

## **Culture and Leisure Sub Committee**

**Tuesday, 7 March 2023**

Present: Councillor J Shaw, (in the Chair)  
Councillors G Bell, L Bell, L Marshall, P McIntyre

In attendance: Mr K Merrin, Mr G Woodward and Ms S Mitchell (Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums)

Apologies: Councillors J Cruddas, D Drummond, L Ferasin, J Kirwin and G Madden

### **C&L22/22 Substitute Members**

There were no substitute members reported.

### **C&L23/22 Declarations of Interest and Notification of any Dispensations Granted**

There were no declarations of interest or dispensations reported.

### **C&L24/22 Minutes**

**Resolved** that the minutes of the previous meeting held on 31 January 2023 be confirmed and signed by the Chair.

### **C&L25/22 Museum Development in North Tyneside**

Consideration was given to a presentation by Mr Keith Merrin (Director), Mr Geoff Woodward and Ms Sophie Mitchell, from the Tyne and Wear Archives & Museums (TWAM), on the progress of development plans for Segedunum Roman Fort & Museum and Stephenson Steam Railway.

It was explained that TWAM worked with North Tyneside Council to operate its museums at Segedunum and Stephenson Steam Railway and deliver activities across the borough that engaged communities, broke down barriers to access, developed skills and educational opportunities, improved health and well-being and supported the economy. Similarly, TWAM worked in South Tyneside, Gateshead and Newcastle operating a further seven museums – South Shields Museum, Arbeia Roman Fort, Shipley Art Gallery, Laing Art Gallery, DiscoveryCul Museum, Great North Museum:Hancock and the Hatton Gallery. This unique partnership of museums enabled TWAM to bring efficiencies, expertise, local and national profile and funding that each venue alone would struggle to sustain.

TWAM was governed by the four Tyneside local authorities through a partnership agreement and a Board which also had representation from the University of Newcastle (owner of Great North Museum and the Hatton) and independent members including the Chair Baroness Joyce Quin. TWAM was an Arts Council England (ACE) National Portfolio Organisation (NPO) which meant it was able to match the contribution made by the partners from national funds. It was the largest Museum NPO in the country and has secured over £3million each year to support delivery of the museum and community activity in the region.

TWAM also delivered the county archive service for Tyne and Wear (including Sunderland) meaning that it held all of the public records for North Tyneside along with a treasure trove of other historical collections. It had recently adopted a new mission which sets the focus of its activity for the next three years on using our amazing museums, collections and expertise to support local communities with the local and global challenges that they faced.

Segedunum Roman Fort: The Fort, at Wallsend, attracted about 45,000 visitors each year including many out-of-region visitors. It was the most easterly fort on the Hadrian's Wall Frontiers of the Roman Empire World Heritage Site and the most excavated fort on Hadrian's Wall, with an 80-metre stretch of original Wall plus a reconstruction that visitors can climb. It had a strong school audience (up to a fifth of visitors) and a long reputation for delivering excellent, curriculum-based education visits.

As well as its Roman galleries the museum also covered the important story of local industrial heritage including collieries and shipbuilding and the nearby Swan Hunter yard. The site was used as a start or finish of the Hadrian's Wall Path National Trail which celebrated its 20th birthday in 2023 and had about 15,000 walkers each year. The exhibition programme had included high profile national loans from the British Museum whilst a popular events programme brought visitors from the immediate local area. It was the only TWAM site that had an admission charge whilst an 'NE28 free admission offer' allowed residents living in the postcode area to attend for free.

The Authority and TWAM had recently secured MEND (ACE - Museum Estate and Development Fund) funding of £499,000 to support remedial work at the museum as part of exciting plans for a new £7million transformation and redevelopment. The aim of the redevelopment was both to improve the venue as a tourist attraction but also very much as a community asset and was linked to the wider Wallsend Masterplan. A Stage 1 bid to the National Lottery Heritage Fund had also been submitted in February 2023 to support this work.

Stephenson Steam Railway: The museum, near Silverlink, attracted about 26,000 visitors a year and includes two miles of railway track between Middle Engine Lane and Percy Main.

Railway pioneers George & Robert Stephenson spent nearly 20 years in North Tyneside developing their ground-breaking ideas. George built 16 locomotives at West Moor Colliery in Killingworth including Killingworth Billy, the third oldest surviving locomotive in the world, which was on display in the museum, along with other engines, coaches and railway collections. The museum displays were refurbished in 2020 primarily funded by the DCMS Wolfson Fund (£94,500).

A highlight of any visit was a trip down the track pulled by one of our working engines, which was made possible by our volunteer group, the North Tyneside Steam Railway Association. The volunteers crewed the trains and did a huge amount of maintenance and repair work, as well as running the café, and improving and maintaining the grounds. There were currently about 50 active volunteers.

The museum had recently been shortlisted for Best Small Visitor Attraction in the North East Tourism Awards and had many popular events including the annual Elf Express which drew a large crowd of local families and generated income for the operation of the museum.

TWAM had recently secured over £81,000 from National Lottery Heritage Fund to develop a Woodland Walk on the site. It would be a resource for community and learning activities as

well as an added attraction for visitors and came from an idea developed by the volunteers. It was also about to take ownership of Metro car 4001 – the first of a fleet of 90 built for Metro, now being replaced by a new generation of trains. The Metro car was very kindly being donated by Nexus to the Museum.

Work with Communities: TWAM worked with partners across North Tyneside to run projects, host special events, offer social prescribing opportunities, provide training and create resources to be used across sectors and much more. It did this in their venues, in the community, in clinical settings and online.

TWAM worked with a number of key partners in North Tyneside including:

Age UK North Tyneside

North Tyneside Art Studio (NTAS)

EngAGE Linskill & Battle Hill

Northumbria Health Care Trust (North Tyneside Hospital)

Helix Arts

TWAM also worked with refugees and asylum seekers providing development and training to increase their employability and broaden their experiences of living in North East England.

Regular offers included 'Warm Welcome' Museum Socials, Museum 2 Museum Cycle routes, Dementia Support in partnership with Age UK, Falling on Your Feet (Falls Prevention Creative Movement), NTAS presents@Seggy (a rolling exhibition of work by participants). In the last year total community engagements across Tyneside were 2658 and total community engagements in North Tyneside were 564. The largest group engaged in North Tyneside were people over 55 via its Platinum Programme with significant engagements with people living with mental health issues via our Wellbeing Programme.

The sub-committee welcomed the positive work being done in relation to the development plans for Segedunum Roman Fort & Museum and Stephenson Steam Railway, and during discussions Members considered a number of areas:

Clarification was sought on how facilities and activities at Segedunum were promoted / marketed. It was explained this was done in the usual ways via interest groups, by cross-promotion to visitors attending other sites/attractions, primetime magazines and newspapers; and this would be reviewed subject further grant funding being secured. It was noted that although facilities were also promoted at so-called 'standstill' points e.g., Metro Station posters / newspapers but this had financial implications. In addition, shopfront presence and traffic calming measures in Wallsend was being explored to help attract visitors to Segedunum.

Clarification was sought on the Bath House excavation work at Segedunum. It was explained this work was done by volunteers and that permission was required by Historic England prior to the commencement of any work done on this site.

Reference was made to the surprising number of visitors to the Segedunum site when a guide was available, which enhanced the experience on learning how a Roman Emperor had visited the site.

Clarification was sought on the links between schools and Segedunum and how children learned about their heritage by promoting history in schools also, whether it was possible for

NE28 Residents to be offered free children's visits e.g., for children to bring their parents / guardians. It was explained that there was a 4-day offer in September, also to recognise the local site's events and activities to help promote the linkage to the town centre and increase the footfall as part of the offer – as this was not always a prime spot (as an old industrial part of Wallsend), it was recognised that traffic calming measures, residents, businesses, schools, and more signage could help in promoting the site.

Reference was made to Stephenson's link to the area was huge but was another place geographically a 'non-spot' and clarification was sought on whether it would be feasible to extend the railway tracks in North Tyneside as destinations. It was explained that Middle Engine Lane was already linked to Percy Main, but that extending the railway track to e.g., the Royal Quays, had been previously tested and not feasible as it was ecology dependent; also, that TWAM and partners had very good relationships with schools in the network in terms of cultural contacts, including workshops for secondary schools on educational / Arts links.

The Chair thanked Mr Merrin, Mr Woodward and Ms Mitchell for their informative presentation on the museum activity and progress of development plans for the Segedunum Roman Fort & Museum and the Stephenson Steam Railway.

It was **agreed** that the report and presentation on the Museum development in North Tyneside, be noted.

**C&L26/22      Date and time of next meeting**

Tuesday 27 June 2023 at 6.00pm.