

WELWYN HATFIELD BOROUGH COUNCIL  
SOCIAL OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY COMMITTEE – 6 APRIL 2016  
REPORT OF THE DIRECTOR (FINANCE AND OPERATIONS)

**MUSEUM SERVICE ANNUAL REPORT 2015-16**

**1 Executive Summary**

- 1.1 This purpose of this report is to provide this committee with an overview and annual summary of the Museum Service, which is located across two sites at Mill Green in Hatfield and at the Roman Bath House in Welwyn. These sites are approximately five miles apart from each other.
- 1.2 The Museum Service currently employs three full-time staff and a further four part-time staff. This staff team is supported by a network of approximately 60 volunteers who are predominantly local residents with a passion and commitment for arts, culture, education and heritage. There is also an active Friends of the Museum Group and a Mill Green Renewable Energy Trust, which was formerly a Mill Trust who assisted with the operation of the 18<sup>th</sup> century water mill at the Mill Green site.
- 1.3 The Museum Service has experienced a challenging year in delivering a broad range of community and educational services in the borough. In terms of the activities and events programme, many of these were adversely impacted by inclement weather over 2015-16 which meant some had to be scaled back or cancelled completely. More significantly, the study area located above the store room at Mill Green was put out of use in November 2015 following clear fire safety advice from the County's Fire Prevention Office and from Chubb Fire and Security and not to use it for any public meetings or events.
- 1.4 The impact of the loss of the study area has been detrimental not only to the education programme delivered on site, but also in lost income opportunities derived from school visits, corporate hires, craft workshops and corporate presentations. The Friends Group are also unable to deliver any of their talks at this venue. It is hoped a solution to the loss of the study area can be found over 2016-17.

**2 Recommendation**

- 2.1 That this committee notes the content of this annual report for the Museum Service and provide any comments or other feedback to the General Manager and Head of Service.

**3 Explanation**

- 3.1 The focus of the Museum Service over 2015-16 is summarised here in the key areas of education; special events; exhibitions; collections; the work of the Friends Group; and other partnerships such as the Mill Green Renewable Energy Trust
- 3.2 Education
  - 3.2.1 The impact of the loss of the study area is being felt despite the new and creative ways in delivering taught sessions without the use of this area. However in only being able to take one school class at a time, when transport costs are impacting on schools and there being no room in which primary school children can have their lunch during the colder months, this is leading to a slowdown in bookings. The Education Officer is

currently only contracted to work for three days per week, so there is no real resource available to offer outreach sessions in local schools.

- 3.2.2 The demand for the new national curriculum topics of pre-history and Roman themed educational sessions has been met by the Museum Service over 2015-16, and is generally well received by visiting schools. The Roman Bath House celebrated its fortieth year of being open to the public in its subterranean vault under the A1(M) in May 2015, and it has seen an increase in school visits. Combined visits to this site along with the Mill Green site have been popular, and the hire of a scout hut in Welwyn village has partly helped in mitigating for the loss of the study area for taught sessions. But not all schools are happy with this arrangement if they cannot also see the water mill in action as part of their visit.
- 3.2.3 Taught sessions for schools are enhanced by pre-history and Roman loans boxes which come complete with lesson plans for teachers to use. These are available for hire either before or after visits, or on a standalone basis if this is what the school prefers.
- 3.2.4 The Museum Service continues to welcome research students from the University of Hertfordshire and other places of study to make use of the archive and collections which assist them in their academic studies. Work has begun with the University of Hertfordshire looking at STEM topics (Science, Technology, Engineering and Math) for older secondary pupils in a more practical way. This initiative is currently on hold with the loss of the study area, but it may be able to continue with an exhibition project in the meantime.

### 3.3 Special Events

- 3.3.1 The weather over the summer, autumn and winter months sent rain and high winds to this area in the wake of the many high profile and named storms hitting this country. This impacted on both visitor numbers and income associated with the activities and events programme. Almost all of the event days after Vintage Day in July 2015 were affected to some degree.
- 3.3.2 The 2015-16 programme was primarily one of consolidation and built on new events developed in the previous two years. It comprised the following:
- i. Little Diggers at the Welwyn Roman Baths.
  - ii. Museums at Night – a Spring Watch type event over two days in partnership with local countryman Peter Oakenfull and bat specialist Roger Havard.
  - iii. Experimental Dig – with the Welwyn Young Archaeology Club at the Welwyn Roman Baths.
  - iv. Fortieth Anniversary Events at Welwyn Roman Baths including a presentation evening with dignitaries marking Tony Rook’s contribution to the site.
  - v. A Roman fun day event at the Welwyn Roman Baths.
  - vi. Summer Garden Parties at Mill Green for the Mayor, the Mixed Group, a private garden wedding reception and a separate birthday party.
  - vii. A Classic Car and Vintage Day attracting a record 700+ visitors in July.
  - viii. Spiced Buns at Easter and three family bread making days in August.
  - ix. A Teddy Bear Fun Day in August (weather affected).
  - x. A Heritage Open Day combined with a Murphy Radio Day and an Autumn Craft Day (weather affected).
  - xi. A Family Halloween Event at the end of October (weather affected).
  - xii. A Victorian Christmas Fair at the end of November (weather affected).
  - xiii. New Year Wassail event in early January – this was unfortunately cancelled completely due to high winds and heavy rain.

In addition to this, new cookery courses were added to the food programme with new events for Indian cooking and pasta making.

The Museum Service was also out and about over 2015 taking its services into the local community. This included attendance at events such as the national Play Day in Stanborough Park and other fetes, festivals and food fairs in the borough.

### 3.4 Exhibitions

- 3.4.1 The service continues to offer Gallery One for hire to local artists on a four weekly basis, and local schools also use this area to exhibit practical course work. In December 2015 this space became the Christmas Pop Up Shop for a second year selling seasonal goods hand crafted by talented museum volunteers alongside donated bric-a-brac items. The proceeds were donated to the service by all of the volunteers involved. Lighting in the three galleries was also upgraded in January 2016 to significantly improve the lux levels in all of them.
- 3.4.2 Display cases within the Welwyn Garden City library are also used by the service to exhibit items from the collection, and these are rotated on a regular basis by the Curator. It is essential that as much of the local collection as possible is on display to the public. This is also central to the Museum Accreditation status with the Arts Council.

### 3.5 Collections

- 3.5.1 The Museum Curator and the part-time Documentation Officer continue to work with the dedicated museum volunteers to collate, document and interpret the current collection of around 35,000 objects and photographs. This includes a rolling programme to improve the quality of digitised descriptions for online access and digitising more images and objects in the collection. The Resource Room at Mill Green, open on a Thursday and operated by volunteers, is kept busy helping members of the public and organisations with their many enquiries.

### 3.6 Friends Group

- 3.6.1 The Group has a steady membership of around 150 local people. They organise talks and visits in the area on local history, heritage and archaeology as a benefit to their membership. They also continue to support the work of the Museum Service by grant funding to help with exhibitions and the purchase of new objects for education projects consistent with their constitution.
- 3.6.2 The Group also manage Mill Green's Cream Teas service on Sundays and Bank Holidays from Easter Sunday through to the end of October. In 2015, working with a reduced number of tea room volunteers, they raised £3,000 from the tea room. This income was supplemented again last year by the involvement of the Virtual School, which is a County Council service for young people leaving care. They operated the Miller's Teas Café three days a week from July to the end of August. This is popular with our visitors, and gives those who participate in this project a taste of adult working life with the public in a catering operation. A small donation is provided to the Museum Service from this at the end of each season.
- 3.6.3 There is a recognised commercial demand for the provision of refreshments at Mill Green which cannot be met by our volunteers or the current model of the Sunday Cream Teas operation. In 2015 a Pop-Up Kitchen was trialled on a freelance basis on the children's school holiday activity days and it was popular with visitors. Through posts to social media it attracted visitors to come for lunch which boosted the number of children participating in the holiday activities. An evaluation is currently underway across the different models trialled, but each one will have staffing and financial implications if they are implemented.

### 3.7 Partnerships

3.7.1 The valuable assistance and guidance from many partner organisations is core to the operation of the Museum Service. Following recent grant funding from Affinity Water, a water use project with the University of Hertfordshire will be in development over the coming year. This is expected to reach out to environmental organisations such as the Wildlife Trust, RSPB and Rivers Authority with an emphasis on water conservation.

3.7.2 The Museum Service has been grateful for support over 2015-16 from:

- i. Asda Hatfield - who supported the Family Halloween event again.
- ii. Herts Archives and Local Studies (HALS) - who provided a volunteer in the resource room on a weekly basis and supported some external events.
- iii. Hatfield Town Council - who loaned tables for the Vintage Day.
- iv. Celtic Harmony - who contributed to the pre-history exhibition at Mill Green.
- v. Hertfordshire Association of Museums (HAM) – who provided small grants and ongoing museum help and support.
- vi. SHARE Museums East - who provided free training sessions for staff and volunteers of Accredited Museums and have been working in partnership on the Visitor Insight East project and the Mystery Shopper Scheme.
- vii. Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) - for funding the collaborative Talking New Towns project which is also building the local oral history archive.

### 3.8 Grants

3.8.1 The Museum Service has also been awarded several grants over 2015-16 to further develop the service. These are:

- i. £2,660 from Affinity water for a community project and exhibition working with the University of Hertfordshire and other external partners.
- ii. £400 from SHARE Museums East to reach out to lower income families and train four volunteers to drive the community buses for pick up points on special event days.
- iii. £500 from HAM for new collections management equipment.
- iv. £500 from the Mill Green Renewable Energy Trust for mill maintenance tasks.
- v. £500 from HAM for object conservation.

### 3.9 SHARE Mystery Shopper Scheme

3.9.1 This project has funding until 2018 from the Arts Council to provide the museum and heritage sector with an affordable mystery shopper scheme over six months of the summer to improve customer service. The Museum Manager sits on the steering committee as the voice of the small / medium sized museum services and has helped to develop the scheme into a workable model. It is a peer to peer scheme in order to keep costs low. The data provided over 2015-16 has enable the service to respond quickly to mystery shopper comments from data provided. It also provided evidence for improvement in certain customer service areas and has helped with requests for funding.

3.9.2 Within this scheme each museum or heritage site can be benchmarked each against the other, as customer service is not based upon budgets or the attraction of the collections. The Museum Service provided six Mystery Shoppers to other sites and received six mystery shops at both local sites in return.

## **Implications**

### **4 Legal Implication(s)**

4.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### **5 Financial Implication(s)**

5.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### **6 Risk Management Implications**

6.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### **7 Security & Terrorism Implication(s)**

7.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### **8 Procurement Implication(s)**

8.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### **9 Climate Change Implication(s)**

9.1 There are no direct legal implications arising from the content of this annual report, as it is for information only.

### **10 Link to Corporate Priorities**

10.1 The subject of this report is linked to the council's Corporate Priority to 'maintain a safe and healthy community' and specifically '*to provide for a wide range of leisure covering arts, leisure, culture, fitness and sport*'.

### **11 Equality and Diversity**

11.1 An Equality Impact Assessment (EIA) has not been carried out in connection with this annual report, as it is for information only.

**Name of Author**  
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**March 2016**