

All-Party Parliamentary Group for Museums AGM 14th September 2020: minutes

In attendance

Lord Alderdice
Baroness Andrews
Maggie Appleton
Viscount Astor
Sir Ian Blatchford
Felicity Buchan MP
Tony Butler
David Cole
Sir Micheal Dixon
Jonathan Djanogly MP
Lord Faulkner
Lord Freyberg
Jo Gideon MP
Kim Johnson MP
Sir John Leighton
Andrew Lewer MP
Andrew Lovett
Alison McGovern MP
Lord McNally
Laura Pye
Baroness Randerson
Beth Reynard
Lord Sassoon
Kathryn Simpson
Chris Skidmore MP
Alex Sobel MP
Alexander Stafford MP
Kathryn Thomson
Suzie Tucker
Esme Ward
Iain Watson

Apologies

Maria Balshaw
Paul Blomfield MP
Lord Boateng
Lord Boswell of Aynho
Lord Carrington
Sarah Champion MP
Theo Clarke MP
Baroness Doocey
Baroness Eaton
Baroness Ludford
Baroness Morris of Yardley
Liz Saville-Roberts MP
Greg Smith MP
Baroness Eaton

1. Welcome and election of officers

Chris Skidmore MP welcomed the group and introduced Suzie Tucker, Head of Strategy and Communications at the National Museum Directors' Council who will provide the secretariat for the group.

The following members were elected as officers:

Name	Party	Position
Chris Skidmore MP	Conservative	Chair
Felicity Buchan MP	Conservative	Vice-Chair

Theo Clarke MP	Conservative	Vice-Chair
Lord Faulkner	Labour	Vice-Chair
Alison McGovern MP	Labour	Vice-Chair
Alison Thewliss MP	Scottish National Party	Vice-Chair
Chris Bryant MP	Labour	Secretary
Kim Johnson MP	Labour	Treasurer

2. Discussion of APPG outline

Members agreed the purpose and framework for the group. Kim Johnson noted that she would like to add a specific point to the framework referencing the role of museums in fighting racial inequality. Baroness Andrews remarked that the objectives should also include mention of social justice in relation to access to museums.

Action: officers will work to revise framework as suggested

The group will correspond with all museums. The National Museum Directors' Council's membership is the national and major regional museums. Their membership is representative of the wider sector with 45 members, but as there are around 2,000 museums in the country the sector is much broader. Their membership includes national, university, local authority and independent museums which are the largest categories of museums in the sector. The activity of the group will be relevant to the whole sector.

Members highlighted other All-Party Parliamentary Groups with relevant subject matters such as Arts and Heritage, Industrial Heritage and Heritage Railways. The group will work collaboratively with these existing APPGs.

Action: the group will continue to liaise with other APPGs and work together where possible

3. Introduction to the museum sector from Sir Ian Blatchford, Chair of the National Museum Directors' Council and Director of the Science Museum Group

Sir Ian Blatchford gave an overview of the museum sector. He highlighted the importance of museums to their local communities but also stressed that it is not just a question of local impact but the enormous contribution that museums make to Britain.

He commented that all political parties value the importance of place making and domestic tourism. Britain's museums are revered as paragons of virtue. They have made great strides in recent years to be more inclusive. Museums across the country are major drivers of tourism. They demonstrate that the UK is a very creative and clever country.

Ian then turned to the current crisis and explained that the immediate concerns are for regional museums, which are hugely affected by both central Government decisions and local authority funding. This will be a key issue for campaigning around in the spending review. Secondly, university museums across the country are really struggling as their own issues are tied up with the fate of universities which is very challenging.

He noted that funding is a perennial issue though not necessarily new funding but the coordination of existing pots of money. There are many funds across Government Departments and many are not controlled by DCMS. For example, there are funds focusing on regeneration, placemaking and the future of the high street. Culture-led regeneration spearheaded by museums is proven to bring growth back to town centres yet museums often struggle to access these funds.

He addressed the many issues being debated currently regarding Britain's history, questions such as what Britain will become as a diverse nation. These are issues that museums discuss all the time. He commented that surveys show that the public invest a huge degree of trust in museums at a time where they are distrusting of many other pillars of public life such as the media. Museums can and need to use their collections to do good and to serve the public.

Ian closed by stating that though the sector is undertaking much work with the support of the APPG he hoped much more could be achieved.

4. Q&A with Sir Ian Blatchford

- Jonathan Djangoly commented on the topic of regional and high street support. Museums are increasingly important in small market towns and larger provincial city centres. He was pleased that there is now a forum for promoting smaller museums.

Ian Blatchford responded that was a helpful point. He explained that the Science Museum Group has a railway museum in Shildon, County Durham and he has seen the spectacular impact the museum has on the town.

- Kim Johnson asked if the group could discuss a fairer funding formula to distribute funding more equally as there is currently a disparity in how funding is allocated across the country.

Ian Blatchford agreed and responded that the important point is how HMT assesses the value of schemes and the investment tends to favour the South East. The aim should not be about not taking away funding from London, but giving a fairer share and raising investment elsewhere. NMDC would be keen to support this agenda. The Prime Minister and Chancellor have made statements about levelling up, so there needs to be cash flowing from that promise.

- Felicity Buchan asked what can be done to encourage people into museums? One key question coming out of pandemic is how to get local visitors into museums when there is no international footfall.

Ian Blatchford replied that the Science Museum are currently talking to Government about collaborating on a big marketing campaign to address those issues. Getting back to where museums were prior to the pandemic with international visitors is at least a two year project so it would be ludicrous to wait for them to return. People must be encouraged to rediscover their local museums. Audiences surrounding London have been hesitant but colleagues in places like Liverpool are having more success in getting people back. Concerns about museums being crowded have been dispelled by the offer of a potentially VIP experience while visitor numbers are restricted.

- Kay Andrews asked what is Ian's sense of the worst case scenario? For example, when the furlough scheme ends. What happens when this comes to an end? How serious and how concerned about the nature and urgency of the problem should we be, how would we need to campaign if the situation worsens, and what could the group do to support?

Ian Blatchford shared that there is great concern for museums to avoid job losses. The Cultural Recovery Fund has been welcomed but funding needs to continue in some form next year for two reasons: that the full scale of the threat is only just emerging now, and that for some museums it will not be just a question of preserving current status. Collections may need to sensibly merge in

a non-chaotic manner. If it's done in a chaotic manner then there's a risk of losing collections and our history will be at risk. What the sector wants Government to do, having created some good funds, is extend them as one year is simply not enough.

- Kim Johnson asked if there is scope to look at more distributive funding models? And to think more creatively?

Ian Blatchford answered that there is potential to be much more interventionist rather than expecting things to happen organically. There is some data on which areas of the country are getting good cultural provision.

5. Proposed activity

Chris Skidmore noted that NMDC will provide the secretariat for the APPG for Museums, operating the website and official twitter account, and provide material for members with updates from the sector, particularly to help frame potential questions in the chamber. The group will hold six meeting per year.

Looking towards the spending review, the group will invite a Treasury Minister to the next meeting to discuss the needs of the sector. The group will look to set up a separate meeting with Robert Jenrick as there are many issues about fairer funding and how this can be achieved for regional museums.

Action: members to make Chris Skidmore aware of any further ministerial meetings they think the group should have

The group will undertake a programme of visits. Ian Blatchford has offered to host the first visit at the Science Museum. Ideally, the next visit will be to a museum outside of London.

Action: members to suggest museums across the UK which they think the group should visit

NMDC has a draft report which was prepared in anticipation of the spending review last year but since then the world has changed rapidly and it will need to be altered. NMDC would like to work with the APPG along with the Museums Association and the Association for Independent Museums to ensure the document reflects the situation facing the whole sector.

Action: the secretariat to work with partners to redraft advocacy document
Other planned activities for the group over the year are a constituency museum of the year competition and an annual lecture and dinner.

Lord Faulkner added that the group should encourage museums to build a relationship with their MPs.

The next meeting will take place in early October.

Action: the secretariat to circulate the date of the next meeting to members

6. AOB

Chris Skidmore thanked all members for joining. NMDC will circulate the minutes and details of the next meeting.