

Committee(s): Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee	Date(s): 20/11/2023
Subject: Mid-year update on activities at Keats House – April – September 2023	Public
Which outcomes in the City Corporation’s Corporate Plan does this proposal aim to impact directly?	2, 3, 4, 7, 8, 9, 10 & 12
Does this proposal require extra revenue and/or capital spending?	No
If so, how much?	N/A
What is the source of Funding?	N/A
Has this Funding Source been agreed with the Chamberlain’s Department?	N/A
Report of: Bob Roberts, Interim Executive Director of Environment	For Information
Report author: Rob Shakespeare, Head of Heritage & Museums, Environment Department	

Summary

This paper provides Members with an update on activities at Keats House between April and September 2023.

During this period, Keats House has continued to rebuild its services and progress a number of priority projects which had been delayed or impacted by the pandemic and its aftermath.

While Keats House is not expected to return to pre-pandemic levels of operation and achievement until 2024/25 at the earliest, year-on-year progress is being made and it continues to support a range of Corporate, Departmental and sector outcomes and priorities.

Recommendations

It is recommended that:

- Members note activities at Keats House from April – September 2023, as described below, and give their views on how these activities support the priorities, aims and objectives outlined within the Corporate Plan 2018/23 and other key strategies, the Environment Department’s primary and supporting aims and objectives, and the objectives of the Keats House Charity.

Main Report

Background

1. Keats House is a registered charity (number 1053381) with the City Corporation acting as sole trustee.
2. Following the conclusion of Phase 2 of the Target Operating Model in the Environment Department, Keats House is managed within the new Culture & Projects Section of the Natural Environment Division. As well as delivering its own priorities and supporting the Natural Environment Division's emerging strategic framework, its activities are designed to contribute to key City Corporation strategies, including for Education, Skills, Cultural & Creative Learning and key sector initiatives.
3. As a registered charity it is required to submit an annual report and financial statement detailing its activities and to ensure compliance with the Charities Act 2011. The draft report for 2023/24 will be presented for discussion at the next meeting of Keats House Consultative Committee, on 3 May 2024, and then for approval by Members of the Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee at their meeting on 15 July 2024. This paper updates Members on activities at Keats House in the first half of the year, i.e. between April and September 2023.
4. In addition to opening to the public, delivering school sessions and a year-round events programme, Keats House is prioritising a number of key initiatives and longer-term projects to enhance physical access to its premises and virtual access to its collections, as identified in its Activities Plan 2023/24 (included at Appendix 1) and outlined below.

Current Position

5. The operational team at Keats House currently comprises 2.4 fte staff, made up of four individuals in three main roles. These officers, supported by our casual and volunteer workforce, are prioritising opening the house to the public and rebuilding the public offer, including live events, school sessions and private hires. Divisional Plan projects, some of which are reliant on other internal and external parties, are being progressed by the Head of Heritage & Museums (previously Principal Curator – Keats House), supported by officers within the Culture & Projects section, including those based at Keats House.
6. Between April and September 2023, Keats House was open to the public on Wednesdays, Thursdays, Fridays and Sundays, 11am - 1pm and 2 - 5pm. Keats House was forced to close on one day during this period and also offered one late opening, until 7pm. Between April and September, 4,206 people visited the house, which was an increase of 28% on the same period in 2022/23 but still only c.55% of visitors pre-pandemic (7,708, April – September 2019).
7. The overarching theme of programming in 2023/24 is 'Young Romantics in the City', a partnership project with Cardiff University supported through their Innovation for All funding stream. The exhibition, which was co-curated with Dr

Anna Mercer, Lecturer in English Literature (Romanticism) and opened in February, reveals the diversity of writers and writing in the Romantic period, through the inter-connected themes of Politics, Class, Gender and Race. Changing object displays have illustrated these themes and we are particularly grateful for the support of the British Library in loaning us their first edition copy of 'The Woman of Colour', which was published anonymously in 1808 and placed on display for the first time in this country from June to October. Preceding and forthcoming object displays have also been supported by London Metropolitan Archives, who continue to help us conserve and provide access to our collections. From November to February, we will be displaying a rarely seen polemic pamphlet by Percy Bysshe Shelley from our own collections, alongside Welsh and English language ballads from the collections of Cardiff University. #YoungRomantics is used for promoting the majority of programming on social media, which continues to be the main way of engaging directly with our audiences.

8. School visits and live events continue to support the rebuilding of our audiences. Between April and September, a total of 21 school sessions, including our new 'Culturally Speaking' and 'Poetry Versus Colonialism' sessions, have been delivered to 421 students and 49 teacher / carers. Keats House summer school also took place over four days in July, engaging GCSE and A-level students in creative writing workshops led by published authors. From September, Poetry Versus Colonialism, Culturally Speaking and Young City Poets will be delivered with funding provided by the City's Cultural and Creative Learning fund, supporting us to work with key cultural sector partners to deliver on the City Corporation's outcomes for learning, skills and cultural engagement.
9. During this period, 19 public events were delivered, attracting at least 471 people to take part in cultural activities at Keats House. In addition, Keats House continues to work with partner organisations, creative individuals and stakeholder groups to support wider initiatives. Highlights of the spring / summer programme included: The Wild Escape event for Earth Day with Hampstead School of Art; Keats Foundation's annual conference held over three days in May; hosting events for Hampstead Summer Festival, including their Art Fair, outdoor theatre performances and family day; as well as our annual free admission day for Open House Festival. These events contribute to the local cultural and community offer, as well as key priorities including Climate Action and Destination City, as programming and audiences continue to recover following the Covid-19 pandemic and its aftermath.
10. Private hires of the Chester Room in Keats House, which is largely used for book launches and literary / small stakeholder events, and the Nightingale Room in Ten Keats Grove, for private parties and larger events, have been supported by Keats House officers, with income earned from these contributing to the overall income target for the charity.
11. As a condition of the premises licence for 10 Keats Grove, Keats House Consultative Committee receive a twice-yearly report of licensable events held at the House, to ensure that the operating schedule and conditions are being upheld. To report that no activities involving the sale of alcohol have taken place

to date in 2023/24 under the terms of Keats House's premises licence. Hampstead Summer Festival events which involved the sale of alcohol and other licensable activities were covered by TENs obtained by the organisers. Complimentary alcoholic drinks were served at six of the Keats House events referred to above and at the Keats Foundation Conference, which also made use of the garden in the early evening. Two Keats House events which included live music took place in the Nightingale Room within the conditions of the licence. Although these did not involve the sale of alcohol they are reported here for completeness. The Premises Licence for 10 Keats Grove was recently renewed for the period to 11 September 2024 at a cost of £180.00.

12. We are actively working with the City Surveyor's Department to deliver the access improvement project, along with associated works to maintain, preserve and enhance the Grade 1 listed house and garden. Quotes for the already approved access improvements to the paths and garden have now been received and are being considered against available budgets for 2023/24 or 2024/25. Plans for the enhanced security of both buildings have now been submitted to the London Borough of Camden, following an advisory visit from their Conservation Officer in June, and are now awaiting the required consents to proceed, with the work still scheduled to take place in 2023/24. Cyclical and reactive maintenance works to Keats House and Ten Keats Grove (library building) are also ongoing.
13. Paul Vick Architects have also recently submitted plans for the replacement of the current dilapidated, wooden boundary fence on Keats Grove to L.B. Camden. The proposed design is for a dual-height brick wall with metal fencing over, which would be more durable and an enhancement to the Grade 1 listed site, which is situated within the Hampstead Conservation Area. We are waiting for their response and the required approvals to proceed before requesting quotes for this project, which we hope to deliver in 2024/25.
14. The licence for Keats Community Library (KCL) to operate from Ten Keats Grove until 31 March 2024, which was approved by CHL at your meeting on 14 November 2022, has been finalised and issued to their Trustees. This has not yet been signed as they seek additional assurances which have been refused as they may prejudice any new agreement. Under the terms of that and the previous licence (with the exception of the national restrictions imposed during the Covid-19 pandemic) KCL have been able to open for 42 hours / week, Tuesday – Sunday from the main library room, and the Children's Library has operated from the Nightingale Room for a total of 18 hours on Tuesdays, Fridays and Saturdays. Under a separate arrangement, as approved at the same meeting and in effect from 20/2/23 to 31/3/24, the Children's Library has also been able to open in the Nightingale Room for an additional 9 hours on Tuesdays (5 – 6pm extension) and Wednesdays (10am – 6pm). An offer of use on Thursdays and some Sundays was declined by KCL at the time due to operational reasons and the difficulties of promoting to their customers.
15. Following the recommendation of the Charity Review, which was approved by Members of the Culture, Heritage & Libraries Committee on 17 July 2023, an informal meeting was held between representatives of City Corporation and KCL Trustees on 12 September to discuss options from 1 April 2024 onwards and the

duration of any future agreement. Following a discussion of the outstanding issues and potential options at the meeting Keats House Consultative Committee on Friday 13 October, officers propose to put to Members of your Committee a report on this matter for approval in your role of trustees of the Keats House Charity. Any new agreement would need to be developed, approved and in place from 1 April 2024.

Proposals

16. Members indicate their continued support for the activities and priorities of Keats House in delivering the Charitable Objectives, as well as contributing to Corporate, Departmental and wider strategic and community outcomes.

Corporate & Strategic Implications

17. The projects and works outlined in this report contribute towards the achievement of the three aims set out in the City of London Corporate Plan 2018-23: Contribute to a flourishing society; Support a thriving economy; and Shape outstanding environments.
18. The projects and works outlined in this report also support the Environment Department to Shape Sustainable Future Environments through its Primary and Supporting Aims and Objectives, and the Education Board's strategic framework.

Conclusion

19. Keats House continues to recover from the impacts of the Covid-19 pandemic, particularly with regard to visitor numbers and associated income. The effects of the pandemic and subsequent changes in the wider economy are also beginning to ease, enabling priority projects to be progressed. However, income targets for admissions, shop sales, events and private hires will remain below pre-pandemic levels in 2023/24 and, possibly still, the following year. Reductions in operating costs and the particular funding model of Keats House Charity have reduced the full impact of these to some extent, but this is also limiting its capacity to invest in future priorities. It is anticipated that recovery across most indicators will be 65 – 75% in 2023/24, with a full recovery by 2025/26, in line with sector forecasts.
20. Over the next three to five years, Keats House will need to determine and demonstrate how it can best respond to the ongoing challenges of recovering from the longer-term impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic and subsequent changes in the economy, while supporting Corporate and Departmental strategic priorities and delivering audience expectations.
21. A number of delayed projects designed to increase physical and virtual access to Keats House and its collections, need to be prioritised for delivery in 2023/24 and 2024/25. These will contribute to the City Corporation's emerging Corporate Plan 2024-29, key Departmental strategies, and a sustainable future for the Keats House Charity, including the 100th anniversary celebrations of the opening of the

house to the public in 2025.

Appendices

- Appendix 1 – Keats House Activities Plan 2023/24

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