

KEATS HOUSE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Friday, 11 October 2024

Minutes of the meeting of the Keats House Consultative Committee held at Committee Room 1 - 2nd Floor West Wing, Guildhall on Friday, 11 October 2024 at 2.30 pm

Present

Members:

Munsur Ali (Chairman)
John Griffiths (Deputy Chairman)
Stephen Ainger
Steven Bobasch

Alexandra Lavery
Nicholas Roe

In Attendance

Officers:

Rob Shakespeare
Simon Glynn
Jayne Moore

- Department of Open Spaces
- Department of the Built Environment
- Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

The meeting was chaired by the Deputy Chairman John Griffiths, Munsur Ali being unable to attend in person.

Munsur Ali observed the meeting via Teams.

Apologies were received from Wendy Mead.

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

There were no declarations.

3. MINUTES

Referencing item 4, a Member asked for an update on the engagement with Historic England. The meeting noted that engagement is under way.

On item 7, specifically the agreement with Keats Community Library (KCL), the meeting noted that a document has been drawn up and its signature is imminent. The meeting noted that the settlement formula is complex and is worth approximately £38K-£40K p.a. and includes heating and lighting, also that an agreement has been reached that there will be permanent free-standing bookcases around part of the perimeter of the children's library.

RESOLVED, That the minutes of the meeting of 03 May 2024 be approved as an accurate record of the proceedings.

4. **ACHIEVEMENTS AT KEATS HOUSE APRIL-SEPTEMBER 2024**

The Committee viewed a presentation on achievements at Keats House April to September 2024, noting the following points:

- The 'Hidden Histories of Keats House' exhibition is currently in place;
- 2025 will be the 100th anniversary of the House opening as a museum and a range of events are expected to take place to commemorate that, including information on its historical context;
- A range of events take place at the House on Saturdays including events for families with young children, and late evening events;
- The recent Open House event was a success;
- Two major partnership conferences took place: the Keats Foundation Conference in May 2024 (scheduled to run from 16 to 18 May 2025); and the Shelley Conference in July 2024;
- Learning programmes have been successful and include initiatives for schoolchildren at KS3 and KS4 in particular;
- The City of London Corporation's Education Strategy Unit (ESU) funds the Culturally Speaking programme that included, in its 2023-24 programme, partnership work with a wide range of cultural museums and institutions (with Dr Johnson's House joining the group in 2025). A wide range of students from different backgrounds were welcomed under the aegis of Culturally Speaking;
- A new collections management database system is expected to be in place in 2025 that will deliver better search capabilities;
- Re-accreditation processes will be rolled out from May 2025;
- The input of the Heath Hands team is valued; and
- The House continues to support the local community via events such as local art fairs.

A Member sought confirmation that information stored in the new collections system could be used and accessed by anyone. The meeting heard that the new database will mean that researchers and members of the public will, for the first time, be able to access the full range of what is held.

A Member asked whether proposed logos and straplines for the centenary programme would be circulated for comment, and the meeting heard that the draft graphics were being presented at the meeting to the Committee for the first time and that further consultation would take place.

The meeting noted that a lawnmower is needed at Keats House (KH) following changes in the organisation of the Open Spaces Department resulting in the loss of the some gardening services. Heath Hands has continued to contribute to the upkeep of the House. Part of an agreement with Heath Hands involves the purchase by KH of a lawnmower that will be operated by Heath Hands.

A Member asked where collaborative partnership within City of London Corporation assets could be further invoked and where support was needed

(including around environmental considerations and digitalisation), suggesting that some kind of cultural asset management apprenticeship scheme could be developed. The meeting noted that partnerships are ongoing, and that further initiatives are expected to be launched on the back of the 100 year celebrations to include volunteer recruitment. The meeting noted that some apprenticeship and trainee positions have been arranged through other means, but that the CoLC family of cultural partners could generate more opportunities. The meeting noted that the collection management system being rolled out is already in use at the Guildhall Art Gallery though requirements across museums vary greatly - noting also comments from Members urging caution on giving power to a single provider of such systems.

On museum accreditation for Keats House and The View (Epping Forest Collection), the meeting heard that the process is ongoing.

A Member commented that there is merit in exploring the potential to get involved in a literary festival for spring 2025 arranged by the Fleet Street Business Improvement District, which recently commissioned a cultural strategy for the area that has a significant focus on the power of the spoken and written word.

A Member commented that May 2025 is also the 100th anniversary of the publication of the Virginia Woolf novel 'Mrs Dalloway' that has a strong London emphasis, noting also the writers of the time involved in Keats House's opening in 1925 including Thomas Hardy, John Masefield, Edmund Gosse and W.B. Yeats.

5. UPDATE REPORT FOR KEATS HOUSE CHARITY, APRIL - SEPTEMBER 2024

The Committee received the report of the Executive Director Environment, and noted the achievements at Keats House in the period April to September 2024 noting in particular how the priorities, aims and objectives outlined within the Corporate Plan 2024-29 and other key Corporate strategies and the objectives of the Keats House charity were supported through those activities.

A Member commented on the improvements in the lighting facilities, commenting also that it was hoped that work could be done on insulation and on a leak that needs to be fixed.

The meeting noted that a contractor has visited the site in relation to the leak but was unable to fix it straight away, and that remedial action is expected imminently. The meeting noted that the Ten Keats Grove building occupied by the Keats Community Library is in poor condition generally and that £900,000 worth of work is earmarked for the site across the next three years, of which £200K is ringfenced for the library building as part of a conservation management plan for the entire site.

A Member asked whether any further plans were in place to continue the educational work of Culturally Speaking. The meeting heard that the funding for that programme is in place for 2024-25 and that two further CoLC ESU-funded

projects for young people are in place: Green Changemakers (creation of climate-resilient gardens); and Change the Record (examining and reinterpreting some records within the new database with a focus on language).

6. DEVELOPMENT OF A FIVE-YEAR BUSINESS PLAN FOR KEATS HOUSE

The Committee heard an update from the Assistant Director Culture and Projects on the five-year business plan, noting that:

- The CoLC Chief Town Clerk is encouraging a move to a cycle of 5-year business plans with Environment Department being one of the first Departments to lead on that; and
- Plans for KH include garden refurbishment, partnership development, volunteering initiatives, and further digitalisation (all to be mapped out in greater detail).

A Member asked whether the substantial investments needed for the building would be incorporated into that five-year plan. The meeting noted that the conservation management plan will set out the needs of the Ten Keats Grove site and that some spend is planned for urgent reactive works ahead of that plan being drawn up to inform the five-year plan in the form of a carefully costed plan and the outcomes for the CoLC.

A Member noted that there is merit in exploring Arts Council England funds as a joint project for the whole site.

A Member asked for the envelope figure to cover a major reinterpretation of the site. The meeting heard that the figure is expected to be a £1M+ project, some of which may be internally funded where it concerns building fabric.

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

There were no questions.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIR CONSIDERS URGENT

There was no other business.

The meeting ended at 3.30 pm

Chairman

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