
BRECKLAND COUNCIL

At a Meeting of the

BRECKLAND AREA MUSEUMS COMMITTEE

**Held on Monday, 5 September 2022 at 10.00 am in
The Beech Room, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, Gressenhall, Beetley, Dereham,
NR20 4DR**

PRESENT

Cllr Robert Kybird (Chairman)	Cllr Phillip Duigan (Vice-Chairman)
Cllr Harry Clarke	Cllr Terry Jermy
Cllr Chris Harvey	Cllr Mark Kiddle-Morris
	Cllr W Richmond

Also Present

Helen Bainbridge	- Chair, Friends of Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse
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In Attendance

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

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20/22CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor Kybird be appointed as Chairman for the ensuing year.

21/22VICE-CHAIRMAN

RESOLVED that Councillor Duigan be appointed as Vice-Chairman for the ensuing year.

22/22MINUTES

(A) MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 28 FEBRUARY 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 28 February 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

(B) MINUTES OF THE MEETING HELD ON 20 JUNE 2022

The minutes of the meeting held on 20 June 2022 were confirmed as an accurate record.

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23/22 APOLOGIES

Apologies had been received from Councillors Bowes, Eagle and Bushell and Ward.

24/22 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

The Chairman stated that the works to transform Norwich Castle were well underway, work had started in summer 2020, with the reopening of the area due to take place in 2023. It remained a work in progress, and he said that Members of the Breckland Area Museums Committee would be welcome to visit, and if interested this could be arranged with Dr Hanley, Assistant Head of Museums. Members agreed this would be beneficial and Dr Hanley would make the necessary arrangements.

25/22 URGENT BUSINESS

None.

26/22 DECLARATION OF INTERESTS

None.

27/22 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. He explained that Covid-19 remained a risk and was being managed on a service-wide basis. Although site operations had reverted largely to pre-pandemic numbers in terms of capacity, there were still restrictions in some rooms due to ventilation limitations. Areas continued to be ventilated as much as possible and when this was not possible the numbers of visitors and staff were restricted. Hand sanitisers and enhanced cleaning regimes remained in place. Dr Hanley stated that it was unsure what Autumn and Winter would bring with regard to an increase in the spread of Covid-19 however, in terms of operational response, it could not get any worse, and he felt that teams were ready to respond to any change and were well equipped to deal with them.

The deployment of CO2 monitors, supplied through Norfolk County Council, had been really effective and had played a critical part to bring back into use some back-office space for staff and volunteers. Dr Hanley stated that it continued to be a challenge, but that they were committed to safe working across all NMS sites and were confident that this could be managed.

In line with Norfolk County Council practice at office hubs, non-frontline NMS staff had been able to return to the workplace. NMS had also implemented NCC Smarter Working and Hybrid Working principles across teams, which identified patterns of home and office-based working for teams and individual staff members.

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The Curator of Kings Lynn and Thetford Museums, Oliver Bone presented the report on activities at Ancient House, Museum of Thetford Life covering the period from June to July 2022.

Building works at the former King's Head public house, a listed building next door to the Ancient House had caused disruption to the Ancient House Museum last winter. The King's Head remained covered in scaffolding following the involvement of Breckland Council and the Health and Safety Executive. It did not affect the current operations of Ancient House and the NMS would work closely with Norse to ensure this continued and reached a suitable conclusion for all.

The Ancient House programme of events planned to exhibit a different exhibition each year. This year the display had been about Thetford Treasure and featured a selection of items from the late Roman hoard of gold jewellery including an inscribed silver spoon found on the outskirts of Thetford in 1979. It also displayed Roman items from the temple site at Hockwold which had included some rare and carefully reconstructed glass vessels, pewter tableware and copper alloy figurines. The Hockwold Hoard would be moved on to the Lynn Museum in Kings Lynn for display in October 2022.

Recently the museum's staff had devoted their energies to the museum's Vikings, History on Your Doorstep exhibition which had opened to the public on 16 July 2022. Museum staff had worked with the project team at the Brecks Fen Edge & Rivers Landscape Partnership Scheme (BFER) and Dr Richard Hoggett to curate the exhibition. This project had involved members of the Teenage History Group in choosing artefacts and themes for display as 'community curators'. Supported with funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the exhibition included material from the 8th century high status site at Staunch Meadow, Brandon, the Viking Burial finds from Santon, on loan from the British Museum, as well as a number of finds from the Thetford area from both the Ancient House and Norwich Castle collections. The exhibition had featured in various news outlets including the i newspaper, the BBC News, Bury Free Press and the EDP. Museum curator, Oliver Bone spoke about the exhibition on BBC Radio Norfolk's 'History at Home' slot on the breakfast show on Saturday 23 July. A summary for visitors about the exhibition was available on the museum service website: The Vikings, history on your doorstep – Norfolk Museums.

The Ancient House was part of the National Lottery Heritage Fund – funded BFER landscape project. The scheme had won a £2m NLHF grant as part of the proposal for a £3.5m landscape conservation scheme. The project was engaging local communities, schools, and like-minded organisations to understand, reveal, celebrate and protect the lost heritage of the BFER over the next five years. The Ancient House Museum was receiving funding as a partner organisation to produce exhibitions and activities in 2022 and 2023 on the themes of Vikings and Riverside Heritage.

Ancient House continued to offer a varied and responsive schools

Action By

programme for local teachers. In July the Learning Officer, Melissa Hawker had responded to a plea for help from a teacher at Drake Primary School who had been unable to take his pupils on a planned trip to the British Museum to learn about the Ancient Greeks. Ms Hawker, with some creative thinking and use of the Museum's collections devised an Ancient Greek day to meet the school's curriculum needs, the feedback had been excellent.

On 1 July 2022, Ancient House joined other museums across the country and invited children to take over their social media accounts as part of an event to emphasise youth voice from Kids in the Museum. The Ancient House feed was taken over by one of the Western Area Kick the Dust work experience cohort who shared her research on Thetford-born Thomas Paine and the museum's junior History Club who shared their 'Here Come the Vikings' project ahead of the new Vikings History on your Doorstep exhibition which had opened on 16 July 2022.

The museum had been preparing for volunteers to be safely re-introduced to the museum. The first project for the collections volunteers would be the scanning and documentation of the recently acquired postcard collection. Initially they would work with Assistant Curator (Lynn Museum) Dayna Woolbright.

28/22 GRESSENHALL FARM & WORKHOUSE REPORT

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

Despite the ending of legal restrictions, a number of the COVID-secure systems and procedures implemented across NMS sites during the pandemic remained in place, with a focus on keeping staff and visitors safe through minimising any risk of infection through transmission. Sites continued to provide hand sanitiser stations and some directional signage. The wearing of face coverings was now optional, and visitors were encouraged to follow respectful distancing. The pre-booking of tickets was no longer a requirement but again remained optional. Site capacity limits had largely reverted to pre-pandemic levels.

The new Gressenhall Events Officer, Fiona Ashley, had now completed two months in post. The events programme for the 2022 season continued to run across the four operational models, which would be reviewed at the end of the calendar year to assess visitor attendance and feedback.

The four operational models included:

- Special event days – major events which required full event staffing and set up, including the use of large parking fields. A premium ticket price applied for these event days to reflect the high level of activities taking place. Free admission continued to be provided to Norfolk Museums pass holders and Friends

Action By

of Gressenhall members. The very successful Apple Day would take place on 16 October 2022.

- Days with a Difference – smaller themed events which required a smaller staffing complement and utilised core parking. These events were aimed at attracting audiences of 500-800 visitors and were offered free to Norfolk Museums pass holders and Friends of Gressenhall members.
- 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 and Friends of Gressenhall members.
- Ticketed Events – pre-booked and pre-paid events. These events were held outside of standard opening hours or out of the main season, offered at a reduced charge to Norfolk Museums pass holders. The Bat Walk event held on 26 August 2022 had sold out.

The temporary exhibition, Georgie Meadows: Stitched Drawings, had been well received by visitors and 550 visitors had left their own drawings in response to the themes of the display as part of an interactive element. On 16 June 2022 Georgie Meadows joined the curator for an Artist Introduction Webinar to further discuss the themes of the exhibition. This was the first online webinar event hosted by Gressenhall and following positive feedback by attendees, it was hoped that more of these events would be held in the future.

The Arts Council funded project Full Steam Ahead, which had provided funding to restore the 1922 Farmer's Foundry steam engine to working order was drawing to a close. The project had explored opportunities to diversify volunteering opportunities relating to steam, and recent activity had focussed on creative opportunities. Young Steam Curators facilitated by the Kick the Dust project had created pop up interpretation exploring the social and environmental impact of steam. Volunteers had included a mix of male, female, young and old.

After a long, hot, dry summer farm animals had been kept indoors wherever possible and the Suffolk Punch horses were all doing very well even in the challenging weather conditions. The two new young horses were now getting used to the farm routines and during the winter months would be introduced to the wearing of the harness. It was anticipated that at least a further 10 to 12 months training would be required before they could be fully integrated to the team.

A new, bright orange, Kabota tractor had been sourced to replace the old New Holland tractor which would be traded in with additional investment in a paddock sweeper which would help the farm team clear areas much quicker than working by hand. These investments for farm equipment had been funded through the NCC capital programme.

Action By

The Community Tree Nursery – which formed part of the Gressenhall Environment Hub – was becoming more established. A new automated watering system had been introduced to help and smaller saplings were beginning to grow, and progress was being made. The long-term aim was to supply young trees to be planted at various sites around the county and tied in with the NCC ambition to plant a Million Trees for Norfolk as well as the DEFRA Trees Outside Woodland scheme.

As part of the Gressenhall Environment Hub work, Gressenhall were continuing to work in partnership with the NCC Environment team and neighbouring landowners in the creation of the Wendling Beck Exemplar Project. The project had many different themes from managing wetland, creating an arboretum, regenerative farming practices as well as improving public access to the whole area.

Gressenhall continued to investigate a range of commercial activities as a means of generating income in the future, including room and venue hire.

The private Facebook group for Gressenhall staff and volunteers remained a valuable communication tool. It provided a link to the museum for staff and volunteers who were not currently able to attend or work on site keeping them posted with regular updates. Maintaining and growing a strong social media presence remained a key priority for Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse.

The Chair of the Friends of Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse Museum, Helen Bainbridge stated that the Friends remained incredibly supportive and continued to explore ways to support the Museum. The second-hand bookshop continued to operate, and they had funded reflection benches for the top of the farm track for people to sit and reflect which had lovely views across the farm. The Operations Manager for East and West, Andrew Smith, explained that the reflection benches had been made from an oak tree from the Gressenhall site with support from the farm manager.

All volunteer teams had now returned to site following the pause of non-essential and indoor volunteering during the Covid-19 lockdowns. Some hybrid/remote volunteering opportunities had focussed on the transcription of workhouse records and research continued. Rachel Kidd, Gressenhall Curator, had been holding re-induction meetings and refresher training where needed with volunteer groups. During the month of July, Gressenhall had offered three Year 10 work experience placements. Over a one-week period, students had gained experience working in front of house, events, learning and completed curatorial tasks.

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 to 25 throughout the Covid-10 lockdown periods. From the start of lockdown to the 21 August 2022 there had

Action By

been a total of 6238 interventions, involving 2,349 individual young people. The current NLHF-funded Kick the Dust project was due to end in March 2023, evidence had clearly demonstrated the positive impact on young people and staff who had engaged in project activity. The aim was to continue to support more working age young people to progress into employment, training, or further learning and long-term volunteering. The new pilot for the bursary pre-traineeship programme would allow the project to gauge the need and success of this entry level pathway into the sector. The project had seen young people move through the programme, gaining the confidence to take on volunteering roles within NMS and others securing their first job through the Government's Kick Start 6-month placement programme; including three young people progressing onto the Teaching Museum and Kick the Dust bursary traineeship programme, three of the current cohort of trainees securing permanent employment in the sector, one with NMS two young people progressing onto Teacher Training, nine young people taking on the Young Ambassador and Young People's Champion roles, one of whom had recently secured a position with the Norfolk and Norwich Festival. Others had stated that their involvement had helped them make choices around subjects and options at school and college.

29/22 CO-OPTION OF A NON-VOTING MEMBER

The Chairman proposed the co-option of Councillor Roy Brame to join the Breckland Area Museums Committee as a non-voting Member. Councillor Brame was a Trustee of the Charles Burrell Museum in Thetford and the Chairman felt this was an opportunity to work together with a two-way flow of communication. This was seconded and agreed by Members. Councillor Kybird would contact Councillor Brame direct to invite him to join the Committee.

30/22 NEXT MEETING

The arrangements for the next meeting to be held on Monday, 20 February 2023 in The Beech Room, Gressenhall Farm & Workhouse Museum, Fakenham Road, Gressenhall, NR20 4DR.

The meeting closed at 11.44 am

CHAIRMAN