

24 March 2006

NATIONAL MUSEUMS NORTHERN IRELAND BOARD OF TRUSTEES

Minutes of a meeting of the Board of Trustees held on Friday, 24 March 2006, at 11.00 am, in the Point Meeting Room at W5, 2 Queen's Quay, Belfast.

Present: Mrs Margaret Elliott (Chair)
Mr Dan Harvey
Professor Eithne McLaughlin
Mr Sean Neeson
Ms Wendy Osborne
Mr Tom Shaw
Dr Alastair Walker
Miss Linda Beers
Mr Bill Montgomery
Mr Harvey Bicker
Ms Patricia Flanagan

In Attendance: Mr Tim Cooke (Chief Executive)
Mrs Jude Helliker (Director of HR & Organisational Development)
Ms Amanda Lilley (Director of Finance and Planning)
Mr Marshall McKee (Director of Operations)
Mr John Gilmour (Director of Development)
Mrs Heather Henning (Minute Secretary)

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies were received from Sir Kenneth Bloomfield and Dame Geraldine Keegan.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 16 December 2005

The minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2005 were approved subject to the following amendments -

4.3 Review of Public Administration

Paragraph 4, first sentence to be amended to read -

"There was no indication from the discussions that had taken place so far that the museum would lose any of its responsibilities outside of the transfer of Armagh County Museum".

4.5 MAGNI Branding

Minute to be redrafted to read -

The Chief Executive said that market research had shown that the MAGNI brand was not well recognised by the public at large as an organisation. He acknowledged the work that had gone into creating a corporate identity for the merged organisation however it had not translated into the public arena in a particularly successful way. Furthermore MAGNI as a concept had not been well received by many of the staff either.

Marketing staff had therefore experimented with different types of branding to test the concept of "national museums". Initial responses to this concept had been positive and the Chief Executive sought the views of the Board to the idea of migrating from the MAGNI brand to a brand that would essential be around the "National Museums Northern Ireland" idea. Board members indicated their broad support for the Chief Executive's proposal to investigate the proposed brand with the aim of achieving a unifying and simple way of describing the organisation's purpose and standing. Professor McLaughlin agreed the simplicity of "National Museums" was attractive. She noted however that the word

"national" is a contentious one in the specific context of this society. It may be that use of this label could deter some people from using our services and facilities or from applying for posts with us. Accordingly she suggested that the pros and cons of the change proposed needed to be more fully thought through and tested before a final decision is made. It was agreed that the issues would return to a subsequent Trustees' meeting. The Chief Executive assured Trustees that a final brand proposal around the proposed concept would be presented to the Board for approval in due course by the new Director of Marketing, Communications and Trading and with this understanding it was agreed that the migration process should continue.

3. MATTERS ARISING FROM MINUTES OF MEETING HELD ON 30 SEPTEMBER 2005

3.1 Maritime Heritage

Mr Neeson referred to the recent purchase of "Nomadic" by the Department of Social Development (DSD) and said there was a pressing need for the Minister to clarify where responsibility for maritime heritage in Northern Ireland lay. The Review of Public Administration indicated that National Museums Northern Ireland was responsible for maritime heritage and Mr Neeson emphasised the importance of it remaining with the museum and had requested a meeting with the Minister to discuss the matter. Dr Walker and other Board members supported Mr Neeson's views.

The Chief Executive said it was his understanding that the recent purchase of "Nomadic" by DSD was not a policy issue, it was simply that DSD were able to provide the necessary funding from their regeneration budget. Following a brief discussion, Board members felt that government's long term vision for maritime heritage in Northern Ireland was clarified and it was agreed that the Chairman should write to the Minister, on behalf of the Board, to seek clarification about the expected role of National Museums Northern Ireland.

The Chief Executive advised Board members that one of the tasks currently being undertaken as part of the museum's strategy for maritime heritage was the drafting of an internal collections based document detailing the artefacts that may contribute to a broader interpretation strategy for maritime heritage in Northern Ireland consistent with the museum's draft Corporate Plan. Relevant artefacts would be categorised under the headings of Titanic, wider shipbuilding in Belfast and the wider industrial development of Belfast during the 19th Century. Mr Neeson stressed the importance of the maritime heritage of Northern Ireland being portrayed from a national perspective rather than being simply Belfast based.

3.2 MAGNI Branding

This item was discussed under "Reserved Business".

4. BUSINESS OF EXECUTIVE

4.1 Executive Summary

The Executive Summary for January to March 2006 detailing activities undertaken during the past quarter and setting out proposed targets for April to June 2006 was noted by the Board. The Chief Executive referred to the Titanic exhibition, a joint initiative with Belfast City Council, currently on show on the ground floor of W5 and the series of very successful exhibitions recent staged at the Ulster Museum namely, the Neil Shawcross and Anthony Green exhibitions and the American Art exhibition. The Ulster Folk and Transport Museum had developed a busy spring and early summer programme and a special event was being planned during July to mark the 30th anniversary of the Ulster American Folk Park.

Trustees also noted that the recruitment process to appoint three new directors was underway.

Capital Maintenance

The Chief Executive referred to the accommodation and capital maintenance programmes and reported that the planning application for the accommodation block at the Ulster Folk and Transport Museum site has been submitted to the Planning Authority and that a business case had been submitted to DCAL. He also made reference to ongoing discussions

with DCAL regarding an underspend in the museum's 05/06 capital maintenance budget as a result of a project overrun of 6-8 weeks. DCAL were duty bound to declare any underspend to the Department of Finance and Personnel (DFP) at year end and the museum would have to rebid for the funding without any guarantee of an automatic reallocation. DCAL however fully understood the reasons for the delayed schedule of work and were being extremely supportive working with museum staff to try to resolve the situation.

Northern Ireland Audit Office Report on Collections Management and Storage

The Chief Executive stated that the Northern Ireland Audit Office (NIAO) report on Collections Management within the museum was drawing to a conclusion. NIAO had issued a last draft of the report to DCAL and himself for final comment with publication expected in early June 2006. The Chief Executive expected the report to make some criticism of the museum's current storage position and explained the methodology used by NIAO staff to assess the storage provision within the museum that had identified 60% of the facilities used as being poor or unacceptable. The Chief Executive assured Board members again that this statement did not mean that the vast majority of the museum's collections were under threat in poor or unacceptable conditions. In fact, 90% of the collections are held in acceptable or better conditions.

It was probable however that the report would be the subject of a Public Accounts Committee hearing. Board members acknowledged the importance of assuring the public that the vast majority of the museum's collections had not been put at risk despite the fact that the museum had not been allocated the necessary capital investment by government to improve its storage facilities. It was agreed that copies of the final report would be circulated to Board members in due course.

Ormeau Baths Gallery

The Chief Executive briefed Board members on the recent closure of the Ormeau Baths Gallery following the withdrawal of its funding by the Arts Council of Northern Ireland (ACNI). The Arts Council was committed to reopening the gallery under a new management arrangement. National Museums had been invited by the Chair and Chief Executive of the ACNI to consider what if any involvement the museum may wish to have in being associated with the gallery. National Museums was currently exploring potential partnerships with the Arts Council and others which may prove beneficial. As a Council Member of ACNI, Mr Montgomery said that the Arts Council would welcome collaboration with the museum. Trustees supported the proposal especially in light of the forthcoming closure of the Ulster Museum.

4.2 Draft Business Plan 2006/07

Trustees noted that the Draft Business Plan 2006/2007 which incorporated the three broad amendments raised by Trustees, had been submitted to DCAL. DCAL had broadly welcomed the plan and were in dialogue with the Executive regarding specific action points.

4.3 Ulster Museum Project

The Director of Development said that work ongoing on the architectural schemes and exhibition designs and the final capital costs for the scheme. The total cost of the project was estimated to be in the region of £12.4m indicating a further £800-£900K of funding needed to be sourced to meet the overall cost of the project. Discussions were ongoing with various bodies as part of the museum's fundraising strategy. Following a brief discussion about the project costs, Mr Harvey said it would be prudent to build in a generous contingency to cover unforeseen problems normally associated with older buildings and that if possible no work should be deferred that was likely to multiply in cost over the next ten years.

The Director of Development briefed Trustees on the outreach activities that would be undertaken during the period of closure to retain the museum's core audience and to develop a broader visitor base especially in rural areas and with under-represented groups. The outreach programme was designed to provide direct and virtual access to the rich resources of the museum and to maintain the profile of the Ulster Museum during closure. During the refurbishment programme the Ulster Museum will have a virtual presence in

the form of a new web page and a programme of e-learning was also being developed to support the virtual museum.

Trustees noted that the Valuation and Lands Agency and Procurement Directorate had been negotiating on behalf of the museum to secure appropriate storage facilities for the museum's collections. Professor McLaughlin welcomed these developments. The Chief Executive said that a further briefing on the UM project including an update on the interpretation strategy would be organised for Trustees. Work was continuing towards the submission of the Stage II HLF bid at the end of April/May with the aim of having formal approval from HLF by September 2006.

4.4 Diversity

Having given an undertaking at the previous Board meeting to brief Board members on the activities currently being undertaken by the museum in respect of diversity, the Chief Executive invited the Director of HR and Organisational Development to summarise these activities.

Through a brief slide presentation, the Director of HR and Organisational Development outlined the importance of diversity in key areas such as audience development, improving society, the museum's role in lifelong learning, repositioning the organisation, financial sustainability and tourism and detailed a range of tasks that would be implemented through a new Learning and Partnership directorate whose strategic responsibility was to broaden the appeal of National Museums Northern Ireland to wider audiences. A range of activities were also being undertaken by the HR and Organisational Development directorate to ensure that diversity and equality principles were mainstreamed through the organisation's employment policies and procedures together with new training initiatives covering themes such as access, languages, customer services and a harmonious working environment. A five year review of the organisation's Equality Scheme was due to be undertaken in July 2006. The Director of HR and Organisational Development referred to the draft Corporate Strategy 2006-2009 and said it would demonstrate to costumers, sponsors and funders a recognition that diversity was at the core of the role of museums. It would also ensure that staff understood they had a personal responsibility to embrace diversity.

Trustees supported the Director of HR and Organisational Development's statement on diversity.

4.5 Draft Corporate Plan

The Chief Executive advised Trustees that DCAL had requested that the original draft Corporate Plan be amended in line with the Strategic Outline Case (SOC) and the Executive Team had therefore re-examined their approach to drafting the plan. The revised plan had been retitled as the "Draft Corporate Strategy" and would cover the period 2006-2009. The aim of the new strategy was to clarify the purpose and role of the organisation and would be used to provide the strongest possible advocacy. The strategy would focus strongly on the key elements of the SOC, outlining clearly the reasons for change and the required action to initiate that change. It would also help staff to understand the connection between the organisation's activities and the change objectives of the organisation. As the draft Corporate Strategy would be a substantive item on the agenda for the June Board meeting the Chief Executive agreed to circulate copies of the document in advance of the meeting.

5. BUSINESS OF CHAIRMAN

5.1 Appointment of Permanent Secretary at Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure
The Chairman referred to the recent appointment of Mr Paul Sweeney as Permanent Secretary of the Department of Culture, Arts and Leisure and proposed that Mr Sweeney be invited join the Board and Executive Team at an informal lunch following the meeting on 23 June 2006. The Chief Executive agreed to issue the invitation on behalf of the Board of Trustees.

5.2 Folklife Festival in Washington DC 2007

The Chairman briefed Board members on a recent meeting, organised by the Ulster Bank,

to outline potential opportunities for Northern Ireland at the Smithsonian Folklife Festival in Washington DC in 2007. The Chairman said that the Smithsonian's selection of Northern Ireland was a wonderful opportunity for the province to showcase itself and an approach had been made through herself regarding the museum's possible involvement in the festival. The Director of Development was asked to give Trustees a presentation on the work of the museum at the June Board meeting.

5.3 Review of Public Administration (RPA)

The Chairman welcomed the recent announcement that National Museums, as a body, would remain untouched following the second stage of the RPA process regarding non-departmental public bodies (NDPBs). The Chairman advised Board members that the Department's responses to her letter, sent on behalf of the Board, asking for the rationale behind the decision to transfer Armagh County Museum to a newly formed local authority and seeking clarification of the assurances that had been given and how the process was to be taken forward simply confirmed that the review process, which was outside the control of DCAL, had concluded that Armagh County Museum should be transferred to a newly formed local authority. The response did however further confirm that the rights of staff would be protected. The Chairman agreed to advise Board members of any further developments in relation to the transfer process.

5.4 National Trust

The Chairman reported that she had recently had the pleasure of meeting the Chairman of the National Trust. Many of the National Trust's aspirations were similar to those of National Museums Northern Ireland and therefore any beneficial partnership links would be welcome.

6. TRUSTEES' COMMITTEES

6.1 Staffing Committee

6.1.1 Approval of minutes of meeting held on 10 February 2006

Board members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 10 February 2006.

6.2 General Purposes and Finance Committee

6.2.1 Verbal report of meeting held on 10 February 2006

Trustees noted that the main items of discussion were the Financial Report for the period ended December 2005, capital re-profiling referred to in the Executive Summary, the draft NIAO report on collections management and the recent review of public administration.

6.3 Audit Committee

6.3.1 Approval of minutes of meeting held on 16 December 2005

Mr Harvey reported that the Audit Committee meeting scheduled for 24 March had been deferred to Monday 27 March due to the unavoidable absence of the Committee Chairman, Sir Kenneth Bloomfield. Mr Harvey said very satisfactory progress had been made in relation to the preparation of the Financial Statements for the year ended March 2005 and these would be recommended to the Board for approval by the Audit Committee in due course. Mr Harvey stated that the organisation had been faced, for some time, with a considerable backlog of Priority 1 recommendations arising from internal audit on a wide range of issues which obviously needed quite urgent attention. These recommendations had been deferred as there were insufficient resources within the Finance directorate to implement the recommendations however as of December 2005, with some assistance from the museum's internal auditors, KPMG, very satisfactory progress had been made and the Audit Committee was hopeful that the number of Priority 1 recommendations would soon be at an acceptable level. Trustees noted that following a full investigation of suspected fraud at one of the museum's sites that the disciplinary procedures had been implemented and appropriate action taken. Board members approved the minutes of the meeting held on 16 December 2005.

6.4 Marketing, Development and Fund-raising Committee

6.4.1 Verbal report of meeting held on 21 March 2006

Mr Montgomery, Chair of the Marketing, Development and Fund-raising Committee reported that the majority of items discussed at the meeting had been discussed under matters arising with the exception of the need to set up a fund-raising advisory panel. Mr Montgomery agreed to provide Board members with a proposal regarding the constitution and powers of the panel for Board approval.

7. WHOWHATWHEREWHENWHY (W5)

7.1 Minutes of W5 Board meeting held on 22 November 2005

Board members noted the minutes of the W5 Board meeting held on 22 November 2005.

7.2 Minutes of W5 Board meeting held on 20 December 2005

Board members noted the minutes of the W5 Board meeting held on 20 December 2005.

7.3 Minutes of W5 Board meeting held on 20 January 2006

Board members noted the minutes of the W5 Board meeting held on 20 January 2006.

7.4 Verbal report of W5 Board Meeting held on 21 February 2006

Mr Harvey, Chairman of W5, reported that visitor figures had been excellent during the last quarter and expected the organisation to produce a good year end. There were several positive funding proposals and sponsorship bids under discussion and discussion with DCAL regarding the long term funding of the organisation were ongoing.

W5, as of a consortium, designed and produced an animated exhibition based on the Wallace and Grommit series which has opened in Bristol. To date over 191,000 people have visited the exhibition which had contributed significantly to visitor numbers. The exhibition was scheduled to return to Belfast at the end of the year and should boost visitor numbers at the end of the year.

8. ANY OTHER BUSINESS

None.

9. DATE AND VENUE OF NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Board of Trustees would take place on 23 June 2006. The venue and time of the meeting would be notified in due course.