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## **REPORT ON SIGNAGE: FROM TURNER CONTEMPORARY TO THE MARGATE MUSEUM AND OTHER HISTORIC ATTRACTIONS**

To: **TDC Artefacts Management Review Task and Finish Group – 4 November 2013**

Main Portfolio Area: Community Services

By: **Madeline Homer, Director of Community Services**

Classification: **Unrestricted**

Ward: **Margate Central**

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**Summary:** **Outlines the current signage for Margate Museum and possible ways to increase the linkage between museum and Turner Contemporary and other places of interest.**

### **For Decision**

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#### **1.0 Introduction and Background**

- 1.1 In a recent visit to Margate Museum by members of the Task and Finish Group: TDC Artefacts Management Review, the Chair requested that a report be produced on how to create linkages between Turner Contemporary and the museum as well as other places of interest.
- 1.2 Margate Museum in the heart of the Old Town has benefited from the Turner Contemporary effect and now attracts around 4-5,000 visitors a year. Once visitors are in the museum they rarely spend less than 40 minutes and often over an hour. The comments in the visitor book are very positive and the museum is ranked 4<sup>th</sup> out of 28 attractions in Margate by Tripadvisor. This level of visitors for a local museum powered by volunteers is respectable, though with Turner Contemporary on the doorstep there is room to improve.
- 1.3 The museum has several strong 'selling' points:
  - Old police station with Victorian cells
  - Magistrates court with bench and witness box
  - One of the best local authority picture collections in the South-east
  - Pictures by artists of national standing
  - A diverse collection of artefacts
  - Margate has a strong story to tell: one of the first salt water resorts, mass tourism from Victorian era to the 1970s, Dunkirk etc.
- 1.4 After several years of closure, the work of the last 18 months has been focussed on bringing the museum back to life and dealing with the backlog of work required to bring the museum and the collection up to modern museum standards. Though the council is overseeing and managing the museum, the majority of the work is being carried out by a dedicated band of volunteers, the Friends of Margate Museum.

- 1.5 The museum is presently opening from February to end of November every weekend and Wednesdays from May to September. The museum is also open for group tours throughout the year.
- 1.6 The Friends of Margate Museum volunteers are also opening the Tudor House at the weekends. There is a joint ticket £2.50.
- 1.7 Recent progress has been dramatic, but for the museum to continue to develop will require funding. The most obvious route would be to apply for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF), initial discussions with the HLF advisors have been positive. The first step would be to gain funding to assist with the cataloguing of the artefacts especially the prints, then to proceed to a more ambitious project that would address the building and modernise the exhibitions. The support of the Friends is critical to accessing these funds.

## **2.0 Current Situation**

- 2.1 At present the majority of visitors find the museum through either picking up a leaflet usually from Droit House or discovering the museum when they come to the Old Town. There is a significant correlation between visitor numbers to the museum and the busyness of the Old Town; when the Old Town is busy the museum is busy. The museum leaflet is presently being redesigned with the help of TDC Communications. The aim is for the leaflets of Margate Museum and Tudor House to have a similar 'look' so creating a stronger linkage between the two attractions. The leaflets will also have a more modern, professional look and be focussed on attracting visitors to the attractions, rather than being a guide of the attractions.
- 2.2 The Margate Museum has a presence on the web through its own website which received 5,000 visits in the last year and the Visit Thanet/Kent websites.

### **Current signage to the museum**

- 2.3 In addition to the 'pub-style' sign over the entrance to the museum, there are two signs directing visitors to the museum
  - A brown sign with several of the letters missing that is attached to the lamp post by the Media Centre on Kings Street. It incorrectly points to the seafront;
  - An informal black sign on the back of the historical Margate sign on the Plaza.
- 2.4 There is a valid reason for the poor signage, when the town's signage was revamped for the opening of Turner Contemporary the museum was closed and its future uncertain. The result is that the museum missed out.

### **Current signage systems in Margate**

- 2.5 Presently in Margate there are two pedestrian signage systems in operation:
  - Directional signage that are positioned at key pedestrian junctions that also inform the walk time in minutes. These sign to specific town areas such as Old Town, seafront, high street, and attractions such as Turner Contemporary, Shell Grotto and Tudor House;
  - Discover Margate maps are positioned at exit sites of the main town car-parks. The museum is not on the maps though they identify the 'Old Town Hall' as being a building of interest.

### **Attractions in Margate with historical appeal**

- 2.6 The Turner Contemporary is attracting visitors who are interested in culture and history. Margate has a long and interesting history that could be further utilised to encourage visitors to explore beyond Turner Contemporary and the immediate

seafront. Within the old Margate Borough there are over 700 listed buildings. These cover a wide range of periods though Margate is particularly strong for pre-resort, Georgian, Victorian and Edwardian periods. At present the following attractions are open to the public and offer visitors historical experiences within easy walking distance of Turner Contemporary:

- Shell Grotto;
- Theatre Royal;
- Harbour arm;
- Tudor House;
- Margate Museum;
- The Winter Gardens;
- Walpole Bay Museum;
- Dreamland (to open).

2.7 There are other buildings that are architecturally interesting or have a story related to them that could be developed to add interest to visitors as they walk between the major attractions and entry points (railway and car parks); or attract visitors to more 'off the beat' areas through walks. Examples of interesting building:

- Duke street assembly rooms;
- Harbour arm;
- Droit house;
- Cecil and Trinity squares;
- Clock tower and the time ball;
- Nayland Rock shelter: TS Elliot wrote the wasteland;
- Royal Sea Bathing Hospital;
- Surfboat disaster memorial;
- India House;
- Sanger memorials;
- Margate caves;
- Dane Park Urinal;
- Tivoli Woods;
- Salmestone Grange;
- Drapers Mill;
- Countess of Huntingdon's Cemetery;
- Churches: St John's, St. Paul's, St Stephen's, All Saints, Baptist and Congregational churches

2.8 There are also connections to historical figures that could be exploited such as JMW Turner, Nelson, Dickens, Keats, TS Elliot, Marie Lloyd, Sickert, George Sanger, Oliver Postgate and Eric Morecomb.

2.9 It is important to differentiate between the different types and reasons for signage and balance the need with the problem of over cluttering the public environment. All towns need key signage so people can find and move efficiently to and between the main attractions. Ideally this signage should take into account increasing the opportunities for secondary spend, but must not 'annoy' visitors by taking them 'around the houses' only for them to find a much shorter route latter on. The next level down is signage to encourage visitors to discover attractions that they may not have come especially for but would enjoy. These secondary attractions keep the visitor in Margate for longer thus increasing the opportunity for secondary spend. There is also activity signage that takes the visitor on a tour; this is often linked to a theme and could be a walk, cycle ride, bus ride or car ride. These are great at getting people to move off the 'beaten track' and are very popular with visitors interested in culture and history. These activities have been

signed traditionally through leaflets or signs with numbers or symbols. However, there is a growing use of apps, and neo readers to communicate information.

### **Town Trail Plan**

2.10 Margate Community Heritage Federation (MCHF) proposed a town trail that would encourage visitors to explore Margate to discover the historical buildings of Margate. Friends of Margate Museum are members of the federation and the museum and Tudor House were part of the plans to increase the footfall between attractions. The Countess of Huntingdon's cemetery featured strongly in the bid. MCHF worked with MACH, to submit a bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund which was initially unsuccessful, however it is being reviewed for a second bid.

### **Current proposals**

2.11 The Council and partners (Margate Town team, Creativity and Margate Art Culture Heritage (MACH)) with support by the Arts Council is about to start the commissioning of the Margate Wayfaring/ Wayfinding' project. The project is to produce an overall plan that addresses pedestrian movement in the town centre and an initial phase of physical implementation concentrating on access between the High Street from The Parade to Mill Lane, Turner Contemporary, the Old Town, Margate Railway Station (including creative content for the Margate Station information board) and the emerging Dreamland. The museum is expected to benefit from project through the increased numbers of visitors exploring Margate and higher footfall to the Old Town. The project aims to have physical signage in place by early summer.

2.12 At the moment the only permanent sign on the museum building is the pub-style sign over the front door. Improving the signage on the building would improve awareness of the museum and its exhibits. Discussions between the council officer and the Friends have identified several options that are relatively easy and cheap to do:

- Window-film/vinyl on selected windows to publicise the existence of the museum and it's contents (approx. £200);
- A notice board by the front door to display information and publicity posters. The holes in the wall indicate there used to be a sign board there (approx. approx. £100);
- Replace the current tired A boards (approx £300);
- Put a permanent sign on the wall that faces up Duke Street to the seafront. (approx. £300).

2.13 The proposed signage for the museum needs to be cohesion, ideally with the design carrying through to the publicity material. Advice on design will be sourced and probably commissioned. The funding for these improvements could be met from the Friends and the existing museums budget, though permission to spend the museums budget has not been agreed, nor have the Friends executive committee agreed to contribute. The issue of planning permission will also need to be addressed for the permanent signs.

2.14 Developing themed activity signage is an interesting proposal and could be either council driven linked into the Destination Plan, or a more organic approach could be taken where the council encourages local heritage groups to develop their own routes. Developing local walks that link into the museum would probably have an impact on visitor numbers. The museum could develop as a centre point for walks and the Council's Tourism Team are keen to develop guided walks to meet an unsatisfied demand. Some museum volunteers have discussed the idea, and the first attempt is the Margate Heritage Trail on 2<sup>nd</sup> November that includes Theatre Royal, Tudor House and Margate Museum.

### **3.0 Next Steps**

- 3.1 The museum to take part in the Margate Wayfaring / Wayfinding Project.
- 3.2 For the signage on the museum building is be improved, requires the options to be fully costed, the funding agreed, the design for the signs finalised, planning permission agreed for the permanent signs, signed produced and erected. It is not unreasonable to expect that improved signage couldl be in place by next year.
- 3.3 Developing themed activity signage is reliant at the moment on local people and groups developing walks.

### **5.0 Corporate Implications**

#### **5.1 Financial and VAT**

- 5.1.1 The Margate Wayfaring/Wayfaring project has already been agreed.
- 5.1.2 It is proposed that the improved signage on the Margate Museum building will come out of the existing museums budget with contributions from the Friends of Margate Museum.

#### **5.2 Legal**

- 5.2.1 Planning advice will be needed for the permanent signs

#### **5.3 Corporate**

- 5.3.1 Improving signage to the museum would help to meet aims under Priority 8: Diverse cultural facilities' and activities.

#### **5.4 Equity and Equalities**

- 5.4.1 Improved signage would increase the visibility of the museum and encourage residents and visitors to visit the museum and other attractions. Visitors who are not 'cultural vultures' or less willing to research an area may be encouraged to visit the museum or other attractions.

### **6.0 Recommendation(s)**

- 6.1 That the Task and Finish Group support::
  - a) The accessing of HLF funding
  - b) The improved signage initiatives;
- 6.2 Members' guidance is sought regarding how they would like to progress all other issues under review.

### **7.0 Decision Making Process**

- 7.1 The Task and Finish group will report their findings to the Overview and Scrutiny Panel who can set up a sub-committee to review any matters relevant to the operations of Council or the District and develop recommendations for submission to the Overview & Scrutiny Panel which if agree, would be referred to the relevant decision maker and/or body.

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**Annex List**

None	N/A
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**Background Papers**

<b>Title</b>	<b>Where to Access Document</b>
None	N/A

**Corporate Consultation Undertakes**

Finance	
Legal	