

KEATS HOUSE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 15 May 2018

Minutes of the meeting of the Keats House Consultative Committee held at Guildhall at 1.45 pm

Present

Members:

Graham Packham (Chairman)
Vivienne Littlechild
Steven Bobasch
Bob Hall

Graeme Harrower
Martin Humphery
Jeremy Simons
Karina Dostalova

In Attendance

Officers:

Julie Mayer	- Town Clerk's Department
Bob Warnock	- Superintendent of Hampstead Heath
Rob Shakespeare	- Principal Curator, Keats House
Colin Buttery	- Director of Open Spaces

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Jim Burge of Heath Hurst Road Residents Association and Deputy Wendy Hyde, the newly appointed Deputy Chairman of the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee.

2. MEMBERS' DECLARATIONS UNDER THE CODE OF CONDUCT IN RESPECT OF ITEMS ON THE AGENDA

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

The minutes of the meeting held on 7 November 2017 were approved.

Matters arising

- Members welcomed the new Principal Curator of Keats House; Mr Rob Shakespeare. The Superintendent advised that he had been in contact with the Livery Committee Clerk about their regular newsletter and taking forward marketing opportunities. A Member suggested that, since most Common Councilmen were also Liverymen, it would be prudent to contact all Members of the Court.
- Parking for coaches carrying school group visits on Hampstead Heath can now be made available by arrangement.

- The Keats House Community Library's Licence to Occupy Ten Keats Grove had not been signed as the Management Agreement requires an update, which is in progress.
- The Premises Licence had been delayed slightly during the hand-over of the previous and current Curators. However, this was now progressing, and discussions have been held with the Metropolitan Police, London Fire Brigade, Camden Council and local residents. The next stage would be to submit the on-line application and notices on site in June 2018.

4. **KEATS HOUSE MEMBERSHIP**

The Town Clerk was heard in respect of the current Membership of the Keats House Consultative Committee. Members noted the sad passing of David Kitchen, the former representative for South End Green Association. A Member suggested that Downshire Hill Association might also like to be represented. The Town Clerk agreed to contact this organisation to seek a nomination. The Town Clerk advised that the Consultative Committee had previously had representation from Friends of Keats House. A Member confirmed that the Friends of Keats House had been incorporated into the Keats Foundation.

5. **KEATS HOUSE UPDATE**

Members received a report of the Superintendent of Hampstead Heath, which summarised achievements and developments at Keats House since the last Consultative Committee meeting in November 2017.

The new Principal Curator had been attracted by Keats House's reputation as an impressive heritage attraction, which enjoys good public engagement and committed volunteers. Since arriving earlier in the year, he had been very impressed by the high standard of customer care and the support of the Keats Foundation. The Curator highlighted the opportunities presented by Keats 200, thanked Members for the suggestions received so far and invited more.

Members noted the following highlights in the report:

1. In respect of the 2.5% increase in visits on the previous year, against a target of 3%, Members found these figures particularly impressive, considering the bad weather at the end of February/early March 2018. The programme for May to August 2018 had been finalised by the time the new Curator had arrived, but he would be leading on the September-December 2018 Programme. Members noted that this would coincide with the anniversary of Keats moving into the former Wentworth Place (now Keats House) and suggestions were invited. A Member suggested a focus on poetry written at the House, and the Curator advised that arrangements for poetry readings were in hand. Another Member suggested that celebrity poetry readings in the background would add to the ambience.

2. The Curator had met with the City Corporation's Head of Visitor Strategy in respect of Keats 200 contribution to the Cultural Strategy. The House also enjoyed a good relationship with the Barbican Centre and Guildhall School of Music and Drama in respect of their outreach work with schools.
3. Fear of terrorist attack had impacted on school visits across the cultural sector in 2017 but there had been some recovery. There would also be a review of the learning programme, in the context of Keats 200, to ensure the curriculum was supported. The 15-hours a week learning post has been maintained and Members noted that higher education groups, as well as schools, gained a lot from visits. The Curator advised that, as he came from an educational background, this was one of his key skills and interests, in addition to training and apprenticeships. Members were pleased to note that the House was now fully staffed, and the customer service apprentice appointment had been particularly successful.
4. The 'Keats and Milton: Paradise Lost' exhibition is on display in the new temporary exhibition space within the house and it was hoped that this would encourage repeat visits. The Team would be conducting a visitor survey to discover what had attracted them to the House and the role the new space might have played.
5. Other visitor experience surveys had indicated that the garden was a very strong asset and Members noted that the gardens had been entered into the 'Open Garden Squares' Weekend in June, when volunteers would be assisting with garden tours, and 'London in Bloom' for the first time.
6. The evening 'lates' had appealed to a new, younger audience and the candlelit tours at Christmas were particularly successful. Members noted the relevance of Keats' story in the history of London, particularly its emergence as a literary and artistic centre, and the role which creative talent played in its development.
7. In respect of building maintenance, Members noted that a new breakdown, repairs and maintenance contractor was in place, which enabled on-line requests, and there had been an improvement in service. The City Surveyor had been engaged on a series of studies; i.e. roofs, damp and the window canopies. Members noted there were no health and safety risks and all fire risk assessment recommendations are being addressed to schedule. However, the current level of investment, over the next 3-5 years, would outweigh the cyclical works programme and, therefore, the City Surveyor would be forming a capital bid and prioritised programme of works. Whilst Members were pleased with this progress, they asked for Officers to be mindful of the 'bow wave' effect. The deterioration to the outside render over the past few months was particularly noted.

8. The Superintendent acknowledged the importance of scheduling these works to avoid conflicts with the bicentenary celebrations.
9. The Director of Open Spaces had been working with the Customer Service Team on the design of the Department's web pages. Members noted that the Director of Communications had overall scrutiny of all City Corporation web sites and was happy to support separate websites if business cases were strong enough. A Member suggested a unified approach with other Open Spaces web sites, to ensure the best use of resources.
10. In respect of Keats 200, Members noted that Guys Hospital and the Apothecaries Livery Company had been contacted and there were plans to include heritage attractions in Enfield, to represent Keats' childhood. The Italian Embassy had previously hosted a visit from the Keats-Shelley Memorial Association in Rome, where Keats had died. Other overseas interests included the USA, Commonwealth countries, Japan, Korea, Ukraine and Germany. The Curator had met with the Keats Foundation to discuss working together and their interest in promoting creative writing. The Chairman and Members suggested programming Keats events at Guildhall, including lectures, readings, etc. There were further suggestions for offsite events; i.e. walks on the Heath and 'Keats in the City' walks, including the Apothecaries and Guys Hospital. A previous visit to Westminster Abbey on Keats' birthday was suggested and the Curator agreed to discuss reviving this with the Keats Foundation.

Entrance remodelling

Members received a presentation on the plans for remodelling and improving the entrance to the house, which had been funded by a c.£60,000 Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) from the London Borough of Camden. Members welcomed the improvements to widen and fully open the gate as, currently, it was very easy to miss the entrance to the House. The exact design and materials were still under consideration and there would be additional signage.

There were also plans to construct a soakaway, which would address the flooding problem and the materials of the pathway would be consistent across the site. The low lighting to the footpath was intended for safety, not to illuminate the house. A further meeting with the Architects was planned, to refine the proposals, and further suggestions from Members were welcome. A Member suggested signage at Keats Close, which tourists often mistook for the House.

In respect of security, Members noted that CCTV footage of the inside and outside of the House and the visitor counter were visible at reception. The Curator suggested that the new design would address security concerns and would be kept under review as the project developed.

In order to further improve the aesthetics, bin storage would be housed in a new fenced off area and Keats House would also be included in Hampstead

Heath's recycling collections. Members suggested that a ramp, rather than steps, would be safer for refuse collection operatives.

6. QUESTIONS ON MATTERS RELATING TO THE WORK OF THE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

There were no questions.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

A Member asked if a water fountain could be installed on the site to discourage the use of plastic bottles.

The Director of Open Spaces agreed to investigate the purchase of a defibrillator and report back to Members in the next couple of months.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING - 3RD OCTOBER 2018 - 2.30 PM AT KEATS HOUSE

3rd October 2018 – 2.30pm at Keats House.

The meeting ended at 3.00 pm

Chairman

**Contact Officer: Julie Mayer
tel. no.: 020 7332 1410
julie.mayer@cityoflondon.gov.uk**