St Nicholas Street, Thetford.

The meeting closed at 3.05 pm

CHAIRMAN