

Agenda item:

Title of meeting: Culture Leisure and Sport Decision Meeting

Date of meeting: 11 October 2013

Subject: Cumberland House Update

Report by: Head of City Development and Cultural Services

Wards affected: ALL

Key decision: No

Full Council decision: No

1. Purpose of report

- 1.1** The purpose of the report is to provide an update on the recent work that has taken place at Cumberland House.

2. Recommendations

- 2.1** The improvements to Cumberland House are noted.
- 2.2** The proposed development of the museum's events programme and the increased involvement of volunteers are noted.
- 2.3** The Friends of Cumberland House are thanked for their work on the garden.

3. Background

3.1 Refurbishment

The past 9 months have seen a number of significant changes at Cumberland House. Capital funding has enabled extensive refurbishment of the ground floor, building on previous work undertaken in 2011 to improve access for people with disabilities (especially to the most popular part of the Museum - the Butterfly House). The refurbishment has entailed:

- Removal of the fish tanks and opening up of the main ground floor gallery to create an inviting an open space and reveal the original architectural features of the building
- Creation of a new reception which faces the main entrance
- Improvements to the museum shop
- Re-instating the original staircase
- Introduction of a natural history library (with full lending facilities)

In addition, as structural problems were identified affecting the floor in the gallery containing the Ice Age display (West Wing) this space also had to be stripped out, the issue with the main beams investigated and a solution found and the room refurbished.

3.2 Re-opening

Cumberland House re-opened on 2nd July 2013 with Flights of Fancy a stunning exhibition of children's artwork. Children in Years 3 & 4 at Beacon View Primary Academy in Paulsgrove and Craneswater Junior School in Southsea were inspired by specimens of birds and butterflies from Portsmouth Museums' School Loans Collection. Three classes from Beacon View and one class from Craneswater spent a day each working with a visual artist Eileen White. They looked carefully at the birds and butterflies and interpreted them in drawings, paintings, collages and sculptures. Each class also spent an hour and a half with author Denyse King. They explored the idea of 'flight' and wrote short stories to take the bird specimens on imaginary journeys. The children's artwork and stories plus a selection of bird specimens are currently on show.

3.3 New post

The other major development has seen the appointment of a Development Officer for the Museum. This was one of the recommendations of the Feasibility Study completed in 2012 exploring the pros and cons of transferring the museum to the 3rd sector.

The post is initially for 12 months only (until June 2014) with an emphasis on (1) increasing the involvement of volunteers at Cumberland House and (2) programming and the development of the museum offer (CLS Cabinet Member Report 14 December 2012).

3.4

During the first 3 months the priority of the Development Officer has been the day to day operation of the museum at its busiest time of year. In addition to this , a new programme of family drop-in activities has been introduced , in the 'new' room in the West Wing including bird finger puppet making (to tie in with Flights of Fancy), dinosaur and butterfly colouring (which has made great bunting for decorating the room), display case of mystery natural history objects to identify and new floor puzzles.

Visitors have been asked for their ideas about how we use this space in the future. The Development Officer has also met with staff working in natural history in the city including the Hampshire and Isle of Wight (HIOW) Wildlife Trust, the council's countryside staff and attended a Friends of Cumberland House committee meeting and recruited and trained an initial four new volunteers to support the work of the museum.

3.5 Visitor Feedback

Cumberland House has received over 24,000 visitors since re-opening in early July (ie over two months and 17% up on last year for the same period).

Staff report an overwhelmingly positive response to the changes and the children's work displayed in *Flights of Fancy*. Shop sales are up by 37% compared to the same period last year.

Some concerns have been expressed at the loss of the fish and Ice Age display; however, most visitors seem willing to accept that the museum is a work in progress and are keen to see what happens next! The majority of responses received for the West Wing gallery suggest it is used for natural history displays or activities (ie 50:50).

3.6 Gardening Group

The volunteer gardening group established by the Friends of Cumberland House and Garden meets once a week in the museum garden. The initial group of six has grown to a group of thirty within 18 months. The group includes trainees from "The Beneficial Foundation" who link their time in the garden to an NVQ module and clients from "The You Trust".

The Friends group aims to continue to work collaboratively and invite people and organisations to take the gardening group forward; Southsea Greenhouse, Girl Guiding and Portsmouth Bee Keepers Association are all part of proposed projects for 2014. Projects include the installation of a bee hive in the museum, celebration of the Brownie Centenary and working with Southsea Greenhouse to hold a joint fundraising day and continuation of 'Dig Tuesday'.

3.7 Next Steps

The matrix below provides an outline plan for programming at the museum over the next 9 months - reflecting the priorities identified for the Development Officer and the need to make an impact (to enable officers to make the case for making the post permanent).

The activity programme below will utilise the first floor gallery in the West Wing:

| Activity | When | Audience | Comment |
|--|--------------------------------|----------------------------|---|
| Use of social media to promote museums | ASAP | All | Await okay from Corporate Communications team |
| Museum Tours | October | Adult | Contribution to Over 60s Festival |
| Themed drop-in activities | From Halloween onwards | Families | Emphasis on school holidays |
| Story Time pilot with Library Service | From October onwards, weekdays | Aimed at children aged 4-5 | Themed to reflect what's happening at the museum, with Hungry Caterpillar for June 2014 Insect Week (see below) |
| Xmas evening opening | Xmas Holiday | Families | Opportunity to explore the museum at night + promote the museum shop |
| Recruitment drive for volunteers | January 2014 | Adults, students etc | Volunteers trained and in place for Easter and Summer Hols |
| National Science Week | March 14-23 | Schools | Considering wildlife on your doorstep theme (link with University?) |
| Marine themed activities | Easter (April 7-21) | Families | In partnership with HIOW Wildlife Trust 'Making Waves' project (link with Blue Reef) |
| National Insect Week | June 23-29 | Families | Possible time to launch Friends of CH Beehive project? |

The remaining element of the original refurbishment and redisplay of the main ground floor gallery, is the creation of the new exhibition - An A-Z of Natural History. An initial selection of objects was made by the Collections Manager and this has been refined by the Development Officer who has also considered a rationale for inclusion (eg introduces an animal group under-represented in the current displays or fit with national curriculum). The final programme for the design and installation of the exhibition will be finalised over the coming months'.

4. Reasons for recommendations

4.1 The completed and planned activities described above reflect the approach agreed with the Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport at previous meetings. It was felt that this was an opportune moment to review progress to date and provide outline details of what is proposed during the next 9 months.

5. Equality impact assessment (EIA)

5.1 An equality impact assessment will be required with respect to the delivery of the museum's activity programme to ensure that events are widely accessible (ie and do not just take place in the West Wing Gallery which is on the first floor and not accessible to all).

6. Legal Implications

6.1 There are no legal implications in this report

7. Head of Finance's comments

7.1 The improvement works for Cumberland House have been funded by Asset Management capital budgets and from within the Museums and Records revenue budgets as follows:-

| 2012/13 & 2013/14 Description of expenditure | Amount | Funding |
|--|---------------|---------------------------------|
| Refurbishment works to open up ground floor display/shop and new reception. Re-display of gallery and exhibits | 53,078 | Museum revenue budgets |
| West Wing first floor strengthening and associated works | 31,000 | Asset Management Capital Scheme |
| Total | 84,078 | |

In addition to these works, £87,000 expenditure on the replacement of sections of the roof took place in 2009/2010. These works were funded from within landlord maintenance budgets.

Asset Management capital works on Internal and External Disability access Improvements took place in 2011/12 costing £80,000.

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Signed by:
Stephen Baily
Head of City Development & Cultural Services

Background list of documents: Section 100D of the Local Government Act 1972

The following documents disclose facts or matters, which have been relied upon to a material extent by the author in preparing this report:

| Title of document | Location |
|--------------------------|-----------------|
| None | |

The recommendation(s) set out above were approved/ approved as amended/ deferred/ rejected by Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure and Sport on 11 October 2013.

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Signed by: Cabinet Member for Culture Leisure and Sport