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**BRECKLAND COUNCIL**

**At a Meeting of the**

**BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

**Held on Monday, 20 February 2023 at 10.00 am in  
The Beech Room, Environmental Hub, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum,  
Gressenhall, Beetley, Dereham, NR20 4DR**

**PRESENT**

Cllr Robert Kybird (Chairman)	Cllr Phillip Duigan (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Claire Bowes	Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
Cllr Harry Clarke	Cllr William Richmond

**Also Present**

Ms Helen Bainbridge	- Friends of Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum
Cllr John Ward	- Chairman, Norfolk Joint Museums Committee

**In Attendance**

Dr Robin Hanley	- Assistant Head of Museums
Andrew Smith	- Operations Manager - West (&East), Norfolk Museums Service
Mr Oliver Bone	- Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums
Ruth Tudge	- Democratic Services Officer
Finlay Williams	- Democratic Services Apprentice

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**1/23 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 5 September 2022 were confirmed as a true record.

**2/23 APOLOGIES**

Apologies had been received from Councillors Bushell, Eagle and Harvey.

**3/23 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

The Chairman reminded the Committee that Dr Hanley had previously offered members a tour of Norwich Castle as part of the Royal Palace Reborn project and to visit behind the hoardings to see the changes that had been made whilst the castle had been under refurbishment since summer 2020.

The project would transform the Keep's internal spaces by rebuilding its medieval floors and rooms so that visitors could experience a Norman Royal Palace and its stories. A major funding provider had

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been the National Lottery Heritage Fund and this refurbishment was one of the largest heritage projects of its kind currently underway in the UK.

Dr Hanley suggested a date of 21 March 2023, at 11:30am, for the visit, which would take approximately one and a half hours and send information would be sent to the clerk for further distribution to Committee members.

**4/23 URGENT BUSINESS**

None.

**5/23 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS**

None.

**6/23 ANCIENT HOUSE MUSEUM REPORT**

Dr Robin Hanley, Assistant Head of Museums for Norfolk Museums Service (NMS), provided members with a Covid-19 update on the situation across all NMS sites.

A number of the COVID-secure and infection control procedures implemented across NMS sites remained in place with a focus on keeping staff and visitors safe by minimising the risk of transmission of both COVID and other seasonal infections. Hand sanitisers were still being provided throughout and enhanced cleaning arrangements remained in place whilst a focus remained on providing well ventilated spaces throughout.

CO2 monitors, provided by Norfolk County Council (NCC), were operating in a number of key spaces, across NMS where there was more limited natural/mechanical ventilation, supplemented by air purifiers where necessary whilst continuing to maintain existing ventilation arrangements to maximise fresh air flow. The CO2 monitors, monitored locally by staff, had proved an effective means of monitoring air flow providing room alerts to highlight peaks with set procedures in place to counteract the peaks for example, opening doors and windows and reducing the number of visitors into the spaces. This efficient means of monitoring continued to ensure minimal risk of transmitting COVID and enabled maximum use of facilities whenever possible.

The Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums, Oliver Bone presented the report on activities at the Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life covering the period from August 2022 to January 2023. Building works at the former King's Head public house, a listed building next door to the Ancient House, had caused some disruption to the Museum's operation since work had begun in late autumn 2020. The King's Head still remained covered in scaffolding following the involvement of Breckland Council and the Health and Safety Executive. It was understood that work was now about to start again, this time on the conversion of the listed building into three houses.

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Planning permission and Listed Building consent for the revised development had been granted in 2022. A site meeting with the developer, builder, architect, and officers from NMS, Norse and Breckland Council took place on 31 January 2023 to plan the next steps of the build.

The Viking exhibition continued to be well received by visitors specifically attending the museum for that reason. The Museum staff had worked with the Breck Fen Edge & Rivers Landscape Partnership and Dr Richard Hoggett to curate the exhibition which had also involved members of the Teenage History Group in choosing artefacts and themes for display. The Ancient House was part of the Lottery-funded Brecks River and Fen Edge (BFER) landscape project. The Scheme won a £2m National Lottery Heritage Fund grant as part of the proposal for a £3.5m landscape conservation scheme. The Ancient House was receiving funding as a partner organisation to produce exhibitions and activities in 2022 and 2023 on the themes of Vikings and Riverside Heritage.

Following agreement at the June 2022 Area Museums Committee and the Joint Museums committee in July 2022, the team at the Ancient House had continued to work on developing a bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund to create new displays at the Museum to make more of the unusual connections between the Museum and the Maharajah Duleep Singh and his family and planned to submit the funding application during 2023.

Ancient House continued to offer a varied programme of school workshops at the Museum to enhance pupils' learning with excellent support and work from the Learning Officer, Melissa Hawker. Ancient House continued to offer digital support and Zoom based sessions where requested.

The Chairman asked if digital attendance was captured and included within the stats data. Dr Hanley confirmed that there remained a demand for digital learning and the attendance was captured through the NCC stats team and included in attendance figures.

The Ancient House continued to offer after school clubs for primary age and teenagers, in fact the first young people who had started attending the Mini Museum Club had now progressed through to join the Teenage History Club which indicated that the Museum had the dedication to continue to provide interesting, fun and challenging subjects for the children and young people to learn in a hands-on exciting environment.

Social media continued to play an active presence with the Museum and was a great way to share information and local history with all ages. The Ancient House remained committed to Twitter and Facebook and hoped to use Instagram at some point in the future when they had the capacity to do so.

In August Ancient House staff had worked with BFER funded Tales from the River project, and a film maker on a week-long summer club

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working with young people to learn new skills. All parties had worked together to create a short film on how the river had been used for fun in past years. The week had been fun, family friendly and interesting, discovering new material and creating animations, film footage and content. The film could be seen at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RV3NDh5KQKs>

As part of the Thetford Christmas Lights event, the Teenage History Club had staged a fictional historically themed murder mystery event which was part of the Kids in Museums Takeover Day initiative, when museums, galleries, historic homes and heritage sites across England were taken over by children and young people. Supported by Arts Council England funding this project supported several young people with varied needs to participate and deliver activities to the public and helped to promote confidence in young people by giving presentations and talking directly to adults to share their knowledge.

The Museum had supported the Heritage Open Days campaign in September 2022 with both a Tudor and Viking open day with lots of visitors enjoying the events. Volunteer artist-in-residence, Dan Morgan had created 3D representations of heraldic beasts linked to the Tudors and was on hand to explain their significance to visitors.

On 20 October 2022, representatives of Ancient House's Teenage History Club had presented a paper at the Queer Heritage & Collections Network Symposium held at the university of Leicester. Their Paper, entitled 'Queering the Vikings', explored gendering Viking remains in archaeological digs explaining the process of disentangling gender and current thinking in biological anthropology and osteoarchaeology and also went on to explain that clothing and accessories were not enough to determine gender. The presentation had received excellent reviews and work was currently underway to film a version of this presentation for circulating to a wider audience as part of the Kick the Dust project evaluation. The presentation can be viewed at the following link:

<https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hLPD0ZGKR8Y&list=PLFpE4MjtiUvrybiv68ocn9xAaDuX88wFF&index=7>

For Black History Month in October Ancient House had hosted a touring exhibition about the history of the African American Abolitionist lecturers who toured Norfolk during the 19<sup>th</sup> century and played a key role in raising awareness of the horrors of slavery and shared their experience in slavery in America.

Volunteers at the Museum had returned and some were back helping with the scanning and documentation of the postcard collection. The Friends of the Museum remained strong with a good active group and keen committee.

The Ancient House continued to host a paid traineeship, provided through the NMS teaching Museum programme, funded through Arts Council England. The current trainee, Katie Crowson had been involved in many aspects of museum work and recently gave a talk about Norfolk's Victorian arctic explorer, Samuel Gurney Cresswell.

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Conservator colleagues from NMS undertake regular pest management checks at the museum and fortunately there were no current pest problems at Ancient House, and this would continue to be regularly monitored.

Councillor Ward complimented Mr Bone for his report which he said had been very informative and interesting and said that the photographs had complimented the narrative very well, giving good insight on his motivating update.

Members of the Committee noted the report.

**7/23 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT**

The Operations Manager for East and West, Andrew Smith presented the report that covered the period from September 2022 to January 2023.

The Gressenhall events programme ran four operational models which were reviewed at the end of each calendar year to assess visitor attendance and feedback. These models were: Special Event Days, Holiday Activities, Ticketed Events and Norfolk School Holiday Activities.

The Heritage Open day, as part of the Special Event Days, had been particularly popular with over two thousand attendees. The National Heritage Open Day theme in 2022 had been *Innovation* and at Gressenhall they had been joined by partners from the Norwich and Dereham Club of Metal Detectorists in the marquee showcasing finds and demonstrating their tools. The site also welcomed two additional working pairs of Suffolk Punch horses for the day, including a foal, for ploughing, cart work and display.

Apple Day in October had been immensely popular again and very busy with entertainment including a band and Morris dancers. There had also been prize giving on the best apple costumes and a comfy zone had been provided in the Chapel with a range of books loaned from the Norfolk Library Service. The farm had hosted oat harvest steam threshing, face painting and a special recipe station. The Environment Hub had been highlighted by stalls on the farm, with visitors challenged to consider what farms of the future might look like by constructing their own farm from recyclable materials which had proved extremely popular with 130 future farms made. It had been featured by BBC Look East and on BBC Radio Norfolk which had been an extra level of advertising for Gressenhall and over £150 had been raised for the Mid Norfolk Foodbank.

October half term saw an average of over 180 visitors per day, peaking at 290 visitors mid-week. Events had included tractor trail rides and lantern making craft activity in the Chapel.

Ticketed events, which were pre-booked and pre-paid events held outside of standard opening hours or out of the main season had

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included a Murder Mystery, Willow Christmas Decorations, apple pruning and a Victorian Family Christmas where Father Christmas had arrived in the Panhard Car. Visitors attending the event on 19 December would also have seen Radio Norfolk's Kayleigh Poacher and team who had broadcast their entire show live from the Museum that day.

Gressenhall had organised several leisure learning short courses throughout the year in 2022 and were hoping to expand the short courses in 2023.

SENSational Families/Nansa hosted a focus group of families at Gressenhall in October in partnership with EMBL's European Bioinformatics Institute; they were looking at developing a treasure hunt activity with input and expertise from the families they work with. The proposal, including external funding was for an additional sensory activity to be made available alongside the stamper trail activity at Gressenhall, to build on the site's existing engagement and support for visitors with SEND. This would be trialled over the Easter school holidays.

The 2023 Gressenhall events programme was now in place and continued to be communicated via social media, Arts Council Tickets and the Gressenhall website, with lots of activities planned for 2023 with particular key dates Apple Day on 15 October 2023 and the Victorian Family Christmas on 17 December 2023. The costs of delivering and marketing the Gressenhall events programme continued to be subsidised with funding from Arts Council England (ACE).

Gressenhall had continued to focus on digital delivery as an alternative means of engaging with both new and existing audiences with a first webinar in June 2022 entitled 'An Artists Introduction; Georgie Meadows' which had focused on her current exhibition Georgie Meadows: Stitched Drawings. Feedback had been very positive, including a call for more Gressenhall webinars.

The Georgie Meadows: Stitched Drawings exhibition had closed at the end of October 2022. The exhibition had encouraged interactions from visitors, and it had included approximately 1,300 drawings left by visitors and twelve stitched responses had been sent in by the community to form a community blanket which had also been displayed at the Ancient House Museum.

A new in-house curated exhibition, opening on 13 March 2023 called 'From Axes to Acorns: Woodlands and how we've shaped them', partially inspired by Gressenhall's role as an environment hub and the tree nursery now on site and would also link into NCC's project to Plant a Million Trees. This exhibition would explore how trees and woodland were more important than ever and would include objects from Gressenhall and wider NMS collections.

In January 2023, woodworm had been detected in the Victorian School Room display and Cherry Tree Cottage display and had been

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treated by freezing collections in vulnerable spaces. With the help of volunteers, around 50 pieces of furniture had been wrapped, transported and frozen. In February 2023 a deep conservation-clean of collections on open display in the workhouse and rural life gallery had commenced.

The Farmers Foundry Steam Engine project, which had been funded by ACE had completed in September 2022. Volunteer projects had also included a Clever Clogs Museum trail created by craft volunteers, and interpretation banners looking at the environment and social impact of steam created by young people. These elements won a £300 grant in the Volunteer Showcase at the SHARE Museums East Conference.

Improvements had been made to the onsite orchard which had been tidied up, new fencing had been installed and new trees to replace those which had died of disease would be planted in the 2023 season.

The Suffolk Punch horses were doing well with the two younger horses, Jack and King now being introduced to the harness and four new Red Poll cattle were also doing very well with in-calf heifers due to calve in March.

As part of a wider scheme to refurbish the farm site, farm tasks had been undertaken over the winter period with work on hedges and maintenance on fences with a new Kabota tractor supporting the heavy work.

The community tree nursery continued to flourish and was now well established. Seeds collected last year were growing well in the raised beds. The long-term aim of the nursery was to supply young trees to be planted at various sites around the county and linked well in to the NCC ambition to Plant a Million Trees for Norfolk as well as the DEFRE Trees Outside Woodland scheme.

Maintaining and growing a strong social media presence remained a key priority for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, and commercial activities were needed to generate income, bat walks and the hiring of spaces for weddings contributed to that income, with a wedding booked for 8 July 2023. Councillor Clark said that the Gressenhall Facebook page was particularly good which was important and very encouraging. Mr Smith said that the team had worked very hard to provide relevant content.

The Friends of Gressenhall and volunteers remained very supportive. Helen Bainbridge, the Chair of the Friends of Gressenhall informed members that the second-hand book shop had gone through a recent facelift and, although small it had been made more accessible with extra bookshelves around the outside. There had been a recent request for more children's books and this had proved extremely fruitful with a host of children's books now ready for sale at the start of the season. The Friends had been extremely supportive and had supported and attended most events over the last year and they continued to raise funds where possible to support the Museum.

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Volunteering was now fully operational after Covid-19 lockdowns. The volunteers continued to support all aspects of work at Gressenhall including work on collections, documentation, steam engineering, landscape conservation, farming, research and maintenance of the Panhard car.

Gressenhall had welcomed over 4,000 school children on educational visits between September and December 2022 with total visits since last April now at 8,480 and with current bookings for February and March 2023 it should be close to 10,000 visits for the first time since Covid-19, although it was thought that the teacher strikes may have some impact on these visits.

Early November saw Gressenhall pilot a KS2 environmental-focused schools' programme which included a week of pilot events, offering free entry and a transport subsidy to schools. Feedback had been very positive, with the effective combination of history and science particularly praised. There would be two more pilot days in February and if successful the event would become a part of the standard schools offer.

Councillor Duigan suggested that it might be worth the research team investigating the work of William Hyde Wollaston, an English chemist and natural philosopher who was widely considered as one of the leading scientists of his time and was born in Dereham. He felt that this may link in well with the science work with the schools.

Dr Hanley updated Members on the Kick the Dust: Norfolk project, funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) delivered in partnership with a range of organisations including YMCA Norfolk, continued to engage with young people aged 11-25. It had been due to come to an end at the end of March 2023 however, three years of additional funding had been secured along with funding from NCC. It was also hoped to secure further funding in the future. Statistics and data along with other information provided had demonstrated that the project had proved to have a positive impact on young people and staff engaging in activity which had been delivered through a blended offer of face-to-face activity and online engagement.

Kick the Dust was set up as a three-stage journey, with young people developing transferable work-related skills, and gaining experiences that they would struggle to find elsewhere, to support them in securing employment. Kick the Dust had supported seven young people on its bursary traineeship programme, the last cohort finishing in May 2022, all of whom had secured permanent employment within the heritage sector. One Kick the Dust participant had progressed onto the NMS Teaching Museum traineeship programme.

All data taken from the project was compared with the Renaisi findings which used data from October 2020 to September 2021 across all 12 National Kick the Dust projects which showed that the Norfolk Kick the Dust project was in line with other Kick the Dust projects scoring higher in 9 out of the 13 areas.



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The aim moving forward was to support more working age young people to progress into employment, training or further learning and gain confidence to take on long-term volunteering roles within NMS.

Visitor figures for both museums from April 2022 to January 2023 saw Ancient House admissions at 7,216 visitors and Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse at 44,472 visitors which had been a good increase on previous years and confirmed that levels were increasing and starting to get back to pre-covid visitor levels.

Members of the Committee noted the report.

**8/23 NEXT MEETING**

The arrangements for the next meeting to be held on Monday, 5 June 2023 at 10am in the Beech Room, at Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum were noted.

The meeting closed at 11.45 am

CHAIRMAN