

CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL

A meeting of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel was held on Thursday 15 December 2022.

PRESENT: Councillors Councillor Chris McIntyre, G Wilson (Vice-Chair), R Arundale, J Rostron and N Gascoigne

PRESENT BY INVITATION:

ALSO IN ATTENDANCE:

OFFICERS: Susie Blood, JR Bowes and Gaye kirby

APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE: C Dodds, D McCabe, M Nugent and J Walker

22/22 **DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no Declarations of Interest received at this point in the meeting.

22/23 **MINUTES - CULTURE AND COMMUNITIES SCRUTINY PANEL - 17 NOVEMBER 2022**

The minutes of the Culture and Communities Scrutiny Panel held on xxxx were submitted and approved as a correct record.

22/24 **MIDDLESBROUGH MUSEUM SERVICE- SERVICE OVERVIEW- SETTING THE SCENE**

The Chair welcomed Gaye Kirby, Creative Programmes and Partnership Manager and J.R Bowes, Museums General Manager to the meeting to provide a service overview of museums.

The Museums General Manager advised that he has commenced his role in March 2021 and that the Creative Partnership Manager had taken up her post in February 2022.

To begin with the General Manager provided some context surrounding the museums advising that Middlesbrough own two museums- the Dorman and Captain Cook birthplace.

The Dorman Museum: Established in 1904 with large collections of natural history, archaeology, and ethnography, the museum has developed a remit that reflects the life and interests of the town and its people.

The museum had extensive redeveloped in 2002, and currently houses eight galleries covering social history of the town, the natural world, decorative arts, and world cultures.

Captain Cook Birthplace museum: In 1978 on the 250th anniversary of Cook's birth the museum opened. It is housed in a purpose-built museum close to the site of Cook's birthplace cottage in Stewart Park.

The museum tells the story of Cook, his 3 voyages and the cultures he encountered through themed displays and artefacts.

The Manager advised that there were 13 members of staff covering the two museums, however currently there was only 1 learning and engagement officer in post due to long term sickness.

The service worked with a number of partners including:

- Tees Valley Museums Group NPO
- Arts Council England
- Teesside Archives
- British Museum

- National Portrait Gallery
- Schools
- Museum Development Network NE
- Captain Cook Trust
- Friends of Dorman Museum
- Middlesbrough Mela
- Taste of Africa
- Curious Arts
- Barefoot Kitchen
- South Tees Arts & Health
- Whippet Up

The ambition of the service was as follows:

Attracting and retaining audiences through the creation of fresh and dynamic programming, expanded museum promotion and deepening our connection to the community and beyond.

This would be achieved by the following steps:

1. Connect with communities
2. Relevant and transformative museum
3. Think differently and create unique and distinctive experiences
4. Playful museum
5. Added value to the visit

In terms of the Dorman museum, the Manager outlined that it currently housed over 300,000 objects, however some were on loan. Structurally, the museum was fit for purpose, however there has always been challenges with the roof and the museum sadly suffers with guttering and leaks when there is strong wind and rain. The majority of the budget goes on maintenance, however in the future, a new roof would perhaps be the only option to protect the collections.

In terms of the ambition, the museum had also outlined a transformation plan, which was as follows:

Changing Lives

- Socially purposeful and engaged
- Enhance lives
- Breaking down barriers
- Active community participation
- Engaging with diverse communities
- Sharing collections and knowledge

Wellbeing

- Increase a sense of wellbeing
- Help us feel proud of where we have come from
- Inspire, challenge and stimulate us

Create better place

- Sense of belonging
- Value and understand where we live
- Encourage active public participation in decision-making
- Use collections and buildings to generate understanding between communities
- Create spaces that are open and accessible to all

Economic Value

- Create new opportunities for residents
- Raise aspirations
- Encourage and attract visitors to the town
- Stimulate further investment.

One main objective is to start celebrating our communities, and looking at how the museums can celebrate Middlesbrough's diverse communities.

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The Manager provided some examples of how the museums have been building towards their ambition, which included a number of videos which has been created in conjunction with partners:

1. Connect with communities- The Dorman museum is free to the public and the panel were advised visitors normally stay between 1- 2 hours. The museum holds number of collections, some fixed and some temporary.

In terms of connection with communities, for the last 6 months the Learning and Engagement officer has been concentrating wholly on schools, re-establishing our school loan boxes and delivering our Egyptian and Captain Cook workshops which are very popular.

Whilst the Captain Cook Museum, is not open all year round, it sits within the beautiful setting of Stewart Park, which attracts thousands of visitors per year. The park itself has lost of artefacts and last year the museum service introduced the Stewart Park Island Discovery Trail (which allows children and adults to follow the trail around the park and collect rubbings along the way). There is a small cost for the trail but it has proven popular.

Other work has included Celebrating connections , which worked with young people aged 12-16 in LINX , where the museum displayed their art work. The service also worked with Middlesbrough Mela and Barefoot Kitchen to develop a 'Taste from home', a community cookbook.

Other community work has linked with the Captain Cook Museum, where local school children had a unique opportunity to meet with rugby team from the Cook Islands. Volunteers and community groups worked tirelessly to produce a quilt , during their rugby world cup game against Tonga. Postcards have been produced and school children are now corresponding with children in the Cook Islands.

2. Relevant and transformative museum- In 2022, the Dorman Museum was fortunate to borrow an Egyptian exhibition, free of charge from the British Museum. The exhibition links with the following 3 ambitions in that this has allowed the Dorman to think differently and create a distinctive experience, adding value to visits and being creative with space, by bringing play, amongst culture and learning.

The British Museum, alongside the Dorman Museum worked with local school children, holding workshops and developing Egyptian themed work to have on display. The children were able to speak to curators from the British Museum via zoom to gain a better understanding of Egyptian culture.

Alongside this, the museum wished to bring something for younger children and with thanks to Covid recovery budget were able to install an Egyptian play area next to the collection. This has proved very successful and loved by families.

The project still continues and in the New Year 300 children will be traveling by train to London to visit to British museum. Something many children have not had the experience to do. It is hoped that this will develop a long-term relationship with the regions.

3. Think differently and create unique and distinctive experiences- as well as the Egyptians, the service worked with Curious Arts, to develop, a curious night in the museum. Curious Arts is a Newcastle Gateshead based charity championing and developing Lesbian, Gay, Bisexual, Transgender, Queer, Intersex, Asexual + arts, artists and audiences across the North East of England and beyond. Producers of award-winning Curious Festival – a celebration of LGBTQIA+ culture, Curious Arts co-ordinate queer arts network Queer Arts North and develop community-focused arts projects and events throughout the year, in partnership with cultural and community organisations from across the region.

Curious Arts took over the museum, questioned social constructs, vogue dancing, sharing memories, developed art and celebrated LGBTQIA+ culture.

The Dorman also hosted the Bottled ocean- an exhibition exploring your own

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relationships with plastic. The artist worked with thousands of children and community groups to reuse plastic to create an under the water themed exhibition.

4. **Playful museum-** The Dorman offers the following to attract families, including the Egyptian playarea, pop up theatre, Dinosaur days, yoga sessions and music sessions. There is a small cost from the activities (except for the Egyptian playarea)

5. **Added value to the visit-** The Dorman museum is a welcome place and celebrates all communities. In 2022, the museum purchased a Virtual reality ride, which changes theme depending on the time of year. The ride is currently open on weekends and during school holiday and has proven to be a welcome addition to the museum. The ride also generates a small income, as it is currently priced at £3.50 per person, or £14 per family. The ride lasts 5 minutes and since its instalment has generated £17k. It was hoped that this type of activity would evolve.

In terms of looking forward, the officers explained they wished to concentrate on the following:

- Democratising our collections and displays- the museums need to be strategic about the collections on show and what they store. Whilst disposing of artefacts may sound easy, there is a long process in place, which is often costly.
- Improving our physical access- looking at the Dorman and Captain Cooks birthplace access to ensure it is open to all
- Strengthening relationships and opportunities with communities- the service wish to embrace and celebrate our communities, by telling true stories and bring new stories to life.
- Enhancing programming and offer- working with partners/ local communities and schools.
- TVCA heritage framework- working together to celebrate our heritage.
- Capital redevelopments
- Building on partnerships- and as well building new ones.

This however was against challenges:

- Staffing and capacity
- Workforce skills and training
- Budgets
- Buildings and Maintenance
- Investment & council priorities
- External funding
- Strategic understanding of the power of museums
- Growing community needs
- Storage and contemporary collecting

The officers were thanked for their informative presentation.

As this was the first meeting, the Democratic Services Officer would work with the panel and develop detailed terms of reference for the review.

Following the order of business, a number of the panel members were shown round the museum.

AGREED:

That the information be noted.

22/25

CHAIR'S OSB UPDATE

The Chair provided a verbal update in respect to the Overview and scrutiny meeting held on 13 December 2022.

AGREED- That the update be noted.

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CHAIRS UPDATE- VISIT TO NORTHERN SCHOOL OF ARTS

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The Vice Chair provided feedback from the recent visit to the Northern School of Arts. Those who attended found the visit useful and very informative.

AGREED- That the information be noted.

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ANY OTHER URGENT ITEMS WHICH IN THE OPINION OF THE CHAIR, MAY BE CONSIDERED.

NO ITEMS