

Report To: Museum Committee

Date of Meeting: Monday, 5 September 2022

Report Title: Museum Update Report

Report By: Damian Etheraads, 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 summaries the work of the museum since the last formal Museum Committee meeting. It includes an update from the last informal meeting in June.

Informal Meeting Update

2. The last informal meeting of the Museum Committee took place on 13 June 2022 at the museum. The committee met with members of the museum team and were updated on their work.
3. The meeting was mostly taken up by discussions about widening representation on the committee. This is one of the central aims of the service's 2022-25 business plan. Discussions are continuing and the outcomes of the discussion will form the basis of the Museum Committee Reorganisation 2022 report.
4. The committee received an update on the [Curating for Change](#) project from Jack Guy, the Curatorial Fellow for the project, and Eleanor Lanyon, Collections and Engagement Curator (Human History). They discussed the progress being made on improving accessibility and representation of people who identify as D/deaf, disabled or neurodivergent within the museum's programming and collections. They spoke about their plans to introduce a Disability Heritage Co-production group over the next few months.
5. Phil Hadland, Collections and Engagement Curator (Natural Sciences) provided an overview on *The Dinosaur on Your Doorstep* project. This new project has been made possible by funding from the [Royal Society](#). This outreach project will see the museum work with a local artist and families living in Hollington to explore the dinosaur history of the area and create a public artwork. The project is being delivered with the support of a number of local partners including Optivo and Fresh Visions.

Visitors and income

6. In April the museum's opening hours were extended again. The museum is now open longer than it was before Covid started. Public opening hours are now Tuesday to Saturday 10.00am-5.00pm and 11.00am-4.30pm on Sundays year round. On Mondays the museum is closed to the public but still welcomes school groups, volunteers and private events. The growth in visitor numbers we started see towards the end of 2021-22 has continued into the first quarter of this year.

| Visitors | Q1 | Q2 | Q3 | Q4 | Total |
|---------------|------|------|------|------|-------|
| Actual | 6711 | | | | |
| Target | 5500 | 6500 | 5000 | 4500 | 21500 |
| Previous Year | 1417 | 4565 | 2146 | 4142 | 12272 |

7. The museum shop has had a strong start to the year. This has largely been driven by sales of merchandise from the Bob Mazzer's exhibition. Maintaining a good shop offer that promotes local producers and reduces single use plastics and throwaway toys will be integral to maintaining good levels of visitor spend. A new POS till system has been introduced which has greatly improved the speed of processing transactions and customer experience.

8. There have been eight wedding ceremonies this year so far and six ceremonies booked for the remainder of the year. The wedding offer will be reviewed again this year to make sure that it is competitive and compelling for people looking to hire the venue. There has also been a number of private hires and event bookings this financial year. However, the limitation of the building mean we are not able to capitalise on as many enquiries as we would like to.
9. Submission to the *Hastings Open 2022* exhibition has generated £4,500 in entry fees. This will help offset the costs of the museum's exhibition programme over the next year. The museum website has been upgraded and can now process payments for events and bookings. Once fully operational we will no longer be depending on third party sites and be subject to their added costs.

Projects

10. Work is now underway on the Esmée Fairbairn Collections Fund project called *Democratising the collections for the 21st Century*. This project has four strands working with home education, LGBTQI+, people seeking sanctuary and disabled people. The D/deaf disabled and neurodiverse strand is starting later as it's linked to *Curating for Change*.
11. Home educating families have been exploring local archaeology using a brand new resource called *Be an Archaeologist*. The resource takes the form of a kit designed to be used carry out a small archaeological dig in a back garden or similar space. For four weeks, each family group made their own test pit in the same manner that a professional archaeologist would. The aim was to gain an understanding of how to do an archaeological dig, whilst also learning about the archaeology to be found on their doorstep.
12. We have continued working with individuals seeking sanctuary through The Refugee Buddy Project. Artist-facilitated workshops ran from February to June, exploring basic sewing, embroidery and patchwork techniques and taking inspiration from the Chilean traditional of arpilleras. Each participant created their own patchwork using photographs, lettering and scraps of material to tell something of their personal experiences of loss, home, identity and making a new life. Taking a common thread running through all the works created, the group created an exhibition entitled *Where are you really from?* which opened in time for Refugee Week in June. In a complementary second 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 Queer Heritage Collective have been working on a queer history museum map and tour – the first ever at Hastings Museum & Art Gallery. They have identified existing objects within the collection and have put forward ideas for new objects and art commissions to tell new stories. The map is scheduled to go into production towards the end of the year. The tentative launch date in February to coincide with LGBT+ history month. In August, the group hosted a public event for Hastings Pride month to share their research, collecting feedback and further stories to consider.
14. *Curating for Change* is now underway. A group of individuals with lived experience of disability, deafness and/or neurodivergence have been recruited to form a Disability History Co-Production Group. The group will be researching disability history in the museum's collections and re-examining other collection material through a disability lens. There will also be the opportunity to learn interviewing and audio-recording skills to capture the

experiences of local residents who are disabled, deaf or neurodivergent in the second part of the project. The interviewees will work with a professional photographer/film-maker to create self-portraits which convey their whole identity, rather than concentrating solely on their disability. Their stories and portraits will become part of the museum collections. The two strands of the project will come together in an exhibition on the Walkway in Spring/Summer 2023 which will highlight stories of disability relating to Hastings' past and present.

15. *Marie in the Margins* is a partnership between, Explore the Arch, Historic England (Battle Abbey) and us linked with the International Congress on Medieval Studies. It is about Marie de France, one of the earliest known female writers and poets. The project has seen local school children visiting the museum and taking part in a range of workshops and activities. It also includes school holiday activity and on-site installation both in the museum and Battle. The video installation is on display in alongside a display of everyday archaeology from the period at the museum.
16. *The Dinosaur on your doorstep* is inspired by our collections and local dinosaur stories. The project is for families living in Hollington and will result in a public artwork being commissioned. Six outreach events have taken place in Hollington with local residents. A mosaic artwork celebrating the local dinosaur discoveries has been completed in installed in the Woody Wood Community Garden. We have worked with partners including Optivo, Surviving the Streets, and Fresh Visions on this activity. It has been funded by a grant from the Royal Society.
17. A virtual visit by members of the Blackfoot community in Alberta, Canada was facilitated on 22 April. The museum team were able to share Blackfoot Nation material from the collection with the source communities. The Blackfoot objects were predominantly collected by Clare Sheridan in 1937. Her trip to the US/Canada is documented in her book 'Redskin Interlude', 1938 and includes stories of items she was given by named individuals – descendants of whom were amongst the community group at the virtual visit.
18. The 'virtual visit' was made possible as part of an Arts and Humanities Research Council-funded project [Concepts Have Teeth](#) which is digitising Blackfoot collections in UK museums. Staff from University of the Arts London, University of Glasgow and University of Southampton digitised selected items from the museum's collection using a variety of techniques. The data collected will be used to 'build' 3D virtual objects for a website hosting a digital collection of 19th and 20th century Blackfoot items currently held in UK museums: [Mootookakio'ssin: Distant Awareness \(mootookakiossin.ca\)](#).
19. Information gathered during the 'virtual visit' through conversations will be added to the objects' catalogue entries. Digital assets created during the visit have been shared with the museum. The Concepts Have Teeth team have secured further funding to extend the project, and will facilitate another 'virtual visit' in Autumn 2022 or Spring 2023.
20. We are supporting *Writing Around the Kids* a group that works with mothers of young child to write creatively. Over a series of online workshops the local Hastings' group has mothers produced work based on the collections at the museum. Their writing are now on display alongside the objects in the galleries.
21. The museum collaborated with the Black-led Artist Consortium and Home Live Art on a funding application to the Freelands Foundation's [Space to Dream Fund](#). The Black-led Artists Consortium is a group of ten arts organisations, galleries and artists currently living and working in Hastings. The proposal was to create an ambitious new model for how

artists and grassroots organisations work together with established institutions to better reflect the contemporary demographics of the town. Freelands Foundation invited us to submit a full application to the fund, one of 15 organisations asked to do so nationally. Sadly we did not receive the funding in the end.

22. The bulk of the museum development planning work is now complete. The consultants, Imagemakers, Focus and Tate+Co work on this phase of the project has drawn to an end. The next stage of the project is to secure formal council backing for the project. Major capital funding will need to be secured for any further activity to take place.

Exhibitions and events

23. *Jason & His Argonauts* (9 July – 4 September 2022) opened with our first public exhibition opening event since December 2019. The exhibition features fun, vibrant and thought-provoking artworks by Jason Wilsher-Mills, one of the UK's leading disabled artists. Taking inspiration from his ancient Greek namesake, Jason worked with disabled communities around the UK, to explore themes of disability to co-create this amazing exhibition. The exhibition tells stories from these communities, mixing them with Jason's own biography, creating new stories and myths. At the centre of the exhibition is Jason's *Changing Places Argonaut* – a 3.5m long inflatable sculpture which relates people's stories from the Changing Places movement. It is accompanied by Jason's vibrant, hyper-joyful digital lightbox paintings and the *Corby Angel* interactive digital artwork, which dances, spins and responds to hand gestures. It is a 20-21 Visual Arts Centre Touring Exhibition.
24. This will be followed by *Hastings Open 2022* (1 October 2022 – 29 January 2023) our second open submission exhibition. Digital submissions closed at the end of June and the final selection will be complete by middle of September. This time we did not accept international entries to avoid problems with new customs rules and procedures. We received over 400 entries totalling some 1100 art works. The exhibition will feature paintings, drawings, prints, photographs, films, sculptures and illustrations by UK-based – many of them living and working locally. We would like to thank the judges, Angela Childs, Ellen Prebble, Euan Ropers, Fiona Denning, Kenton Lowe, Laetitia Yhap and Patricia Finnegan for their help and support.
25. On the walkway, [*Where are you really from?*](#) (18 June – 24 July 2022) featured 18 arpillera patchworks made by local people with experience of immigration and seeking refuge, and the volunteers who support them in building new lives here in Hastings. Arpillera is a form of patchwork that originated in Chile. The exhibition was collaboration between the museum and The Refugee Buddy Project, funded through the Esmée Fairbairn Collection Fund administered by the Museums Association.
26. *Follow that duck into Hastings Museum* (30 July – 4 September 2022) supported the Follow That Duck Trail raising funds for St Michael's Hospice. The exhibition featured collages by ten local schools who helped create small ducking for the trail. Following this the walkway will welcome an exhibition about Lady Brassey's photos.
27. In addition to the temporary displays and installations mentioned above there have also been a number of others around the museum since March. These include the *Museum of us* in the Brassey Lobby, Issam Kourbaj's *Imploded, burnt, turned to ash*, in the ground floor walkway, the Home School' Lego display in the Story of Hastings, and *Marine Mammals* in the Natural Science gallery.

28. The events programme was restarted in April. It has taken a few months to build up but is now re-established and growing again. The summer holidays have been an especially busy time with a range of family-friendly and low cost events taking place. The Lego Labs and Circus School proved popular with families. We also partnered with Explore the Arch and Create Music to offer a diverse programme.
29. In addition to the on-site programme we have been trailing outreach events. Photographs from the local history collection have been used to prompt conversation and memories with older people local older people at risk of isolation and loneliness. The coffee mornings have been organised by Optivo at local community centres. So far, the curator and local studies volunteers arranged photographs for the sessions in themes such as Place and Landmarks, Events and Celebrations, and Homes.

Schools and learning

30. School visits have continued to rebound after a slow start. Since April we have welcomed 764 pupils. This is 52.8% above our Quartey target. This year's targets are 2500 students, 50 schools and 50 Arts Awards.
31. The Museum Learning Officer has been busy refreshing and updating our onsite workshops for schools. These is now a greater range of topics being offered than ever before. Some of the new and updated workshops developed in-house include: Hastings & St Leonards' Landmarks; Grey Owl; Marianne North; Romans; Mysterious Maya; North Americans and Recycling.
32. In addition to these in-house workshops the Museum & Schools programme has funded the development of workshops by specialist providers on the Victorians, Natural History and Literacy workshop. As each of the workshops is tested and finalised they are being added to the [website](#) for booking by schools and home education groups.
33. The Lego Innovation Studio continues to attract strong interest. The workshops are being reviewed and Lego is now being more widely used throughout the museum learning offer. For example the new recycling work uses the WEDO equipment and the Hastings & St Leonards' Landmarks workshop uses Coding Express.
34. School feedback continues to be overwhelmingly positive:
- "I asked the children their opinion, they said it was perfect and lots of fun"
 - "The children were all very engaged with their learning and the way the programme worked enabled children to work independently learning through exploration communicating with one another and making connections from prior learning. Fabulous workshop, thank you"
 - "A lot of care and thought had gone into the delivery of this workshop and the children gained so much from it"
35. Loan boxes use has declined as schools have been eager to visit us on site. Nevertheless, they have been used by 226 children since April. A new loan box has been developed at the request of Hastings Wild Things Project. This new, Bones Box, is now available for use by schools, groups and home educating families. It was also good to see the feedback form the Brownies after using our new Archaeology box.
36. In addition to this we have met and exceed our Arts Awards target for this year already. We are currently putting 88 young people through their Discover Awards. Similarly, a number of improvements have been made to our on-gallery learning officer. New interactive elements,

such books, costumes and toys, have been added to enrich the galleries. These have been warmly received by visitors.

37. The museum's work with Johns Hopkins University Museum Studies course has successfully drawn to an end. The museum supported the students in developing community based activities to that benefit local people. This is resulted in three be-spoke programmes/activities that are ready for the museum to adopt to improve outreach and engagement.

Volunteering

38. We are very grateful to our volunteers. They are continuing to support the team and deliver on a range of activities. Since March volunteers have been re-boxing and documenting parts of the archaeology and Native North American collections. They have also been digitising bomb damage records from World War Two; inventorying the Local Studies Room and cataloguing photographs from Hastings Observer in the 1980s-2000s.

Building

39. There have been relatively few building actions so far this year. Regular maintained and service checks have been undertaken. Repairs of the bungalow roof were completed in April. There is some work required on the fabric of the building especially on the brick work and stone surrounds.
40. The museum was broken into in the early hours of Sunday 14th August, and some cash from the donations box, and a small quantity of items from the museum shop, were taken. Police forensic officers attended, and images were captured on CCTV, which the police have. We continue to work with the police on their investigation. Nothing from the collection was taken. We have put in place enhanced security measures.

Staffing

41. Eleanor Lanyon, Collections and Engagement Curator (Human History), is moving on to work on a local engagement project elsewhere in the county; Eleanor has been a real asset over the past three years, and we are very grateful for what she has done. We wish her well in her new role.

Covid-19 Secure Measures

42. The council reduced its Covid-19 secure measures. The council's Covid task group are continuing to review the measures that are in place. The museum continues to encourage use of hand sanitiser and social distancing.

Options

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

Public Exemption

44. This report contains no exempt information

Timetable of Next Steps

45. 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 | September 2022 | Museum and Cultural Development Manager |
| Approval by Cabinet | Cabinet | October 2022 | Museum and Cultural Development Manager |

Wards Affected

All Wards

Policy Implications

Reading Ease Score: 47.6

Have you used relevant project tools?: Yes

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

Hastings Museum & Art Gallery in figures 2018-2021

Officer to Contact

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