

Malton Museum Consultants Report

At the recent meeting with the Consultants who are drawing up the report about a possible new location for Malton Museum I raised a few concerns about the report which was being presented in its draft form.

My first concern was the passing references to Norton, even describing it as a village, and the lack of any map of Norton in the report. The report was very much focused on Malton and did not indicate that Malton and Norton are one community and have been for the past 2000 years. I was not surprised by this weakness because I realised that employing outside consultants to prepare this report, who did not really understand how this community works, would rely on the way their guidance notes took them. However, I did make this weakness very clear.

The report implied that there was little deprivation in Malton but failed to identify the level of deprivation in Norton. It also focused on housing development and newcomers from Eastern Europe in Malton but failed to mention this for Norton. Some funders consider deprivation as a lever when offering support.

The report, in comparing Malton Museum with other Museums, listed a series of other museums some of which were Local Authority run and staffed. Malton Museum does not have the advantage of being housed in Local Authority property and is entirely volunteer run.

One of the properties being considered is Harrison House near the Railway Station. This property is in Norton and is being retained on the list because it is not owned by the Fitzwilliam Estate and is owned by North Yorkshire Council (NYC). The other three properties being considered are owned by Fitzwilliam Estate as we would expect being in Malton.

I also raised my concerns that the PLB Report of 2000 was not mentioned at all and the site behind the Fitzwilliam Offices had been ignored. When asked, the Fitzwilliam Representative indicated that nothing was ruled out but listed a whole series of financial and logistical problems that would probably prohibit that development. My feeling is that there is a limit to the level of support the Estate will offer to display its own collection.

I do have some concern that the Fitzwilliam Estate are in a position to 'manage' the expectations of Malton Museum Trustees in their decision-making considerations by only offering properties they favour and managing the outcome using lease costs on the different properties.

I was also concerned that the Woodhams Stone Collection only received one mention in the whole report. My view is that any future museum development must include all the facets of local history for both towns (this community) and the wider environs. I even concluded in my comments that the name of the Museum should be changed to include 'Heritage Centre' to reflect this all-embracing historic content.

I was not alone in airing my concerns on these matters. Museum Development North, in its own comments later, raised exactly the same issues.

Proposal

I propose that Norton TC invites Woodhams Stone and Malton Museum Representatives to discuss how the two organisations might work more closely to ensure that any new location can offer to the public

1. A full and comprehensive collection of local history across the ages
2. An outreach programme to schools and interested groups

This meeting should include two representatives from each Council, a Clerk to record the discussion and two to three members from each Woodham Stone and Malton Museum.

It is to the advantage of both organisations to have the same defined path forward. Major potential funders are more likely to embrace a project which combines all the parties promoting local history than individual groups going in different directions. I believe it would be much easier for both Town Councils to offer financial support to this project if it was seen as representing the whole of the community and not just half of it.