

KEATS HOUSE CONSULTATIVE COMMITTEE

Minutes of the meeting of the Keats House Consultative Committee held at Guildhall on Wednesday, 22 June 2016 at 11.30 am

Present

Members:

Vivienne Littlechild (Chairman)
Graham Packham (Deputy Chairman)
Steven Bobasch
Barbara Newman
Jeremy Simons
Nigel Steward
Martin Humphery

In Attendance

Mrs Ann Pembroke - Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee

Officers:

Nick Bodger - Head of Cultural and Visitor Development
Vicky Carroll - Culture, Heritage and Libraries
Frankie Kubicki - Culture, Heritage and Libraries
Julie Mayer - Town Clerk's Department

1. APOLOGIES

Apologies were received from Dennis Cotgrove.

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 22 September 2015 were approved as a correct record.

Matters arising

- Since the last meeting, Keats House had joined London Pass.
- In respect of the ceiling damage in the library, the Chairman advised that this was not a matter for the Keats House Consultative Committee. However, the Senior Curator advised that an appointment had been made to assess the works later today.
- Also since the last meeting, the first floor landing had been fitted out as a temporary exhibition space and was currently exhibiting a display about Keats travels in Scotland.

4. **KEATS HOUSE PROGRESS REPORT 2015/16**

The Sub Committee received a report of the Director of Culture, Heritage and Libraries which set out steady growth across footfall and retail, while grants and awards continued to demonstrate the high regard in which the house is held by the cultural sector.

Members noted that, whilst the Service Based Review (SBR) options were being reviewed (item 5 on the agenda), events had been scaled back slightly but the summer months were set to pick up again.

Since the publication of this agenda, the Michael Rosen performance with the Guildhall School of Music & Drama had taken place and was very successful. The Chairman, who is also a Member of the Board of Governors of the Guildhall School of Music & Drama, offered to provide feedback to the Board. Members suggested that similar, future events be recorded.

The Principal Curator thanked Mrs Pembroke for her assistance in resolving the issue with the conservatory, which was now water-tight and had a new storage cupboard. Members noted that there had been some problems with the new boiler but they were being resolved.

In respect of the current staffing position, the Principal Curator advised that whilst she was working at the Guildhall Art Gallery to cover maternity leave, the Senior Curator, also in attendance at this meeting, was acting up into her role. Members noted that an additional member of staff had been appointed, on a short term contract, to cover for the Curator acting up into the Senior Curator's role. This arrangement was working well. Furthermore, Members noted that the Head of Cultural and Visitor Development was also overseeing Keats House and this provided further opportunities for joint working.

In respect of private event bookings, Members noted that the house was generally used for book launches, children's parties and toddler/children music classes. The Senior Curator advised that there had been some interest in private dinner parties but Members noted that such opportunities would be more viable with the use of dedicated caterers, who would be able to promote the house and cover the licensing aspects. The Senior Curator advised that the House applied for Temporary Event Notices from time to time. Two members of the Licensing Committee were in attendance and explained the provisions and objectives of the 2003 Licensing Act.

In respect of organised tours, the Senior Curator advised that they would need to be priced at £100, at least, or were likely to run at a loss. Members noted that the opening times had been extended and, in October 2016, V&A Members had booked 2 tours of 25 people. Members suggested that a Ward Club could be a potential future client.

In response to a question about the slight decline in general visitor numbers, the Senior Curator advised that Keats had opted out of the National Trust Partnership Scheme as, previously, some National Trust members were paying as little as £1.75 for admission. However, the Curators had met with the National Trust yesterday and they would be opting back in, with effect from January 2017, with a revised entry fee of £3.25 for members.

Members commended the number of awards received by the House and noted that a certificate in respect of Hudson Heritage Hidden Gem award was being displayed and shown in email signatures.

5. KEATS HOUSE: SERVICE BASED REVIEW FINDINGS

The Head of Cultural and Visitor Services was heard in respect of the Service Based Review savings targets of the City of London Corporation and, given that Keats House received £262,000 pa funding from the City, this had come under some scrutiny. Members were reminded that their recent meeting had been postponed while a series of options had been worked through with consultants, as follows:

- a. Arts Council of England (ACE)
- b. British Association for Romantic Studies (BARS)
- c. Continuum (UK commercial visitor attractions provider)
- d. English Heritage / Historic England
- e. Harvard Libraries, US
- f. Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF)
- g. Keats Community Library (KCL)
- h. Keats-Shelley Association of America, US
- i. Keats-Shelley House, Rome, Italy
- j. Keats-Shelley Memorial Association (KSMA)
- k. Kings College London
- l. Landmark Trust
- m. National Trust
- n. Newcastle University
- o. NYC Romanticism Group, US
- p. Team Tourism Consulting
- q. University College London

As a result of the consultation, a number of alternative business models had been explored; none of which were found to be viable.

Members were pleased to note that a decision had been taken, by the Culture, Heritage and Libraries Committee that, for now, funding would continue, with a caveat that various options for income generation be considered and these options would be explored further in the next agenda item.

6. **IDEAS FOR INCREASING REVENUES AT KEATS HOUSE**

The Principal Curator of Keats House was heard in respect of ideas for income generation and the following matters were discussed and noted:

- The gift shop's stock was being continually reviewed; ideas for further additions included small romantic gifts and a replica of Fanny Brawne's engagement ring; and officers advised they were exploring the opportunity of using a TV shopping channel to produce/develop this.
- Use of the house and grounds for wedding and engagement photography.
- The expansion of events to include dinners and wine and cheese evenings, accompanied by tours.
- Members noted that the Germaine Greer event had sold out but such events were reliant on the goodwill of the speaker.
- Plans for a Summer School in partnership with universities.
- A remarketed Patrons and Supporters' Scheme. The Senior Curator offered to provide Members with exact numbers. Whilst noting that the numbers were fairly low, Members noted their benefits in developing relationships and building a supportive community.
- The Curator offered to seek advice from the City Solicitor in respect of Legacy giving, which had proved very successful for some other cultural institutions.
- A stand-alone website was likely to be very effective but Members noted that this would have a cost associated with it.
- Filming was effective when the house was promoted as part of the film, but credits often go unnoticed. The Senior Curator agreed to investigate using YouTube.
- The Principal Curator had met with various houses in Hampstead to consider collaborating on an advertising campaign but only The Freud Museum had any funds to potentially contribute; this did not therefore go ahead.
- Coffee carts had been approached, but Members noted that this would need a large footfall to be cost-effective. Whilst agreeing that Keats House was a very desirable venue for a coffee shop, the outcome from the consultation had concluded that investment in a cafe would not be viable. Ice cream sales during the summer months was suggested and discounts at local coffee shops had also been considered.

- Members noted that Hampstead's bid for a Business Improvement District might have potential.

Advertising

- The Head of Cultural and Visitor Development advised that magazine and newspaper advertising remained very expensive and was less successful than social media, which was cheaper and often very successful. Members noted the recent success of Son et Lumiere, which had over 1 million views on Facebook.
- Members noted that advertising on the tube often raised profile but was not as successful in increasing footfall. Members noted that historic underground posters from the 1930's were available at the Transport Museum but Keats House shop was not large enough to house them.
- Officers noted two festivals in Hampstead over the next 2 weeks (including Southend Green on the weekend of 25/26th June) and the possibility of running a Keats House stall.

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

There were no questions.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS THAT THE CHAIRMAN CONSIDERS URGENT

Members noted that Ms Diana Gore's resignation (representing the Keats Grove Charity) had not created a vacancy as this appointment had been made in an advisory capacity. However, the Keats Foundation was holding a vacancy and the Senior Curator agreed to investigate possible candidates in order to fill this.

The meeting ended at 13.00

Chairman

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