

Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee



Forest Heath
District Council

Minutes of a meeting of the **Extraordinary Overview and Scrutiny Committee** held on **Monday 16 April 2018** at **6.00 pm** at **Palace House, The Mews**, Palace Street, Newmarket, CB8 8EP

Present: **Councillors**

Chairman Simon Cole
Vice Chairman Ruth Bowman J.P.

Chris Barker
John Bloodworth
Brian Harvey

Christine Mason
David Palmer
Reg Silvester

By Invitation:

Andy Drummond, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture

Also in attendance:

Chris Garibaldi, Director of the National Horseracing Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art
Peter Jensen, Chairman of the Home of Horseracing Trust

215. **Substitutes**

There were no substitutes declared.

216. **Apologies for Absence**

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Rona Burt and Nigel Roman.

217. **Public Participation**

There were no questions/statements from the public.

218. **National Horseracing Museum, Newmarket**

[Councillor Ruth Bowman arrived at 6.07pm]

The Chairman of the Overview and Scrutiny Committee wished to thank Chris Garibaldi (Director of the National Horseracing Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art) and Peter Jensen (Chairman of the Home of Horseracing Trust)

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for giving the Committee the opportunity to visit the National Horseracing Museum and for the opportunity to scrutinise the Project.

The Committee then received Report No: OAS/FH/18/009, which provided information on the background to the scrutiny exercise to review the Home of Horseracing Project, now referred to as the National Heritage Centre for Horseracing and Sporting Art, which proposed two objectives for this review:

1. To carry out a routine post implementation scrutiny review of the Council's involvement in the Home of Horseracing Project, a year after its official opening; and
2. To review the National Heritage Centre's future plans and how the Council can assist in their delivery as a partner.

It was proposed that this piece of scrutiny be carried out over two sessions. The first higher priority session being carried out at this meeting, and involving external partners would look at:

- a) Whether the Council's involvement in the project had resulted in the desired objectives?
- b) What role the Council could have in supporting the National Heritage Centre's future plans for growing visitor numbers, in the context of the wider Newmarket Vision?

Once the capital project was formally closed down, a second, internally focused scrutiny session would be held to look at any learning that could be applied to future Council projects.

At this session the review started at 5pm with Scrutiny members being given a tour of the facility and at 6pm the formal Scrutiny Committee commenced with a presentation from the National Heritage Centre and discussions took place between the Committee and partners to explore the following main issues:

1. How had the capital project achieved the original objectives set for it by the partnership?
2. How had the National Heritage Centre performed in its first 18 months against its original business plan?
3. What does the National Heritage Centre's new business plan say?
4. Where does this fit into the Newmarket Vision and the Council's strategic plan?
5. How would the Council be involved in taking this forward, and what specific assistance does the National Heritage Centre need?

The Committee received a detailed presentation from Chris Garibaldi which included information on the context of the project; project partners; where the capital came from to fund the project; work carried out by the three

existing charities; key achievements (including being shortlisted for the 2017 Art Fund Museum of the Year within a few months of opening, and winning Suffolk Museum of the year 2017); visitor numbers; admission tickets; repeat visitors; where visitors came from; gift aid collected on tickets; visitor spend and what it was worth to the local economy; special exhibitions; National Portfolio Organisation status from the Arts Council; fund raising initiatives; the importance of volunteers in running the site and with over 9,000 hours gifted; engagement with the local community; the learning offer; and the focus of the new business plan.

The Committee considered the information provided on the tour and the presentation in detail and asked a number of questions of Chris Garibaldi and Peter Jensen to which comprehensive responses were provided. These included opening times, booking arrangements and support for visitors.

Arising from this questioning and discussion, the Committee acknowledged that the National Heritage Centre (the Centre) was striving to be a world class visitor experience and asked how this would be measured. In response Mr Garibaldi explained this was achieved through external validation. In particular by the national bodies. The map of visitor postcodes highlighted in the presentation also showed how far visitors travelled across the UK to the Centre. He stated that the Centre was more than a museum, it was an experience.

The Chairman of the Committee stated that what the Centre had to offer was outstanding, and asked how they were marketing the Centre as an international product as it was felt that Newmarket was difficult for international travellers to get to. In response Mr Garibaldi informed members that the Centre was using Discover Newmarket and he had recently joined as Board Member on the "Visit Cambridge and Beyond". Cambridge had a tourist management challenge and he was working with the Board through their contacts to develop a visitor triangle (Cambridge, Newmarket and Ely), as well as working with coach companies. He further explained that the Home of Horseracing was helping to support the local economy, in particular through the High Street Redesign Project which was very important as the Centre wanted the High Street in Newmarket to reflect quality. The Newmarket Vision Tourist Group was also looking at how to market Newmarket as a visitor destination.

In response to question raised regarding whether the Centre was looking to become cost neutral, Mr Garibaldi explained that museums were rarely cost neutral and, whilst the Heritage Centre had support from third parties, it received no direct core revenue funding from the local taxpayer. It therefore had to take a commercial approach wherever possible. Notwithstanding this, he felt the Centre was exceptionally good value for money for general visitors and particularly for schools. The Centre provided a complete mixture of lifelong learning and the science offer was proving very popular with schools.

The Chairman of the Committee on behalf of the Committee asked Messrs Garibaldi and Jensen what more the Council could do to help the Centre further? In response they raised three areas where they felt the Council might be able to provide assistance:

- 1) Palace Street: There were concerns about safety issues in Palace Street. It would be a huge advantage to the Centre if Palace Street was pedestrianised or closed to through traffic when the Centre was open, say between 10am and 5pm. The Centre was also keen to understand liability if accidents occurred.

In response the Chairman of the Committee agreed that there needed to be some form of dialogue on traffic calming, perhaps rising bollards. He also stated the Council might be able to help with pre-planning advice/consultation with Suffolk County Council.

Jill Korwin (Director – Forest Heath District Council) advised that Suffolk County Council was doing a road study in the area and the Centre would be a key consideration in the work on the town centre as part of the Newmarket Vision.

- 2) Improved signage in terms of a sign over Palace Street marketing the entrance / directing people to the Centre.
- 3) General marketing support within West Suffolk and specifically road signage outside of Newmarket on the major arterial roads, and within the town particularly to car parks. Currently there were three signs along the A14/A11 which were old, advertising the old museum (Home of Horseracing), and to replace them would cost the Centre around £50,000 per sign.

In response the Chairman suggested that the Council might be able to help negotiate with Suffolk County Council/Highways England regarding the replacement of the signs with the new branding.

Councillor Andy Drummond, Cabinet Member for Leisure and Culture and Mr Jensen informed the Committee that the original idea for the Centre, and setting up the Home of Horseracing Trust, arose after Forest Heath District Council's compulsory purchase of Palace House in the 1990's, and therefore the Council had itself played a key part in the project from start to finish, including the vision of developing a world class museum. Alex Wilson, Director at Forest Heath District Council stated that the project had been an excellent partnership and the fund-raising achievements of the Trust had been phenomenal.

Whilst considering this report, the Committee also wished to discuss the financial contents of the new business plan which was circulated separately to members of the Committee and was available on request from the Heritage Centre. As there was to be detailed discussion of the document which would involve discussion of the financial affairs of a third party, it was proposed, seconded and unanimously **RESOLVED** for these discussions to be held in private session (see Minute Number 220 below) and the press and public were then excluded from the meeting.

Following the conclusion of the discussions in the private session, the press and public were re-admitted to the meeting. Councillor Ruth Bowman then moved the recommendation, this was duly seconded by Councillor Simon Cole and with the vote being unanimous, it was:

RESOLVED

That:

- 1) The Committee **noted** the Council's involvement in the original objectives set by the partnership had been met.
- 2) The Committee would look at how best to progress the areas of assistance requested by the National Heritage Centre and recorded in these minutes.

219. Exclusion of the Press and Public

It was proposed by Councillor Brian Harvey, seconded by Councillor Simon Cole, and with the vote being unanimous, it was

RESOLVED:

That, under Section 100A(4) of the Local Government Act 1972, the press and public be excluded from the meeting for the following item of businesses on the grounds that it involves the likely disclosure of exempt information as prescribed in Part 3 of Schedule 12A of the Local Government Act 1972.

220. National Heritage Centre, Newmarket

The Overview and Scrutiny Committee considered the financial information contained within the new business plan for the Heritage Centre, which was circulated to members of the scrutiny Committee. As this would require the detailed discussion of the finances of a third party, the Committee felt this follow-up conversation to the published information should take place in closed session, since the Heritage Centre was an independent body.

In particular discussions were held on commercial revenue and financial projections and budgets (income and expenditure) through to 2022, to which comprehensive responses were provided.

Once the discussions were concluded in the private session on the new business plan, the meeting then moved back into the open session, where the press and public were re-admitted and the Committee then voted on the recommendations contained within the report (see Minute Number 218 above).

The Meeting concluded at 7.45pm

Signed by:

Chairman