

NATIONAL ARMY MUSEUM COUNCIL

Minutes of the 162nd Meeting of the Museum Council held in the boardroom at the National Army Museum, Chelsea at 10am on Thursday 3rd May 2018

Present

General Sir Richard Shirreff Chairman
Mr William Wells
Ms Jessica Spungin
Mr Patrick Aylmer
Mr John Duncan
Dr Paul Schreier
Mr Guy Perricone
Dr Jonathan Boff
Mrs Sabine Vandenbroucke
Lieutenant General Sir Simon Mayall

In Attendance

Mr Justin Maciejewski Director, National Army Museum
Mr Mike O'Connor Deputy Director, NAM
Ms Elizabeth Sutherland Committee Clerk (Minutes), NAM
Mr Mike Robbins Chief Accountant, Army Resources
Brigadier Martyn Gamble Head of Arms & Services, Home Command
Mrs Brenda Hobday Honorary Marketing Advisor
Mr Richard Hughes Honorary Legal Advisor

Item 1. Opening remarks

A slideshow of the Commonwealth Community Wreaths on display in the Museum played, as the Chairman welcomed those present, including the new NAM Director to his first Council meeting.

Item 2. Register of Members' Interests

The Register was made available in accordance with Charity Commission advice and no amendments or additions were made.

Item 3. Apologies for Absence

Apologies had been received from HRH The Duke of Kent, Royal Patron of the NAM and Mrs Judith Donovan.

Item 4. Minutes of the Previous Meeting & Matters Arising

Council approved the minutes of the previous meeting and the Chairman was authorised to sign them as a true record.

Item 5. The State of the NAM: Baseline Assessment One Year After Reopening

Following the Council dinner, the new Director had spoken on a one-to-one basis, to every member of staff, Friends of the Museum, Council Members, and some former Members, close to 200 conversations.

An assessment of NAM was made based on discussions of six critical questions during the leadership off-site event;

- What is the scope and purpose?
- What do we do to fulfil this purpose?

- Who do we serve and how well have we done in Year One?
- How do we currently sustain what we do?
- What are our ambitions, are they realistic?
- How is it governed and how well is it working?

The Director presented slides and posed the question; if the Museum were to close, how much would it save the Army and how much would it cost to reinvent? He pointed out that the Army had an obligation to maintain an archive and engage with the academic community, but running a national museum was discretionary. The NAM archive told the story of the soldiers, a precious resource.

In considering the Museum's scope and purpose, the Director referred to the NAM's Royal Charter, which consistently used the term "Our Army" rather than the "British Army". It was a significant and deliberate decision by the Museum's founders, and "Our Army" encompassed the entire British Army and the various Land Forces of the Empire including the British Indian Army. The concept of Our Army connected all those communities in this country and from the Commonwealth to the story of Our Army. The Objects as set down by the Royal Charter were;

- To maintain the Museum known as "The National Army Museum";
- To collect, preserve and exhibit objects and records relating to the history and traditions of Our Army;
- To collect, collate and publish information relating to, and to carry out research into the history and traditions of Our Army;
- To encourage research into, and the accumulation and dissemination of information and knowledge bearing on, the history and traditions of Our Army and all matters connected therewith.

Along with providing an institutional history service to the Army, the Museum needed to drive research and teach people about the history and the traditions of Our Army.

The Director outlined the Museum's overall performance in three outputs; the Army community which consisted of Army veterans and families, the general public, and the global specialist community-

The Director unpicked the myriad of different experiences that both inspired and disappointed some visitors (from a sample of international visitors he had spoken with and from a compilation of comments the Visitor Experience team had put together). There were several areas in which improvements could be made in the way the Army's story could be told. The NAM would continue to refine and improve its galleries.

The NAM did an extremely good job in giving pastoral support to regimental museums. PlayBase was so popular that it would soon be running at capacity. The Museum now had Learning Programmes Manager in place to organise school group visits. Friday lectures attracted 80-100 guests each week by returning to core traditional subjects. The Library service now had an infrastructure and was moving in the right direction, but still had a way to go to provide a First Class archive service. The NAM had not been engaging enough with collectors and enthusiasts but was starting to reconnect with those groups.

A Member highlighted that one of the Museum's commitments to Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) was to diversify the NAM's appeal, hence the Friday panel discussion about LGBTQ+, gender and sexuality for instance. Another Member posited that in trying to be inclusive to all segments the Museum risked excluding its core majority audience, and advised that a balance needed to be struck. The Chairman found there were 47 different nationalities in his Division when he served and felt that painting a broader, diverse picture of Our Army was important.

A Member suggested changing the name of the NAM to Our Army, and employing an academic chair. Council discussed these divergent and far reaching questions and decided not to rule them out but to support the Director's current priorities which did not include a change of name at this stage.

The NAM's 2017-18 revenue sources were shown in a pie-chart. The Director emphasised that although the Museum had independent editorial control, it would not drift away from the Army in an unsympathetic way in the coming years. He explained that the NAM was an independent charity but was resourced by public money and needed to be run in accordance with 'Managing Public Money' as a non-departmental public body. Empathy for the Army would be one of the future values.

The group agreed the shop needed to do better commercially and Council discussed moving its location. The Director intended to relocate the shop slightly rather than shift it to the front of the Museum to avoid congestion, and chaos for PlayBase entrants. He also wanted to use the entrance space for an iconic military object.

In response to a query, the Director confirmed that the Museum was designed for 350,000 visitors a year and had not achieved this number in its first year but this remained the ambition.

The Special Forces exhibition received fantastic feedback The Director made the point that Exhibitions were expensive and did not make profits. Council concurred having a corporate sponsor for exhibitions was vital. It was agreed that as a general rule the Army could contribute a third of costs, ticket sales should generate a third and a third should come from sponsorship.

The Director ran through a slide which bulleted what was holding the Museum back. He spoke of how curatorial experts with a deep knowledge of the historical significance of the collection were small in number, with the prevalence of museum generalists, and asserted that military collections experts needed to be nurtured and grown internally. Furthermore, ideas should not trump reality, the Director intended to base the Museum's exhibits on the power of its existing collections. The Germany exhibition would be delayed into the next financial year as the urgent priority was to sort out the current permanent display of the collection, gallery by gallery. This would take up a lot of curatorial capacity. The programme would also be financially constrained.

Item 6. Reset & Refine Draft Outline: Purpose, Approach, Priorities & Plan

The Director outlined the NAM's approach based on five revised strategic objectives;

From:

1. Create memorable, relevant and accessible activities aligned to audience need in order to maximise audiences and generate footfall;
2. Establish the NAM nationally and internationally as the first choice for the history and life of the British Army;
3. Maximise financial resilience organisational efficiency and sustainability;
4. Safeguard and make accessible the collections and associated knowledge;
5. Develop a national footprint for NAM by establishing a network of national partnerships, linkages and working relationships.

To:

1. Connect the British Public to the story of Our Army;
2. Become the leading authority on the history of Our Army;
3. Safeguard and make accessible our collections and expertise to the widest possible audience;

4. Enable and support networks of military museums and heritage organisations in the UK;
5. Build greater financial resilience and sustainability.

The Director laid out the future values of the NAM. Integrity and rigour in the way that the story of Our Army was told would be core values. Also, empathy with the Army needed to shine through in the way the story was told. Visitors wanted to learn and not be patronised and for this reason the NAM must not shy away from explaining the context and the detail of the artefacts displayed.

Council explored the need to find partners and agreed that the NAM had the ability to convene experts.

Council discussed the need for genuine expertise and Members suggested cooperating with the Indian & Pakistani communities. The Field Marshal pointed out that Our Army had the largest volunteer army the world had ever seen. It was a powerful story of what good integration looked like and it was a story that should be told boldly.

The priorities for the year ahead for each objective were outlined by the Director;

- Refine interpretation to align with new NAM values;
- Reset plan for exhibitions, public programme including experts and partners;
- Greater focus on archive, Templer Study Centre and Stevenage accessibility;
- Increase support to regional museums and shape new Army Heritage Strategy.

Council agreed with these objectives. The Chairman thanked the Director for his comprehensive reports which Council fully supported.

Item 7. Reports from Committees

7.1 Acquisitions & Disposals Committee

The new Chairman of the Acquisitions & Disposals Committee (A&D) reported on his first meeting and spoke of how the Committee were keen to be of productive value to the Museum.

The A&D Chairman raised the matter of the Ethiopian request for the return of Emperor Tewodros' hair. In Ethiopian culture a lock of hair was regarded as human remains whereas under British legislation the artefact was not. The Ethiopians wanted only the lock of hair (not the other artefacts from the collection) to be returned, and intended to bury the hair rather than display it. Members believed this was an opportunity to do something positive diplomatically with Ethiopia. The Director would consult with the Arts Council, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media & Sport (DCMS) and the Foreign Office. An established process was in place for the return of artefacts and each factor would be fully considered. As this was a collections issue, Members asked the Director to make a recommendation to Council in due course.

7.2 Building for the Future Committee

The Director presented slides with final account figures for the refurbishment and Council discussed the approach to the final payment for the project.

The Deputy Director reported that G-A had submitted a bill in March 2018 (as allowed for in their contract) which had been signed off by the Quantity Surveyor and paid at the end of March 2018.

7.3 Audit & Risk Assurance Committee

The Chairman of the Audit & Risk Assurance Committee (A&RA) reported on the recent meeting. Financial controls had been reviewed and they were generally deemed as strong. The Director confirmed that a draft NAM group budget for this year was in final stages.

The Ministry of Defence (MoD) had permitted the Museum to lay financial statements after Parliamentary summer recess which allowed Council more time to scrutinise the figures, which Members appreciated.

Summarised GDPR updates were circulated. The Museum had a good process in place and the A&RA intended to ask the NAM's internal auditors to carry out a collaborative consultancy check on GDPR compliancy.

In response to queries, the Deputy Director clarified that the Museum was bound to offer surplus items to other accredited institutions in the first instance, and only if there was no interest could the NAM auction off items. Two tank transporters had been sold as no other institutions wanted them. There was good capacity at Stevenage to house a further two museums worth of collections and the ability to build a new mezzanine floor which could house a further four to five collections. The Director planned to create a new visitors room at Stevenage for specialists to improve accessibility and a charge would be introduced for the service.

7.4 NAMTL

The Chair of NAMTL updated Council on figures. The numbers year to date were down on expectations, mostly due to poor retail performance and the late arrival of the guidebook. Potential venue hires for 2019 were currently in negotiation.

Item 8. Finance Summaries

The Director reported that the accounts had been presented to the A&RA in the presence of the NAO and they were yet to be fully audited.

The A&RA Chairman remarked that the profit for the year looked quite satisfactory considering NAMTL income was down.

Investments had not yet been sold but were ready to be liquidated if required.

Item 9. Health & Safety Report

The Health & Safety report was brought back as a standing item on Council's agenda. Risk and Health & Safety policies were in place and the Deputy Director confirmed that the Museum was a safe institution. Council were happy to sign off the report.

Council discussed how the mandatory low levels of lighting might affect some visitors. Scientific research on the effects of lighting on collections had not been very convincing thus far and Members agreed the health and safety of visitors in galleries was important and if necessary should be prioritised over low light levels.

Item 10. Army Sponsor Update

10.1 Financial Framework

The NAM management were working on the final draft of the financial framework which the Chief Accountant, Army Resources was broadly happy with. The Chairman of Council thanked the team for the helpful document.

10.2 & 10.3 Grant in Aid & Use of Grant in Aid for Loan Repayments

Council appreciated the GiA letter which confirmed the 2018-19 Control Total. The Chairman thanked the Army for their support over many years.

Item 11. Exhibitions & Public Programmes Update

11.1 Special Forces Exhibition

This item had been covered previously in the meeting and the Director reiterated that the exhibition had been positively received by everyone. Numbers had been high due to a busy Easter period. It was expected that the exhibition would attract 20-24,000 visitors.

11.2 Munnings/WWI Centenary

The Cavalry paintings of Sir Alfred Munnings had broad public appeal as they linked to the dominions of the First World War. The NAM intended to close Special Forces slightly early to link the Munnings exhibition to key dates. [Following the Council meeting it had been confirmed by the Canadian War Museum that Munnings exhibition will not be ready for opening until end of November. Dates to be confirmed].

The Assistant Director, Collections, joined the meeting to report on how the Museum would anchor its exhibitions and programmes around the First World War. Pop-up exhibitions would feature in the atrium and travel to Army locations such as Sandhurst in July and Army Headquarters in August. Numerous lectures had been lined up along with good online content. One idea was '100 Soldier Stories in 100 Days' which featured a variety of service people from the Commonwealth. The theme for conference at the end of November 2018 was 'Remembrance and Reflection' which looked at how Canada, Australia and Ireland remembered WWI. This programme also tied in well with the Year 1 and Year 2 school curriculum.

11.3 Auf Wiedersehen Deutschland

This item was covered previously and the Director reiterated that the exhibition would go ahead but at a later date than originally scheduled. Dates to be confirmed.

11.4 Future Exhibition Programme

The Director proposed in the longer term to have an annual rhythm of holding 1.5 exhibitions a year, a 3-D exhibition and a 2-D exhibition that would straddle two years, along with a new Focus Gallery exhibit which would be a smaller (50msq) shorter (changing three times a year) rotating exhibition. These might also travel out to regional Museums to help them generate footfall. The Council agreed with this overall approach and level of ambition.

Item 12. Future Governance & Committees: Approach & Structure

The Director presented slides which compared the model from the past with a new governance model for the future. The Director proposed to broaden the remit of the Museum's Committees to ensure everything the NAM did as an organisation was covered, which Council thought was sensible.

The Performance, Audit & Risk Assurance (PA&RA) Committee would oversee performance and overall operations, with which Council agreed, to prevent the proliferation of too many more committees.

The Acquisition & Disposal Committee would become the Collections Committee and look at collecting, conserving and the delivering the Museum's narrative (communicating).

Members discussed their desire to create a balance of academics as well as historians in order to link the NAM to communities which were important to core supporters of the Museum. The Collections Committee had explored building on the existing but largely defunct panel of experts to support the NAM on specialist topics such as specific historic issues or areas of the collection such as uniforms and badges.

The Director proposed that the governance of NAMTL, over time, be brought closer to the overall governance of the NAM to ensure better alignment with the PA&RA which Council approved.

All of the Director's future governance proposals were endorsed by Council.

Item 13. Any Other Business

The Director intended to talk to the Director-General of RUSI regarding the Siborne Model and would report back to Council.

Dates of Council Meeting Dates in 2018:

10am Wednesday 18th July
10am Thursday 1st November