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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

14 May 2018 Item No.

GRESSENHALL FARM AND WORKHOUSE REPORT

Report by the Operations Manager – West

This report provides information on activities at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse from February to April 2018.

1. Events and Activities

- 1.1 Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse closed for the 2017 season on Sunday 29 October 2017. The museum reopened from Monday 12 to Friday 16 February 2018, 10am to 4pm. The 2018 main season commenced on Sunday 11 March. The museum is currently open daily 10am to 5pm.
- 1.2 Gressenhall continues to offer a broad programme of events based around the four operational models:
 - Special Event days – major events which require full event staffing and set up, including the use of large parking fields. For 2018, these will be: *Retro Revival*, *Village at War* and *Apple Day*. A premium ticket price applies on these days to reflect the high level of activities taking place. Free admission continues to be provided to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
 - Days with a Difference – smaller themed events including *Mothering Sunday*, *Futuristic Farming* and *Horse Power*. These require smaller staffing complement and utilise core parking. They are aimed at attracting audiences of 500-800 visitors. Again, they are offered free to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
 - Norfolk School Holiday activities – extra themed activities delivered each day of the Norfolk School holidays, with minimal increase in staffing. Free to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.
 - Ticketed Events – pre-booked and pre-paid events. For 2018, these include the murder mystery event *The Devil at the Door* and *Victorian Family Christmas*. These events, held outside of standard opening hours or of the main season, offer a reduced charge to Norfolk Museums Pass holders.

- 1.3 The museum reopened for the weekdays of February Half Term, with a programme of activities exploring the theme of Spring cleaning (936 visitors). Visitors helped prepare for the new season and discovered what happens behind the scenes when the museum is closed, including how museum objects are looked after, and pests kept away, with activities at the Norfolk Collection Centre.
- 1.4 Prior to the start of the main season, a preview day was held for Norfolk Pass Holders, Friends of Gressenhall and Players of The National Lottery. *Welcome to the Workhouse* took place on Saturday 10 March 2018. All groups, organisations and individuals who have helped to create and support the *Voices from the Workhouse* Project were invited, to form a celebration of the end of this redevelopment. 228 visitors met costumed characters and engaged with a wide range of craft activities inspired by the stitched letters of workhouse inmate Lorina Bulwer.
- 1.5 On Sunday 11 March, the museum officially opened for the 2018 season and held its first “Day with a Difference” format event of the year: *Mothering Sunday*. In addition to the usual card making and free cream tea for all mums within the Mardlers’ Rest Café, the events team worked with the *Women Reaching Women* partnership of organisations working in Norfolk and around the world. These groups delivered a diverse range of activities for the whole family including stalls, crafts, talks, singing and story-telling. The partnership is made up of a range of organisations including Mother’s Union, Soroptimists, Leeway, GATE, Freedom Charity, Norwich Dedza Partnership and Diversity Plus. The event was highly well received, with 614 visitors which is higher than the average 500 visitors for this early season event.
- 1.6 The theme for the Easter holidays was Bugs and Beasties with the chance to discover the variety of insect life living on the site and make their own weird and wonderful beastie in Art Attack! An Escape Room activity proved particularly popular, where the aim was for families to prove themselves worthy of being the assistant of bug-expert Professor Bugsley. This theme continued on the Easter Bank Holiday Monday with *Gressenhall Goes Wild*. Visitors to this “Day with a Difference” had to don wellies and raincoats to brave the bitterly cold and wet weather, meaning that although all planned messy fun and natural crafts activities were delivered, woodland exploration was moved undercover in the chapel. Despite these conditions, 232 visitors joined us and the feedback from those families was overwhelmingly positive.
- 1.7 These events continue to attract Norfolk Museums Pass holders and to act as a driver to further pass sales.
- 1.8 The costs of delivering and marketing the Gressenhall event programme continues to be subsidised with funding from the Arts

Council England (ACE) as part of the 2018-22 ACE business plan as a National Portfolio Organisation.

- 1.9 The Gressenhall events programme is promoted via a specific piece of print, as well as an increased programme of digital marketing including Facebook adverts and the museum's own social media presence.

2. Other Museum Developments

- 2.1 Following the successful grant award of £1.47m (79%) from the Heritage Lottery Fund for the *Voices from the Workhouse* project, the redeveloped workhouse spaces were formally launched July 2016. The final new displays within the first floor Collections Gallery were formally launched on 10 March 2018, with the gallery having been opened as a 'work in progress' since May 2017. This gallery incorporates over 2,000 objects from the museum's rural life collections. This event marked the end of the main activity plan relating to the *Voices from the Workhouse* project although, following conversations with the Heritage Lottery Fund, a digital marketing campaign is planned for early summer 2018 to help promote the new full offer.
- 2.2 As part of the new Collections Gallery, a dedicated temporary exhibition space has been created to house an annual show. The 2018 exhibition *Beer and Brewing - Norfolk's Rural Pubs* opened for the start of the main season. This explores the changing roles of pubs and the relationships they have with their local communities. Family visitors are able to play traditional pub games including the Norfolk favourite 'twizzler' and a plaster panel created by the artist John Moray-Smith is one of the objects on display.
- 2.3 Building on the success of the 2016 and 2017 *Collaborate* programmes, which saw the museum working with a wide range of creative individuals and groups, *Collaborate 2018* is themed around the temporary exhibition's subject of pubs and brewing. This programme was formally started with an inspiration day on Friday 23 March, to enable interested individuals and groups to explore more of the museum's collections and stories. Their creative outputs will then be displayed within the museum in October. An accompanying programme of outreach to local groups and pub quizzes is currently planned to encourage more individuals to engage with the theme, to be inspired, and to create their own beer mat to add to the displays. During the year, updates will be available through the *Collaborate* blog <https://collaboratewithgressenhall.wordpress.com>
- 2.4 Gressenhall's Curator Dr Megan Dennis continues to develop links with the Digital Humanities Forum at Carleton College, Minnesota. This innovative liberal arts college have created a 3D virtual model of the workhouse as it was in 1779. During January/February 2018, Carleton

College fully funded Megan to enable her to visit the college for one week. This enabled her to work with the Carleton students to create additional material for the suite of iPads for visitor use and for display on the permanent projectors within the gallery spaces. This project has demonstrated the museum's ability to use the flexible content management system *Darwin* to constantly update and re-fresh the digital offer at the museum. These iPads were formally launched for the start of the main 2018 season. They are available to pre-book via the museum's online ticketing system, or can be obtained from the shop on arrival. They are free to borrow and are aimed at families and groups returning to visit the new displays.

- 2.5 The use of cutting edge technology allowing visitors to 'meet' real people from the workhouse's history have been well received. However, for some visitors they have the potential to cause sensory overload. Following the successful pilot project in 2017 when adjustments were made for autistic visitors during "early bird" openings, delivered in partnership with Autism Anglia, further "early bird" openings have been planned for 2018. The first one of these took place on Sunday 29 March with 21 visitors taking up this opportunity. Several of these visitors had not been to Gressenhall before, suggesting that these events are opening the site up to new families.
- 2.6 During recent years, the Norfolk Collections Centre has opened more frequently to support Gressenhall events and activities, following the reorganisation of these large object stores during the *Shine a Light* project funded by The Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund. During the period covered by this report, the centre was open for three days during February half-term to explore 'what's been eating the collections?'. The team had examples of the damage that pests could do to objects, specimens of the various pests (and magnifying glasses) and information about how museums can treat such infestations. These activities attracted 81 visitors over the three days. For Mothering Sunday, families could print their own Mother's Day cards and explore the centre's printing collections, attracting 71 visitors. On 10 April, the first of the 2018 West Runton Mammoth tours were held, with 13 bookings and exceptionally good feedback on the opportunity to hear more about this spectacular object from Dr David Waterhouse, Senior Curator of Natural History.
- 2.7 Maintaining and growing a strong Social Media presence remains a key priority for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and the site has four Social Media Champions to ensure the regular publishing of interesting content on Facebook and Twitter. All staff are encouraged to support this, supplying content and images. These Champions also respond to enquiries and reviews made via these channels, Trip Advisor and Google Reviews. At the time of writing the museum had 3,977 Facebook likes and 5,351 Twitter followers. A Pinterest account is also supported with a wide range of boards including 'Weddings at Gressenhall' and an Instagram page is established and currently has

910 followers. Furthermore, Gressenhall continues to generate regular blogs about work taking place at the museum. The site has been awarded a Certificate of Excellence from the influential TripAdvisor website.

To connect with Gressenhall, please visit:

<https://www.facebook.com/GressenhallFW>

<https://twitter.com/GressenhallFW>

<https://www.pinterest.com/gressenhallfwh/>

https://www.instagram.com/gressenhall_fw/?hl=en

<https://gressenhallfw.wordpress.com/>

http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Gressenhall_Farm_and_Workhouse

- 2.8 Gressenhall continues to develop a range of commercial activities as a means of generating income, including room and venue hire. Five weddings are already booked for the 2018 season, and negotiations continue with an events management company to develop this offer further. The aim is to deliver a high quality offer whilst ensuring that such bookings do not detract from key museum activities.

3. Friends and Volunteers

- 3.1 The Friends of Gressenhall remain active, with bi-monthly Committee Meetings held at the museum. The Friends of Gressenhall continue to support a range of activities across the site including significant levels of funding towards the upkeep of the Suffolk Punch horses.
- 3.2 In 2017, the Friends generously agreed to support a project to restore the Farmers' Foundry engine boiler (formerly part of the Bygones Collection at Holkham) back to working use. This was in addition to a grant of £19,788 from the Arts Council England Preservation of Industrial and Scientific Material PRISM fund. This engine was manufactured by the Farmer's Foundry Company, Great Ryburgh, just seven miles from Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. The portable steam engine was used to power a range of different processes including threshing work, corn-mills, centrifugal pumps, stone-crushers, dynamos, chaff-cutters, hay-balers and saw benches. Initial conservation work identified that additional resources were required to make the engine fully operational, and an application was submitted to the Association of Industrial Archaeology in March 2018. An outcome is expected in May/June.
- 3.3 The Friends continue to operate the Gressenhall second hand bookshop, generating income for the Friends. Recruitment of a new team of active Bookshop volunteers has helped to ensure that new donations are processed daily and the shelves tidied. As a result, income from this shop continues to grow.
- 3.4 The Gressenhall Curator Dr Megan Dennis continues to co-ordinate, manage and develop the volunteer teams at Gressenhall. Around 120

volunteers are currently active on site, organised into a number of specialist teams. Volunteer hours are currently being recorded to provide HLF contribution in kind match funding for the *Voices from the Workhouse* project. During January to March, when the museum was predominantly closed, the volunteers gave over over 827 hours of time on site to support the museum, with additional volunteers working from home on digitalisation projects.

4 Learning & Outreach

4.1 School visits have held up well and 10,600 children have visited in the year 2017-18. This is a strong performance in the light of continued financial pressures on schools. These pressures are illustrated by the fact that during 2017-18, for the first time in ten years, we have had three schools cancel bookings with us due to a lack of funds.

4.2 Partnership work with other NCC departments continues to develop and the Learning Team have recently organised a day for older children in receipt of support from NCC Virtual School Sensory Support. Despite appalling weather, spirits remained high and staff and families reported a wonderful day. VSSS staff have re-emphasised the importance for families and children to have a safe space in which they can meet each other and their support staff.

4.3 Planning continues for a Mental Health Wellbeing Day for young people on 9th June 2018. Meetings have been held with a range of local service providers including NCC Early Help, CAMHS and the YMCA. The Learning Team have been pleased and impressed with the positive response and Staff within these organisations immediately recognise the important role that museums can play in supporting Public Health initiatives. The day will follow a similar model to that of our Fostered and Adopted families and VSSS days. YMCA will run Wellbeing workshops, Gressenhall staff will facilitate art activities and the marquee will be used as a marketplace for LSPs to meet with young people and families.

4.4 Gressenhall continues to be registered with NCC as a Care Farm. The site is currently offering funded work-based placements to a number of adults with learning difficulties.

5 Visitor numbers

5.1 Visitor figures for the period will be circulated at the meeting.

6 Resource implications

(a) Finance

Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse receives funding to support core operations and activities from Norfolk County Council. A number of activities are financed as part of funding to Norfolk Museums Service from Arts Council

England as a National Portfolio Organisation under the terms of the current 2018-22 Business Plan. Project activities are funded from a range of external sources including the Heritage Lottery Fund. The source of these funds are detailed within the report. The above report includes no additional or unfunded financial implications.

(b) Property

Unless specified, the above activities relate to the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and Norfolk Collections Centre site. The above report includes no additional implications relating to property.

(c) Staff

The team at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse are supported by a wider team of colleagues within Norfolk Museums Service. Some current posts are funded by external project funding. The above report includes no additional implications relating to staffing and personnel resources.

(d) Information Technology

Digital operations at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse are supported by Norfolk County Council's IMT department. Social media is delivered by the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse team. The above report includes no additional implications relating to Information Technology.

7 Recommendations:

7.1 That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

Originator of report:

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