

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

Members:

Vivienne Littlechild (Chairman)
Ann Pembroke
Barbara Newman
Jeremy Simons

Susan Kirby
Steven Bobasch
Diana Gore

Officers:

Saimah Tahir
Vicky Carroll

Town Clerk's Department
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 as an afterthought. A Member informed the committee that research into visitor spending habits noted National Trust Members spent less in gift shops than general visitors.

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 robust donation box in the garden as they noted that this had worked well in Jane Austen's House.

A Member requested Keats House to be advertised to Ward Clubs and Livery Company's as a good place to hold events as both the Nightingale and Chester rooms could accommodate large parties. The Principal Curator informed the Committee that ITV had been in contact to hold dinner parties but had ultimately decided on an alternative venue that was more centrally located. 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 and a detailed discussion on the booklet ensued. 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 under the event in the booklet.

The Principal Curator updated the committee on what the project to enhance the interpretation and visitor experience entailed. 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 audio headsets or mobile phone apps to add to the experience. 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 which had prepared to Members. 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 looked at as a potential opportunity to further promote the cause.

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 bring in revenue and give a better experience for people.

A representative of the Keats Foundation noted that she was disappointed that it had not been possible for the Keats Foundation and the new fundraising group to work more closely together.

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 dispensation from the Guerne Family.

A Member noted that the bookshop was retailing a second hand biography of Keats at £30; she requested that books were priced more responsibly in order to attract buyers.

The Committee discussed longer opening hours during winter, this was received positively by the Principal Curator who would look into this next winter as the interpretation project would be taking place this year.

7. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

There were no urgent items.

8. DATE OF THE NEXT MEETING

The Town Clerk informed the Committee that its next meeting would take place on 2nd February at 2 pm and the location would be Guildhall.

The meeting closed at 4.30 pm

Chairman

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