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**BRECKLAND
AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE**

25 January 2021

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 October 2020 to December 2020.

1. Temporary Closure of Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum due to the COVID-19 pandemic

- 1.1 All Norfolk Museums Service (NMS) museums, including Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, closed to visitors on 19 March 2020 as a result of the Coronavirus pandemic. The majority of NMS non frontline staff have been working remotely from home since this time. Following a phased COVID-secure reopening of the NMS museum sites at Norwich Castle, Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse and Time & Tide during July and August and at Lynn Museum during October, all NMS sites closed again from 5 November as part of the second national lockdown. Following the announcement that Norfolk would be in Tier 2, three NMS sites reopened to the public on Thursday 3 December. These sites were Norwich Castle, Time & Tide Museum and Lynn Museum. The seasonal site at Gressenhall remains closed until the start of the 2021 season. Following the announcement that Norfolk would be in Tier 4 from Boxing Day, all NMS sites closed again with effect from 24 December. Museums are legally required to close to visitors in both Tier 3 and Tier 4.
- 1.2 Many museum activities and services, including general visits and school visits, have been severely impacted due to COVID-19. NMS staff have been involved in supporting key work relating to the Norfolk County Council's (NCC) COVID-19 response, including helping to coordinate volunteer activities, managing the distribution of food and medicine to residents who needed this support, and making telephone calls to identified vulnerable residents.

- 1.3 Throughout the period of the pandemic, NMS staff have developed a broad range of digital resources to support audiences, including resources for children and families. Digital engagement included a significant expansion of social media activity. Resources continue to be made available for those in digital poverty or without ready access to digital content.
- 1.4 The enormous range of NMS activity during lockdown is being captured in the weekly *Museums Mardle* staff e-newsletter. Members of the committee can be added to this distribution list on request.
- 1.5 The reopening of museum sites during 2020 followed the implementation of strict COVID-19 safety procedures that were reviewed and signed-off by the NCC Health & Safety and Wellbeing team. Reopening was also in accordance with sector-specific guidance issued by the National Museums Directors Council. All visits were pre-booked using timed tickets available from the Art Tickets website. To accommodate social distancing, site visitor capacity was significantly reduced.
- 1.6 Staff training took place at Gressenhall Farm and workhouse in advance of reopening. Staff were provided with any identified PPE and protective screens have been installed at key points. Enhanced staffing levels ensured that visitors were provided with the necessary support and advice.
- 1.7 To reduce 'touchpoints' in the museum some of the interactive elements of the displays have been covered over. However, to help family groups enjoy the museum displays new 'takeaway' activity trails and packs were introduced for younger visitors and their families to use around the Gressenhall site.
- 1.8 All museum visits had to be pre-booked using timed tickets available from the Art Tickets website. To accommodate social distancing, site visitor capacity has been significantly reduced. For Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum up to 15 visitors were able to book per 15 minute period.
- 1.9 Whilst visitors were requested to pre-book their visit via Art Tickets to ensure that visitor numbers were carefully managed, if there was capacity within the museum, 'walk-in' non-booked visits were facilitated where possible.

2. Events and Activities

- 2.1 Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse has unfortunately had to cancel its events programme at the museum since March 2020 due to the COVID-19 pandemic. During this period there has been a focus on digital delivery as an alternative means of engaging with both existing and new audiences.

- 2.2 The school holiday programme for October half term 2020 was able to go ahead, in an amended COVID-19 secure self-led format. The half term week theme was *Awesome Autumn* and the programme ran from Thursday 22 October to Sunday 1 November. This theme allowed visitors to explore nature more closely through autumn crafts, fascinating quiz trails, adventurous woodland games and a pumpkin obstacle course. An average of 140 people per day enjoyed the events on offer.
- 2.3 The 2020 events programme at Gressenhall was planned to offer a broad range of activities based around four operational models but all events from late March onwards were unable to go ahead. For this reporting period, the following days and activities were cancelled:
- Special Event days – major events which require full event staffing and set up: *Apple Day*
 - Days with a Difference – smaller themed events: not scheduled during this period
 - Norfolk School Holiday activities: not scheduled during this period
 - Ticketed Events – pre-booked and pre-paid events: *Victorian Family Christmas*
- 2.4 Since the reopening of the Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse on Monday 20 July, a reintroduction of small-scale event activities has been instigated. For the October to December period, the following activity was run daily when the site was open:
- A 'pencil free' children's activity available to all visitors.
- 2.5 Digital resources have been created by the Events, Learning and Curatorial teams which have been uploaded and are available to visitors on the Gressenhall website. Resources include children's craft activities, an online murder mystery along with creativity and wellbeing activities inspired by Lorina Bulwer. These resources are updated on a regular basis.
- 2.6 Gressenhall presented the first virtual event day via the museum's social media channels on Sunday 11 October. *Apple Day Online* delivered creative craft ideas, delicious apple recipes and an apple variety quiz with posts across the day for online audiences to enjoy. The second virtual Gressenhall event *Online Festive Activities* was hosted on Monday 21 and Tuesday 22 December. Digital visitors were greeted with Christmas themed storytelling, craft activities, cooking sessions and a special virtual visit from Father Christmas.
- 2.7 The costs of delivering and marketing the Gressenhall event programme continues to be subsidised with funding from Arts Council England (ACE) as part of the 2018-22 Norfolk Museums Service ACE business plan as a National Portfolio Organisation.
- 2.8 The Gressenhall events programme is promoted via a specific piece of print, as well as an increased programme of digital marketing including

Facebook and Google adverts and the museum's own social media presence. All changes to the Gressenhall events programme have been communicated via social media, Art Tickets and the Gressenhall website.

3. Other Museum Developments

- 3.1 The 2020 season temporary exhibition *Full Steam Ahead* opened on 17 February 2020 for half term, just before the national lockdown. This exhibition is designed to celebrate all things steam, including the Farmers Foundry Company engine which is currently undergoing restoration before being relocated and displayed at Gressenhall. The exhibition was re-designed to include COVID-19 safety measures before the museum re-opened in the summer. This meant that all touch points and interactives were removed or covered up and a one-way system established through the space. The exhibition is due to be de-installed before Gressenhall re-opens in mid-March, although this is subject to COVID-19 restrictions at that point.
- 3.2 The temporary exhibition for 2021, *More in Commons*, is well-developed. For this exhibition, staff are working in partnership with Norfolk Wildlife Trust, who are celebrating their 95th birthday. The exhibition is a celebration of the wildlife, history and community of Norfolk's common land. Working together with natural history colleagues, community groups (including Gypsy and Romany Travellers) and volunteers staff are developing a COVID-19 secure but still engaging exhibition. It starts with a community designed 3D sculpture, created by volunteers working remotely, which directs people to the main exhibition in the Collections Gallery. The main exhibition display explores the wildlife, history and community groups that use common land and examines what the future holds for Norfolk's green, unenclosed spaces. The exhibition will also feature in the wider site including a Robert Kett scarecrow for Cherry Tree Cottage. Work is on target for the exhibition to open in the spring.
- 3.3 Staff have created several online versions of previous temporary exhibitions and tours during the lockdown period. These simple pdf files allow online visitors to explore the objects and images at their own pace and to review areas of interest. The online tours available include:
 - Full Steam Ahead
 - Once Upon a Time
 - LGBTQ+ Stories
 - Queer Nature Tour
 - Behind the Scenes Collections Store Tour

Staff are currently working on uploading this digital content to the Google Arts and Culture platform which will make this material, and other previous temporary exhibitions, accessible to a much wider audience online.

- 3.4 Gressenhall has continued to lead on the *More Than Oliver Twist* project. This Subject Specialist Network (SSN) project is funded by Arts Council England. The establishment of a new Workhouse Network SSN was one of the objectives of the recent *Voices from the Workhouse* project at Gressenhall supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund. For this project Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum is working with five other workhouse museums and Nottingham Trent University to engage museum workforces with pauper histories. NMS has been granted a further extension to the project, which will be complete by 31st March 2021. Mel Rye and Morgan Tipping were originally appointed to create a physical temporary exhibition together with the six regional partners. Since lockdown this was changed to a completely digital offer, hosted on the Google Arts and Culture platform:

[The Workhouse Network — Google Arts & Culture](#)

The exhibition features artwork telling the visual story of six of the inmates whose lives were researched during the project. These are accompanied by audio soundtracks that tell their lives in the form of a radio show, reflect on their contemporary resonance and give the researcher's a chance to explain their experience of working on the project. A five-year plan has been written which will ensure the network continues to grow and includes a range of opportunities to apply for future funding for further projects. Lockdown gave staff the opportunity to recruit further family history research volunteers and they have completed research on all the inmates recorded in the 1881 and 1871 censuses. These are being added to the free, publicly available eHive website, providing a fantastic resource for academics and local and family historians:

[More Than Oliver Twist on eHive](#)

- 3.5 The Farmers Foundry Company steam engine restoration project, also funded through Arts Council England, has another revised and approved timetable because of the delays brought about by lockdown. Good progress has been made on the engine in the steam engineers' yard and the engine is now ready to be returned to site, once restrictions are lifted. The steam engine will be returned to Gressenhall, made fully operational again and will provide the platform to train a new diverse volunteer team.
- 3.6 A Collecting COVID-19 project was started in response to the national lockdown and is using a phased approach to collect stories and objects relating to the pandemic across diverse rural Norfolk. The initial phase of collecting was during the first lockdown and was followed up by a living with the pandemic phase. Staff have worked hard to identify stories from a range of people and organisations across rural Norfolk to reflect the diverse experiences of people within the county during this unusual time.

- 3.7 The new Adventure Playground at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, funded through the NCC capital programme 2019-20, opened on Saturday 25 October 2020, in time for the October half term week. The opening of the new playground followed the implementation of strict COVID-19 safety procedures that were reviewed and signed-off by the NCC Health & Safety and Wellbeing team. All visits were pre-booked using timed tickets available from the playground entrance once families had arrived at Gressenhall using their pre-booked museum entry tickets. To maintain social distancing, the capacity of the playground was significantly reduced, with 25 children able to use the play equipment during a 40 minute play session. Five play sessions are available per day with a 30 minute cleaning regime between each one. The new look adventure playground will play a key role in attracting families, repeat visitors and NMS Museums Pass holders to the site once we are able to re-open Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse. The new adventure playground complements the wider site's existing interpretation including such elements as the wildlife, woodland, heavy horses and farm animals and blends into the surrounding landscape very well.
- 3.8 The Gressenhall farm staff have again amended their working pattern to ensure key priorities are covered during the lockdown. The daily feeding and care of the livestock is crucial and Richard Dalton and Mike Crisp, the farm officers, provide cover every day including weekends. Other Gressenhall team members will help to support this farm priority when required. One element of the farm operation which has been able to continue during lockdown is the training of the youngest Suffolk Punch horse, Caspar. Reports of his progress so far are encouraging and, if this continues, he will join the rest of the team and share their work from the 2022 season onwards.
- 3.9 Maintaining and growing a strong social media presence is of even greater importance during lockdown periods and beyond. This remains a key priority for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and a digital report for the period will be circulated at the meeting.

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](http://www.tripadvisor.co.uk/Gressenhall_Farm_and_Workhouse)

- 3.10 The private Facebook group for Gressenhall staff and volunteers remains a valuable communication tool. It provides a link to the museum for staff and volunteers who are not currently able to attend or work on site. Regular updates are provided by staff completing security checks and other essential work on site during the lockdown period. This included photographs of the farm animals being fed and the

buildings, gardens and wildlife. Content is also uploaded by remote volunteers working on various projects and the Facebook group has become a safe space for developing the Gressenhall digital community.

- 3.11 Gressenhall continues to investigate a range of commercial activities as a means of generating income in the future, including room and venue hire where virus restrictions and lockdown periods allow.

4. Friends and Volunteers

- 4.1 The Friends of Gressenhall remain supportive but it has not been possible to hold the bi-monthly Committee Meetings at the museum since March 2020. The Friends continue to operate the Gressenhall second-hand bookshop, but as with all other areas of the site, this has been impacted by the COVID-19 lockdown and has been closed since the middle of March. Therefore, the Friends have been unable to generate any new income from the bookshop this financial year
- 4.2 The Gressenhall Curator, Dr Megan Dennis, continues to co-ordinate, manage and develop the volunteer teams at Gressenhall. This group receives email updates on Mondays, Wednesdays and Friday to provide a regular link to Gressenhall and other volunteers. The emails are appreciated by many of our volunteers, particularly those living alone, or who are shielding. A range of remote volunteering opportunities have been developed which has seen our volunteer team increase to over 150 volunteers. We are recruiting people from across the UK and increasing the diversity of our volunteer group. These volunteers have worked on family history research, cataloguing workhouse archives and improving collection records. A new project sees remote volunteers working together to create a 3D sculpture for our 2021 temporary exhibition *More in Commons*. A weekly Virtual Gressenhall Tea Break on Zoom also continues during this lockdown with regular attendees.

5. Learning & Outreach

- 5.1 The planned COVID-secure return of school visits was delayed due to the second lockdown in November. This was frustrating for staff and schools as there were some 800 children from schools booked in to visit Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse for a range of events. However, the number of bookings is clear evidence that there remains a strong demand amongst schools for our services and a confidence in our ability to deliver a safe, educational experience. Following the end of the second lockdown, Gressenhall was one of three museums in NMS (along with Lynn Museum and Stories of Lynn), who were able to welcome schools for the first time since March 2020. This followed a significant amount of COVID-19 planning work in liaison with the NCC Health, Safety & Wellbeing team. Gressenhall was visited by five schools in total, each visit being from a single class group bubble. Preparations were thorough, with safe systems of work in place and

learning staff and freelancers visiting the museum in advance to see how the day would operate in practice. The school visits went well. Hand sanitiser stations were used in each space that children undertook their activities and staff completed ad hoc cleaning when necessary during sessions. Any objects that were touched were cleaned or quarantined after use and a two-metre distancing was successfully maintained throughout. Learning team staff were supported by Front of House staff who assisted with cleaning lunch spaces. The care taken in developing, testing and communicating our systems of work ensured that museum staff, teachers and children could relax, enjoy the day and learn something new. Although the most recent lockdown means that schools will not be visiting again until after February half term at the earliest, our recent experience of face-to-face delivery will stand us in good stead when visits can recommence.

- 5.2 Learning staff have completed and piloted two sets of films to support classroom learning. Schools watch the films, think of questions they wish to ask, and talk to a costumed character or member of staff via livestream. The *Neolithic Britain* films follow a light-hearted story to engage Year 3 students (7 and 8 year olds). The story revolves around a Mrs Smith who does not think that the Neolithic period was very important and is transported back in time to undertake a series of object-based challenges. We have also developed a *through the keyhole* series of films to support studies of Victorian Britain. Each film shows a costumed character going about their duties in a particular museum space: schoolroom, washhouse, farmhouse kitchen and workhouse. They encourage children to ask questions about a range of subjects from the technologies used to the realities of life in Victorian Norfolk. Responses to both series of films have been very positive.
- 5.3 The learning team are intending to build upon their experience of digital engagement in the future. Museum learning teams have been looking for ways to deepen their engagement with schools for many years and we hope that livestreaming will become part of our offer to complement face to face visits. This enhanced digital offer allows staff to follow-up museum visits with a digital classroom in order to answer any questions and consolidate learning.
- 5.4 Gressenhall continues to be registered with NCC as a Care Farm. Work-based placements to adults with learning difficulties have been suspended during the pandemic. Placements will be reviewed later in the year.

6. Kick the Dust project update

- 6.1 The *Kick the Dust: Norfolk* project, funded through the National Lottery Heritage Fund, has continued to engage with young people throughout the COVID-19 lockdown period. The project team have adapted their activities to support existing groups across Norfolk, in particular YMCA groups, using digital means.

- 6.2 From the start of the first national lockdown in March to the 21 December 2020 there were a total of 1,860 interventions, involving 704 individual young people taking part in 880 hours of quality digital activity. 19 Kick the Dust groups have been taking part in 371 different digital activities across the county, with a further 11 YMCA groups involved in 109 heritage related activities plus an additional number engaging in activities left at their residences to complete independently during lockdown.
- 6.3 Total engagement numbers for the project from October 2018 to 21 December 2020 are 7,932 interventions, involving 2,419 individual young people, taking part in 4,015 hours of quality activity. Of these interventions, 186 volunteering opportunities have been provided to 93 individual young people.
- 6.4 Of this activity 28% has been categorised at 'Player' level, 46% at 'Shaper' level and 20% at 'Leader' level. Of these activities, 53% involve young people in leading and designing projects as well as acting as mentors to staff and other young people. Three young people currently sit on the Project Steering Group.
- 6.5 Breakdown of participants:
This has changed considerably since lockdown due to the high number of YMCA clients project staff have been engaging with through the enhanced digital offer.
7% aged 11-13 years
12% aged 14-16 years
32% aged 17-19 years
24% aged 20-22 years
25% aged 23-25 years
- 6.6 Engagement by target audiences (some young people fall into more than one category):
YMCA clients – 41%
Secondary schools – 30%
FE/HE – 24%
Young people with mental health issues – 15%
Outside of mainstream education – 8%
Young Offenders at those at risk of offending – 5%
Looked after children and adopted living at home - 7%
SEND – 6%
NEET – 4%
Care Leavers – 2%
New arrivals and refugees – 2%
Pregnant young mums and teenage parents – 1%
Young Carers – 2%
- 6.7 As part of the feedback, young people are asked how aware they are of the range of job roles available within NMS and the heritage sector and how they perceived museums in terms of being spaces for young

people. 72% of young people stated they had little or no knowledge of job roles in NMS or the heritage sector before taking part and 92% felt that museums were a space they could use and would use in the future.

- 6.8 Evaluation responses from this Kick the Dust project can be compared with those from the other eleven Kick the Dust projects currently running across the UK. This programme-wide evaluation has been commissioned by the National Lottery Heritage Fund from the evaluation specialists Renaisi.
- 6.9 Summary of evaluation responses:
Following their engagement with our project:
93% of young people said they had learnt new and interesting things about heritage (Renaisi survey 90%);
85% of young people felt that heritage reflected them (Renaisi 70%);
90% felt heritage would engage other young people (Renaisi 89%);
82% of young people said they were more likely to become a volunteer as a result of their involvement in KTD and this option was the most popular with work experience for all those who took part. (Renaisi 61%);
100% of young people stated they felt welcomed and respected by staff and 100% felt a sense of achievement;
84% of young people stated they now had a better understanding of heritage having taken part in the programme with 16% stating they weren't sure and needed more engagement. (Renaisi 78%);
70% of young people felt they had the opportunity to influence decisions. (Renaisi 66%);
88% of young people felt that there were jobs for young people like themselves to work in heritage. (Renaisi 72%);
65% of young people felt that heritage had helped them understand more about their own lives – it had given them context;
81% said they had found heritage more relevant than they had before embarking on their Kick the Dust journey (Renaisi 77%);
96% of young people felt that the programme was easy and affordable to get involved in but had concerns that they may not be able to do this in the future if there was a significant cost to them. (Renaisi 92%).
- 6.10 Learning officers, Rachel Duffield and Rebecca Hale, have been engaging with remote work experience groups of young people from a wide range of backgrounds. The programme has two parts. In the first part, young people meet museum staff (front of house, curatorial, learning etc), find out about their roles and undertake a related activity. In the second part (which our first group is about to start), young people work together on their own museum-related project.

7. Visitor numbers

- 7.1 Visitor figures for the period will be circulated at the meeting.

8. 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 National Lottery Heritage Fund (formerly 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.

9. Recommendations:

That the Area Museums Committee notes the report

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