

## KEATS HOUSE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Tuesday, 16 September 2014

### **Minutes of the meeting of the Keats House Consultative Committee held at the Guildhall EC2 at 2.30 pm**

#### **Present**

Vivienne Littlechild – Chairman	Susan Kirkby
Ann Pembroke	Steven Bobash
Barbara Newman	Diana Gore
Jeremy Simons	Nigel Steward

#### **Members:**

Vivienne Littlechild – Chairman	Susan Kirkby
John Scott – Deputy Chairman	
Ann Pembroke	Steven Bobash
Barbara Newman	Diana Gore
Jeremy Simons	Martin Humphrey
Nigel Steward	Harriet Cullen
Jim Burge	David Kitchen

#### **Officers:**

Saimah Tahir	- Town Clerk's Department
Vicky Carroll	- Culture, Heritage and Libraries

#### **1. APOLOGIES**

Apologies were received from John Scott, Martin Humphrey and Harriet Cullen.

#### **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 6 February 2014 were approved.

#### **4. KEATS HOUSE PROGRESS REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries summarising achievements and developments at Keats House during the six months since the last Consultative Committee meeting.

The Principal Curator at Keats House advised that the visitor figures were generally positive, although there had been a dip during May-July which was reflected across galleries and museums within London, who had noted a similar trend. Visitor figures for August were incomplete at the time the report was published.

The Principal Curator noted that the partnership between the National Trust and Keats House, which enabled Members to receive half price entry, would

end next year. It was felt that, whilst this may have some negative effect on visitor numbers, it was likely to have a positive effect on income, since many people produce their membership card upon entry. All Members felt it was vital to expand the gift shop in order to support the Foundation and the long term aim was to open an online gift shop as the Keats brand had a strong international following.

In response to a Member's question, the Principal Curator explained that visitors were not charged to use the garden because it was hoped that in the longer term, visitors to the garden may later visit the house and become supporters of Keats House. Members wanted to explore the idea of a donation box in the garden as they noted that this had worked well in Jane Austen's House.

A Member suggested that Keats House be advertised to Ward Clubs and Livery Companies for events, as both the Nightingale and Chester rooms could accommodate large parties.. The committee agreed that City links should be utilised to promote Keats House for events.

The Principal Curator distributed an events booklet for September to December 2014. It was noted that free events were normally in partnership with other organisations that paid for the programme and Family Days had a good attendance. The committee welcomed the idea of adding the name of partners who had paid for the event.

The Principal Curator updated the committee on the project to enhance the interpretation and visitor experience . Research had shown that visitors, who had knowledge of Keats life and works, could fully appreciate the house and grounds, but the house was less accessible to non-specialists. 'Easy Tiger' had been brought in to tastefully layer in interpretation such as his letters and poetry. The basement would include as a film room' which would illustrate Keats' life. It was hoped that the combination of these activities would result in a better visitor experience' with people staying longer and being better informed of Keats. Members discussed having audio commentary in each room' either through the medium of headsets or mobile phone apps. Although Keats House did not have Wi-Fi, this was something that could be looked into to accomplish audio commentary.

## **5. KEATS HOUSE FUNDRAISING REPORT**

The Committee received a report of the Director of Visitor Development and Services Director, Culture, Heritage & Libraries summarising progress to date with raising funds for Keats House.

The Principal Curator had been working with local residents to develop a supporter's scheme and distributed leaflets. Supporters now could select 3 different types of membership levels. So far there were 5 couples who had agreed to become patrons. Melvin Bragg had agreed to become Chair of the UK patrons and a renowned individual had agreed to become Chair of the international patrons. The Principal Curator had been working with a volunteer who has contacted 5 other museums to understand how they manage their

membership schemes. Diana Gore is organising a mail drop campaign to 8,000 homes nearby to establish a supporters group. An event had been arranged in Tower Bridge on the 26 November to raise Keats House profile within the City and Valentine's Day was also being considered as a potential opportunity. Members felt it was imperative that Keats House had its own brand identity. At present, Keats House website came under the umbrella of the Corporation of London website. The long term aim was for Keats House to have its own website and online shop, which would utilise the worldwide following of Keats and the strength of the Keats Brand.

A Member noted that providing refreshments for visitors would generate revenue and enhance the experience.

The Chairman and Committee thanked the volunteers for their contribution and ongoing support of Keats House.

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

A Member proposed that the conservatory become a shop for plants which would be provided by West Ham Park. However it was noted that this would need a dispensation.

It was suggested that books should retail at the most reasonable price possible. The Committee discussed longer opening hours during winter, this was received positively by the Principal Curator who would look into this for next winter, in time for the would be taking place this year.

**7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT**

There were no urgent items. The Town Clerk informed the Committee that its next meeting would take place on 2 February at 2 pm and the location would be Guildhall.

**The meeting ended at 3.50**

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Chairman

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