

Report To: Museum Committee

Date of Meeting: Monday, 14 March 2022

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

1. Your report must clearly present reasons for all the recommendations so that these can formally be published as a matter of public record. This is a statutory requirement.

Introduction

1. This report summaries the work of the museum since the last formal Museum Committee meeting. It includes an update from the last informal meeting in November.

Informal Meeting Update

2. The last informal meeting of the Museum Committee took place on 8 November 2021 via MS Teams. The committee were updated about progress with projects including *Curating for Change*, *What's in the Box?* and *Democratising Collections* funded by Esmée Fairbairn and the Museums Association.
3. Collections and engagement colleagues provided an overview of how volunteering had developed over Covid and plans for getting more people involved in the future. The meeting also touched on the future plans including the redevelopment, the website and the business plan.

Visitors and income

4. The museum's visitor figures are starting to show signs of recovery. Despite Omicron affecting visitor figures in December we remain on track to achieve the target for this year.

Visitors	Q1	Q2	Q3	Q4	Total
Actual	1417	4565	2146		8130
Target	1156	2948	2948	2948	10000
Previous Year	0	700	1784	0	2484

5. The museum shop has continued to perform well throughout year. Takings in Q2 and Q3 totalled £7777. Takings since January appear to be strong, in large part this is due to the Bob Mazzer exhibition. The museum is likely to exceed the income target for this financial year. There were 12 weddings in 2021 and there are currently 10 weddings booked for 2022. The number of private hires are picking up slowly.

Projects

6. The *What's in the Box?* project came to end in January. The final strand with people seeking sanctuary featured the British Museum Spotlight Loan: *Crossings: community and refuge* and Festival of Sanctuary in September. The project achieved its aims and has led to the museum developing a successful model of community working. In total, 66 participants took part in 150 session and co-produced 23 creative outputs such as exhibitions, videos and workshops. Project outputs were attended or viewed by 83997 people. In addition, 3029 objects were documented and 6514 accession register entries transcribed and 22 objects accessioned.
7. Participant, volunteer and visitor feedback has been overwhelmingly positive:
 - "My time volunteering at the museum is a wonderful opportunity to do something for myself with interesting, supportive people in a lovely, safe environment" – volunteer
 - "I enjoyed trying to find all the crabs limbs and trying to match them to the right crabs" – participant

- “We gained so much from the time spent at the museum. It was such fun. [Staff] were so welcoming. I'm so grateful for the way the experience enriched our lives” – participant
 - “I enjoyed the input from Eleanor and Kasey, the input from EJ and the transgender museum information, the workshop with Dinos, the filming with Alice and Kamila. I found the information and discussions on labelling objects fascinating” – participant
 - “An amazingly powerful piece of work. As an oral historian (and a celebrant) people’s life memories and hidden voices are so very important to me. What a truly valuable project” – visitor
 - “I saw the exhibition today and its one of the best I have seen at this wonderful museum. So many beautiful pieces. It made me reflect and I left feeling uplifted and hopeful” – visitor
8. *What’s in the Box?* was funded through an Arts Council England National Lottery Project Grant. Funding has been secured to continue the work started in this project for the next two years. The final project evaluation is appended to this report.
 9. Work is now underway on the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project called *Democratising the collections for the 21st Century*. It is a continuation of the collections-based community engagement work started through *What’s in the Box?* This project has four strands working with home education, LGBTQI+, people seeking sanctuary and disabled people. The D/deaf disabled and neurodiverse strand is yet to start as it’s linked to *Curating for Change*.
 10. Home education activity is focused on the archaeology collection. The museum’s home education group are currently investigating the collection and making their own creative responses to them. Work is just beginning on a second element of activity where participants have the opportunity to carry out their own excavations in a community archaeology project.
 11. The Queer Heritage Collective is working with the Museum of Transology and Home Live Art to research and develop a guided tour of the museum. The tour will focus on stories about LGBTQI+ people, art, culture and history in Hastings. This will continue the work that was begun during *What’s in the Box?* to improve on a more permanent basis the visibility of LGBTQI+ history and experience in the museum.
 12. We are continuing to work with families seeking sanctuary through The Refugee Buddy Project. Artist-facilitated workshops started in February and are running until June. The participants are creating a patchwork. The completed work will be shown at the museum during Refugee Week in June. In a complementary strand of activity, several individuals from the refugee and migrant community will receive training in conducting and audio recording interviews with fellow refuge-seekers, whose testimony will then be added to the collections.
 13. The *Curating for Change* project is now underway. 17 people applied for the paid Curatorial Fellowships, of which five were invited to interview. The successful candidate, Jack Guy, will start in April and will be with us for 18 months. He will be supporting the curators and on *Democratising the collections project activity* and the *Jason & His Argonauts* exhibition. He is undertaking on-the-job training for a qualification in Cultural Heritage as well.
 14. The deadline to complete the Respond and Reimagine Grant from the Art Fund activity has been extended to the end of March. The grant is allowing us to develop blended learning workshops and loans boxes and update the museum’s website. We are continuing to roll out the workshops. A series of teacher CPD events are taking place throughout March to help support this. The blended workshops and digital loans boxes are also now complete. The website is continuing to be developed. The beta version is now being tested.

15. *Hastings Digital Museum* has now drawn to a close. It was funded by a National Lottery Project Grant from Arts Council and public funding from Art Fund. The programme combined online with in-person activities. The final report is appended. Over the course of 2021 we:
- worked with 17 creative organisations and practitioners
 - produced more than 70 workshops, sessions, activities, exhibitions and videos
 - reached 201193 unique individual users on the museum’s Facebook, Twitter and Instagram accounts
 - had 1064 people participate in online activities or attended in-person Covid-secure events.
16. Feedback has been extremely positive with the project achieving the aims to reduce isolation and give people something meaningful to do:
- “You’ve done a great job and lifted many spirits in this very odd time. Thanks again and God bless you all” – participant
 - “Really enjoyed the project. I do Scrapbooking but otherwise nothing ‘arty’” – participant
 - “I think because it was from 'outside' I was keen to do it and liked the deadline too as I am a great one for putting things off till another day” – participant
 - I’ve loved doing it. we miss St Lens & Hastings so much, and it’s so lovely to be a part of something that connects to the Hastings community! – participant.
17. The museum development planning continues to move at pace. The interpretation and business planning consultant team have been joined by Tate+Co as lead architects. They are working in partnership with Huntley Cartwright Chartered Quantity Surveyors, Engenuiti (Structural and Civil Engineering), Steensen Varming (Mechanical and Electrical Engineering and Sustainable Design) and Adams Habermehl (Landscape Architecture) to develop the agricultural and costs plans for the development. Plans are being developed to meet National Lottery Heritage Fund requirements for capital developments. Public consultation on the plans begins on 22 March for two weeks. This includes a display at the museum and online. The plans will be finessed using consultation feedback and be complete by the end of April.
18. The museum is working with Explore the Arch on *Marie in the Margins*. It is a collaborative, multi-disciplinary exploration of one of Britain’s earliest known female authors, Marie de France. Writing in the 12th century she was a poet and wrote verse narratives on romantic and magical themes. The project draws links between Marie and her contemporaries and female artists working in Hastings’ cultural sector today. It is focused on participatory engagement with families and young people through a diverse programme of activities which will unlock hidden histories for a wider range of people and bring them into contact with the 1066 story.
19. We are supporting [Writing Around the Kids](#) by Anna Jefferson and Sam Johnson. This project has invited mothers of young children to participate in a series of creative writing workshops. The sessions are online and for writers of all abilities. The project culminates with an exhibition at the museum. The project is fully subscribed. In addition we are also working on the *Museum of Us*, a pop-up traveling museum which celebrates the people of Hastings and St Leonards. We will host a display based on what’s collected later in the year.

Exhibitions and events

20. *Crossings: community and refuge* opened on 10 September 2021 and ran until 2 January 2022. It was a British Museum Spotlight Loan and part of a British Museum National Programmes tour. It featured the Lampedusa Cross and Issam Kourbaj's poignant boat artwork, 'Dark Water, Burning World'. The exhibition included 12 artworks created by the local people seeking sanctuary community through the *What's in the Box?* project and also 10 objects for the museum collection. Local artists contributed postcard-size artwork to the exhibition, which were sold to raise funds for Hastings Community of Sanctuary. The exhibition attracted local and regional interest and received a great deal of positive feedback.
21. *Bob Mazzer In Camera, a retrospective* (20 January – 17 April 2022) opened as planned in January. It features his 50 favourite images from his extensive archive. The exhibition is receiving a lot of attention and has featured in *The Guardian*, *Daily Mail*, *Grazia* and *BBC South East Today*. The exhibition has been extended due to popular demand and will now close in June.
22. Our next exhibition, *Jason & His Argonauts* (July-August 2022), explores themes of disability through brightly coloured, humorous art works, statues and inflatables. Designed by Jason Wilsher-Mills and disabled communities around the UK this exhibition is the launch point for our *Curating for Change* activity and developing work with local D/deaf, disabled and neurodiverse people. Jason Wilsher-Mills is a disabled digital artist who has exhibited widely, both internationally and in the UK. His work celebrates disability, his working-class heritage, popular culture from his childhood and the life experiences of other disabled people. It is a 20-21 Visual Arts Centre Touring Exhibition.
23. Following this, our winter exhibition will be the second biannual Hastings Open (September-December). An open call will be made shortly for entries. A panel of practicing artists, gallerists and arts organisations will review entries and select the final hang. We are encouraging entries from UK-based artists working in painting, drawing, printmaking, photography, film, sculpture and illustration. This time we will not accept international entries due to new customs rules.
24. On the walkway, *Together We Draw* (20 January – 5 June) has been curated by St Leonards-based artist Sue Tilley. It features a selection of artworks created during lockdown by local people taking part in her online drawing class and interview show on Isolation Station supported by Home Live Art. The exhibition has proven popular and was shown on BBC Breakfast.
25. The events programme continues to be hindered by Covid-19. However, there have been a number of successful events held since September. These include the Sanctuary Festival, organised by Hastings Community of Sanctuary and the launch of The Buddy Refugee Project's education report detailing experiences of refugee children in schools and their annual fundraising Christmas Fair. A fuller programme is being organised for April onwards.

Schools and learning

26. Museum & Schools programme funding was awarded for a further 12 months. This means the partnership between Hastings and Bexhill museums will continue until at least March 2023. The programme funding is given by the Department for Education and administered by Arts Council England. This year no targets have been set by either body for school visits or Arts Award due to continuing impact of the pandemic.

27. Despite the variable approach schools are taking to visits we are continuing to work with significant number of young people. In Quarter 3 the new learning officer booked activities for 1304 pupils for the period January to March 2022. Bookings for the Lego innovation studio are picking up again as well; 330 pupils are booked to take part in workshops in March.
28. There has also been an increase in the number of educational projects that we are involved in. [Midnight in the Museum](#), developed by Kate Hulme and Sarah Haines and funded by Arts Council England, is a storytelling and wellbeing project for children aged 6-9. Six fictional stories related to objects in the museum have been created along with supporting creative, fun and well-being activities. The stories cover anger management, understanding grief and learning to love yourself. The project has a dedicated website for people to access and download the activities and also a free subscription service for families to receive *Midnight at the Museum* packs to their homes. 200 families signed up for the postal subscription and additional activities packed were translated for families seeking sanctuary.
29. We are also supporting the *Choose2bKind* project. It aims to equip children of different levels of literacy to approach reading with confidence while teaching about kindness and ways to deal with bullying. Using the museum the children will have the opportunity to take part in workshops including collaging and theatre/drama activities. The results of which will feature in the Town Explores A Book festival in April.
30. The Loan Boxes have been proved extremely popular during January as we have engaged remotely with 421 students through them. The most popular topics have been the Stone Age, Victorians, Ancient Greece and the First World War. The Loan Boxes Collection is undergoing a process of updating.
31. We are delivering 90 Discover Arts Awards this year through projects like Choose2bKind. We are in discussion with East Sussex College the possibility of delivering Golden Awards to some of their students and continue to support one Silver Arts Award.
32. A series of teacher Continuing Professional Development (CPD) events has been organised for March. Each session celebrates a different aspect of the work that has been done onsite and online that promotes innovation and breaking barriers while teaching teachers to use those resources in their class and feel comfortable to come back to the museum. Details of the sessions are available [online](#).
33. The museum has been invited to partner with [Johns Hopkins University](#) (Washington, US) as part of their MA Museum Studies this semester (Jan-May 2022). Their core module explores community engagement approaches and techniques. A small group of students will use the museum as a case study with support of the museum team. John Hopkin's museum studies course is the most popular in the US.
34. The Learning Policy is due for reviewing. An updated version for 2022-27 is appended. It contains no material changes to the currently policy that has been in place since 2019.

Volunteering

35. The collections and engagement team been working with volunteers on the inventory of archaeology, social history and decorative arts collections. Through their inventory work and ongoing transcription of the registers, they continue to improve the integrity of object

data, enhancing the collections' capacity to be used, reviewed, and developed through contemporary collecting and rationalization. To date, 7800 entries from the registers have been transcribed. We are also trialling volunteer opportunities to support the schools and learning programme.

36. The Volunteer Policy is due for reviewing. An updated version for 2022-27 is appended. It contains no material changes to the currently policy that has been in place since 2019.

Building

37. The building has undergone planned maintenance including a new fire risk assessment and emergency system testing. Storm Eunice damaged the roof of the bungalow necessitating emergency repairs. A number of smaller leaks in the main building roof have also been attended to since January.

Covid-19 Secure Measures

38. The council has retained a number of Covid-19 secure measures. Currently, visitors are still required to wear face coverings unless exempt. There has been an increase in people refusing to wear masks and complaining in person and online about the rule. The council's Covid task group are continuing to review the measures that are in place.

Options

38. To accept this report and the Learning and Volunteer Policy updates and recommend approval by Cabinet.

Timetable of Next Steps

39. 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 2022	Museum and Cultural Development Manager
Approval by Cabinet	Cabinet	April 2022	Museum and Cultural Development Manager

Wards Affected

All

Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score: 43

Have you used relevant project tools?: Y

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

Equalities and Community Cohesiveness	Y
Crime and Fear of Crime (Section 17)	N
Risk Management	Y
Environmental Issues & Climate Change	N
Economic/Financial Implications	N
Human Rights Act	N
Organisational Consequences	N
Local People's Views	Y
Anti-Poverty	Y
Legal	N

Additional Information

What's in the Box Evaluation Report
Hastings Digital Museum Final Report
HMAG Learning Policy
HMAG Volunteer Policy

Officer to Contact

Officer Damian Etheraads
Email damian.etheraads@hastings.gov.uk
Tel 01424 451151