

Report To: Museum Committee

Date of Meeting: Monday, 8 March 2021

Report Title: Museum Update Report

Report By: Damian Etherington, Museum and Cultural Development Manager

Key Decision: N

Classification:

Purpose of Report

To update the committee on the museum's work since the last formal meeting

Recommendation(s)

- 1. To accept this report and recommend approval by Cabinet.**

Reasons for Recommendations

Introduction

1. This report summarises the work of the museum since the last Museum Committee meeting.

Performance

2. The museum's visitor figures have been impacted by Covid-19 restrictions. They have been, when the museum has been able to open, at about 20% of the previous year's figures for the comparable period of August until December. Due to the pandemic no targets have been set 2020-21.

Visitors	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Actual	0	700	1,784		2,484
Target	-	-	-	-	-
Previous Year	10,457	13,764	8,757	12,627	45,605

3. As the museum has been closed for much of 2020/21 there has been little opportunity to meet income targets. The spend per visitor in the shop was at an annual average of 23p in 2019/20. This has increased to £1.37 during the months we were open in 2020. Paid-for digital activities have been trialled. The online a preventive conservation course was attended by an international audience averaging 30 people per session.
4. Ceremonies have been badly hit by Coronavirus. There were nine wedding ceremonies expected from April 2020 until the end of the year. All ceremonies have been cancelled or rescheduled for 2021. The museum has limited the number of guests in the Durbar Hall to 10 people; this will change as the guidance from government does.
5. The *What's in the Box?* project has continued against the odds and is making steady progress. The team have been working hard to minimise the impact of Covid-19 on the project. So far, 11 volunteers have been working on the collection, nine of whom have been newly recruited during lockdown. The home education strand has been running successfully since autumn 2020. Nine families have participated comprising 10 adults and 12 children, aged 4 to 15. The LGBTQI+ strand began in February. Each participant will produce a short film introducing a chosen object with links to their own experience, highlighting existing objects in the collection and interpreting new items. The migrant and refugee strand is in the planning stages. This strand will link to the exhibition, *Crossings: community and refuge*, the British Museum Spotlight Loan arriving later this year.
6. The external evaluator has reported that the volunteers and participants have found the project fun, interesting and varied; they have learned new skills and noticed increases in their confidence. They also hope to continue working with the museum and praised staff who were described as 'welcoming,' 'friendly' and 'supportive.' *What's in the box?* is funded

by Art Council England. It is a collections-based community engagement project which aims to give greater public access and make better use of Hastings Museum & Art Gallery's collection. The museum is working with East Sussex home education, LGBTQ+ and refugee community groups to document and review our collections and develop co-curated exhibitions showcasing their work.

7. In December 2020 the museum received a £30,000 Respond and Reimagine Grant from the Art Fund. This grant is to develop the museum's digital and educational work. A small number of the collections will be digitally scanned to create 3D images. These images will be added to museum's existing selection of loans boxes. An entirely new digital-only loans box will also be developed. A further five blended learning workshops will be developed to supplement the current offer and teacher training session will also be offered throughout the year. This funding will also allow the museum website to be redesigned and upgraded.
8. The museum received £13,000 from Arts Council England in December to extend Hastings Digital Museum into 2021. This funding allows us to continue to work with creative freelancers and develop more projects aimed at getting people involved and doing things while at home. It also provides additional funding for us to work with Starlings Music Group and Arts on Prescription.
9. Sixty residents started writing *Lockdown Journals* during the first lockdown, with many deciding to stop when it was lifted. Their journals and associated paperwork started arriving at the museum in September. A few people have restarted their journals for Lockdowns 2 and 3. The journals are a mix of hand-written and digital accounts, which will be considered for accessioning in due course so that future generations of local people and researchers can understand what the experience was like.

Programming

10. *Hastings Open 2020* ran from 27 August 2020 until 3 January 2021. The exhibition was well received with many positive comments from visitors and the local press. The exhibition featured 92 artworks by 69 artists. Monika Veriopoulus, an artist based in Hastings was selected as the prize winner. We would like to thank the judges, Ben Urban, Ellen Prebble, Kate Adams, Patrick Adam Jones and Kenton Lowe for their help and support as the selection panel as well as everyone who contributed their work. The next Open exhibition will be in 2022.
11. The opening of *My Vital Life – Laetitia Yhap at 80* (23 January – 9 May 2021) has been affected by the national lockdown. The exhibition features 25 of Laetitia's artworks and 12 from the museum collection. Due to lockdown a number of [online views and videos](#) have been released via social media. The exhibition is a celebration of the life and work of Laetitia Yhap, a Hastings resident and acclaimed painter. It reflects Laetitia's unique approach to the world, and the stories she attaches to objects, through a selection of her drawings and paintings alongside everyday objects and artworks from the museum's collection.

12. In tandem with Laetitia's exhibition, ExploretheArch opened *Looking at things* (23 January – 9 May 2021) [online](#). Created by designer Erica Smith and mentee artist Esme Fisher, it is a collaboration between the museum, Active Arts, Hastings and Bexhill Mencap and Teddy Tinkers. By 15 February over 1700 people had visited the virtual exhibition. A physical exhibition will be installed and opened to the public when lockdown restrictions allow.
13. The summer's exhibition programme is being reviewed due to the latest government guidance. *Ingenious Contraptions* will still go ahead but may open earlier than planned. It brings together automata from Cabaret Mechanical Theatre's collection and objects from the museum collection. It is intended to be a fun, entertaining and engaging exhibition for families and for those who have an interest and a desire to create, invent and design. It will feature automata by Paul Spooner, Keith Newstead, Carlos Zapata and Patrick Bond. The exhibition has been made possible with the help of Sarah Alexander and Andrew Horowitz.
14. *Crossings: community and refuge* (10 September 2021 – 5 December 2021) is a British Museum Spotlight Loan and part of a British Museum National Programmes tour, featuring the Lampedusa Cross. The exhibition is being co-curated with local migrant and refugee groups. The cross is made from two pieces of a boat that was wrecked off the coast of Lampedusa, Italy, in 2013, causing the deaths of 311 Eritrean and Somali refugees. Moved by their plight, the island's carpenter made a cross for the survivors from the boat's wreckage. This exhibition has been made possible with the generous support of The British Museum Trust, Arts Council England, Art Fund and the Garfield Weston Foundation.

Schools and Learning

15. The Museum & Schools programme has received an 'intent to fund' email from Arts Council England for a further year until March 2022 and is awaiting confirmation. In previous years, funding has been confirmed as late as April.
16. School and educational visits have not been possible since March 2020. Between lockdowns, the museum trialled blended learning workshops with local schools and has been working on developing the loan box offer. Between October and December, 17 Loan Boxes were booked out, reaching 562 students. To support lockdown learning the museum's "Digital Discover" Arts Award is available on the museum website where young people can explore the museum's collection remotely. This offer has been taken up by several home school students, and discussions are taking place with St Mary's School in Bexhill and East Sussex County Council's Inclusion, Special Educational Needs and Disability (ISEND) service for bespoke digital projects to support their pupils.
17. The museums partnership with Education Futures Trust has continued to develop. The Museums and Schools officer took part in a consultation with their Youth Group and have encouraged them to get involved with the #DigitalQuilt by offering art packs to those young people.

Volunteering

18. Volunteering had to be paused during lockdown. Between lockdowns the volunteers continued to support collection documentation efforts with the museum team. We are currently trialling new ways of working with volunteers remotely to ensure their safety and ours.

Building

19. There have been no new major planned building works since the last report. A planning application to install additional security fencing has been made to secure the rear of the property. Problems with the boiler are ongoing and it is likely it will need replacing in the near future.

Covid-19 Secure Measures

20. Since reopening the museum as introduced a number of Covid-19 secure measures. The museum has achieved *Good To Go* accreditation because of this. The measures at the museum are reviewed as the government's guidance is updated. Between lockdowns the following measures were in place:
- Reduced public opening hours. The museum was open Thursdays to Sundays each week, from 10am to 12.30pm and 2pm to 5pm. This allowed staff to clean the building between the morning and afternoon sessions.
 - Ticketed entry and timed visits. If visitors did not have access to the internet, they could book by phone on 01424 451052.
 - One-way route around the building. A single route through the ground and first floors was introduced. Visitors were asked to keep to the route and maintain at least 1m+ from people not in their group.
 - Enhanced cleaning. New cleaning materials and routines were introduced. All cleaning products met BS EN 1276 and 14476 ratings
 - NHS Test and Trace. In line with government requirements a record of people visiting the museum was kept for 21 days after which it was deleted or securely destroyed. The information was not used for any other purpose.
21. In addition to these measures' visitors were required to wear face masks and be symptom free. There was also hand sanitiser stations, new directional signage and additional staff throughout the building. There were also, sadly, fewer gallery activities and interactives available. Those that remained were regularly cleaned each day. All in-door events have been cancelled for the foreseeable future and a reduced exhibition programme is being followed.

Options

22. To accept this report and recommend approval by Cabinet.

Public Exemption

23. This report contains no exempt information.

Timetable of Next Steps

24. Please include a list of key actions and the scheduled dates for these:

Action	Key milestone	Due date (provisional)	Responsible
Discussion by Museum Committee	Museum Committee	March 2021	Museum and Cultural Development Manager
Approval by Cabinet	Cabinet	April 2021	Museum and Cultural Development Manager

Wards Affected

All Wards

Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score: 45.1

Have you used relevant project tools? Y

Please identify if this report contains any implications for the following:

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	No
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	No
Risk Management	No
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	No
Economic/Financial Implications	No
Human Rights Act	No
Organisational Consequences	No
Local People's Views	No
Anti-Poverty	No
Legal	No

Additional Information

Officer to Contact

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