

Museums for changing lives

Studies in Partnership: Sustainability Project



Acknowledgements

The work described in this booklet is supported by Renaissance, the MLA's ground-breaking programme which is transforming England's non-national museums. It strives for excellence, and through targeted investment, and cultivation of local, regional and national partnerships, it is realising the sector's potential to make a real difference to people's lives. Central government funding is enabling regional museums across the country to raise their standards and deliver real results in support of education, learning, community development and economic regeneration.

In the East of England, Renaissance is managed by the Renaissance East of England Office, and delivered by the four large museum services which together make up the East of England Museum Hub:

- Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service
- The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge
- Luton Culture
- Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service

You can read more about the impact of the Renaissance programme in the East of England by visiting our website: www.mla.gov.uk/renaissanceeastofengland



The
Fitzwilliam
Museum



Cover Image: Traditional harvesting at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

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Sustainability Project: In a nutshell

“Sustainability is about meeting the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their needs.”

Maurice Davies, Deputy Director, Museums Association, speaking at the 2008 Museums, Sustainability and Growth Conference, Norwich Castle

961

packets of radish seed and 220 bags of seed potatoes handed out by Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse for their “grow one thing this year” campaign

“We learnt how the flour was made – it does not just come in a bag from Tesco.”

Participant, Growing Grain event, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

£450,000

additional funds levered in by the Sustainability Project for family projects, capital development and building and site improvements

“The children understood that archaeologists use what is left behind as evidence... about the types of waste we produce and how that is different to waste in the past”

Teacher comment following a learning session at the Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey on recycling

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museums in the East of England now using the Green Museums toolkit to improve their sites and reduce their carbon footprint

Foreword

In the current economic climate there is a greater emphasis than ever on working in partnership to deliver services more efficiently and more responsively to local needs.

This booklet is one in a series of six highlighting ongoing projects led by East of England museums which have partnership working at their heart. Taken together they demonstrate that museums have a valuable contribution to make in:

- Engaging local people in decision-making
- Promoting community cohesion through exploration and celebration of the past
- Providing economic benefits through employment and tourism.

Communities benefit when museums share resources and expertise with each other:

- **The Greater Fens Museums Partnership and Maritime Heritage East** are networks which bring together museums with similar collections to celebrate and promote unique aspects of the region's past. Economies of scale are combined with a richer offering to the public and more effective promotion of heritage to visitors.
- **Something Borrowed** is a partnership with the British Museum which is enabling smaller museums in the East of England to borrow items from the BM's collections, creating new opportunities for tourism and learning.

Museums are also working increasingly with partners beyond the cultural sector:

- **Growing Communities** provides a forum for museums, local communities and planning departments in Growth Point areas in the region to explore how the past can help shape future development
- **Stepping Stones** has brought together 24 museums in a partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions to create 32 jobs and apprenticeships for long-term unemployed young people
- **The Sustainability Project** is unlocking the potential of rural life museums to engage the public in debate around environmental and social issues, as well as joining forces with other organisations to find ways of reducing the sector's carbon footprint.

This work is supported by Renaissance, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's ground-breaking programme that is transforming England's non-national museums. The staff leading these projects are funded by Renaissance East of England which has also developed the strategic vision and infrastructure to help the sector become more outward-looking and innovative.

The projects showcased in this series show museums have a part to play in making the Big Society a reality – by providing a unique space for communities to learn about their past and get involved in shaping their future.

Vanessa Trevelyan
Head of Norfolk Museums &
Archaeology Service
President, Museums Association
October 2010

Sustainability Project: Overview

“It’s pointless showcasing history to the world if it costs the earth to do so.” Delegate, Museums, Sustainability and Growth Conference, 2008, Norwich Castle

It is no longer merely ‘good to be green’; it is increasingly essential. In the present economic environment an integrated approach to sustainability will enable museums to both adapt to new circumstances and provide better value for money.

For many museums – especially those in local authorities – there is also a real opportunity to be key partners in showcasing and interpreting corporate

priorities around sustainability, including carbon reduction.

With its focus on the preservation and passing on of collections, information and knowledge to future generations, sustainability in its broadest sense is fundamental to the museum profession.

During recent years, museums in the East of England have been working to address issues of sustainability through a range of projects looking at the sustainability ‘triple-bottom line’: environmental, economic and social. Working through the established Rural Museums East [RME] partnership, this activity has primarily centred upon the



Grinding flour, Growing Grain event, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

region's rural life museums. Such museums are well placed to explore these issues because their collections relate to a time when we, as a nation, lived in a more sustainable manner - from a greater sense of community through to closer links to the land. The project was also shaped by a recognition that the general public are increasingly distanced from the practical experience of using, or seeing in use, the tools displayed in these museums. Addressing issues of sustainability would therefore help these sites find a contemporary relevance for their collections, making them truly accessible and more engaging for visitors.

The RME partnership consists of:

- The Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL) in Stowmarket Suffolk, focussing on social sustainability
- Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, the Museum of Norfolk Life, which has been taking the lead on environmental sustainability
- Stockwood Discovery Centre, in Luton, which recently completed a green build project
- The Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire, a smaller independent museum which, prior to the start of the project, had yet to engage with sustainability issues on any significant scale.

This booklet details the experiences of museums within the East of England in engaging with sustainability in its widest sense, tackling environmental, social and economic concerns, with

practical case studies of how these sites have put sustainability into action.

It is all too easy to see 'sustainability' as being forced to cut back and reduce services, but for the RME, this work has opened up new partnerships and new areas of development for the museums. It has successfully levered in over £450,000 additional funds for family-orientated projects, capital development, building and site improvements.

The Sustainability Project also engaged with museums across the region to help support their own sustainable development, including working with other stakeholders to demonstrate the positive impact museums can make within this field. Through two highly successful Museums, Sustainability and Growth conferences in 2008 and 2010, and the development of the Green Museum and Social Sustainability toolkits, the opportunities for more museums to become actively involved has been both promoted and supported on the ground.



Bird-scaring: practising a traditional farming technique at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse

When were we happy?

Social sustainability at the Museum of East Anglian Life



The Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL) strongly believes that museums can help increase the happiness and well-being of both their local and wider community through the events they run, the partnerships they create and the opportunities they can offer. As part of the regional project, MEAL focused on issues of social sustainability through an online exhibition entitled *When were we happy?*

This sought to explore our rose-tinted view of the past. Using four time periods it compared and contrasted the well-being and happiness of the ordinary people who lived and worked

in the village of Stowupland in the years 1851, 1901, 1951 and 2001. An online exhibition was created: www.whenwerewehappy.org.uk

Building on the success of this project the museum worked with local schoolchildren to explore what makes people happy. *Happy Days* culminated in an exhibition at the museum, alongside a display on 'Trust': a further essential element to any cohesive community.

Happy Days: Suffolk schoolchildren explore the exhibition

Promoting room hire facilities: Offering economic sustainability for museums?

Located in the heart of the Norfolk countryside, yet lying only a short drive from Norwich, Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse was keen to explore the potential for developing its venue hire income stream through more effectively promoting itself as a unique and relaxing rural venue for meetings and events.

As part of the Sustainability Project, improvements were made to a number of spaces on site to make them more attractive to external bookings: from audio-visual equipment and a hearing loop in the chapel, to improved lighting and heating and new furniture in the Boardroom. These alterations have allowed the spaces to be used more flexibly to meet a diverse range of needs. More effective promotion to groups, organisations and corporate

users has been developed including a range of targeted marketing materials and the creation of a room hire brand. The catering offer at the site has also been developed.

To support this package, Gressenhall was able to play to its strengths and offer added value including tours of the site and cart rides, making a meeting at Gressenhall truly memorable and distinctive from other venues.

In 2009, Gressenhall saw a 50% increase in takings, whilst bookings received for 2010 have already seen an 82% increase on 2008 figures.

These bookings have not been at the expense of Gressenhall's character, but have enabled a whole new audience to see what the site has to offer.

Upgraded facilities: The chapel at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse



Sustainable to the core: An integrated approach to environmental concerns at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse



At Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, work has been taking place to integrate environmental sustainability into the core operation and daily running of the museum.

The key element in this has been the Gressenhall Green Team: a group of staff and volunteers from all levels within the organisation, operating with the support of senior management. As environmental sustainability is as much about 'behavioural change' as policies, this approach has proved very effective, enabling people to address sustainability issues within their own work areas, whilst enabling them to take ownership of any changes and future direction.

Environmental sustainability has also been integrated into on-site interpretation with recycled aluminium graphic panels, improved facilities to support biodiversity and environmentally themed events and activities. In 2007 and 2008 Gressenhall ran Go Green events - single days which focused on issues of environmental concern with a mix of information and retail stalls, demonstrations and activities. On reflection, however, these events could have been hosted by any number of other non-museum organisations and were essentially preaching to the converted in the visitors that they attracted.

During 2009 and 2010 therefore, Gressenhall developed the 'Green Stream', running throughout the entire events programme, from the main event days to school holiday activities. This allowed them to incorporate more of the collections and the site, and reach audiences who might not attend a specifically 'environmental' day.

"We learnt how farmers worked years ago and how difficult it was to produce wheat and bread - something we take for granted today." Participant, Growing Grain event.

Above, Left: Grinding flour workshop at the Growing Grain event

Spreading the green message: Environmental support for the wider museums community

The Sustainability Project has used the experiences of the Rural Museums East partners to encourage museums across the region to become more sustainable.

An initial pilot with the Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire identified the need for a systematic approach to support museums which would not only identify the options available but also enable the museum in question to prioritise where to start.

An informal partnership was made with Renaissance East Midlands, who had just launched their *Green Museums Step-by-Step Guide*, developed by Groundwork Derby & Derbyshire. This encompassed all of the standard areas for consideration, whilst also taking into account areas of specific concern for museums.

The audit is easy to complete and covers measuring current energy usage, identifying areas for improvement, prioritising these and setting targets for change.

Inspired by the experiences of the partnership showcased through two seminars and the Museums Sustainability and Growth Conference, to date more than 10 museums within the East of England region have taken up the opportunity to go through the

Green Museums Step-by-Step Guide. A series of Green Action Grants available in autumn 2010 will enable them to put some of these ideas into practice.

Roof insulation being installed at the Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey, Cambridgeshire



Building greener museums: Experiences from two different sites

Museums are quite often located in unsustainable, energy-hungry buildings within which they attempt to retain tight environmental controls. We felt it was hypocritical to be promoting sustainability to visitors, without first starting to put our own houses in order.

At Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse, an initial audit by the Centre for Alternative Technology identified areas for improvement to the grade II listed former workhouse, and the museum has since been awarded county council carbon reduction grants to carry out draught proofing works and to install loft insulation, helping them to reduce their carbon footprint and save money in the process.

With Stockwood Discovery Centre, the partnership had the opportunity to evaluate a modern green build, and to assess the success of new lighting and heating systems within such a building.

The new structure included features such as sustainable building design, a sedum roof, biomass boiler, solar water-heating panels, low wattage and sensor lighting.

The experiences of Stockwood Discovery Centre have been subsequently incorporated into designs for a new green build at Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse and used to advise museums across the region.

Green build: The entrance to Stockwood Discovery Centre, Luton



Waste tells a story: A pilot learning session at The Farmland Museum



In a joint project with Donarbon Waste Management, The Farmland Museum and Denny Abbey in Cambridgeshire developed a new session for local schools exploring historic and contemporary methods of reuse and recycling.

In a morning at the museum, the pupils explored the archaeological rubbish left by previous inhabitants of the site, while the activity 'A Bag Full of Clues' got them questioning what materials would survive from our modern world for archaeologists of the future to find. They also visited the 'Village Shop' to learn about packaging in the more recent past and created rag rugs.

During the afternoon at Donarbon, pupils took on a 'Recycling Challenge' sorting clean rubbish into correct bins. They visited the composting area to consider how waste might be better used and planted their own seeds in pots created from milk cartons before going on a 'Sensory Site Tour' to discover what happens to all our rubbish and to view the landfill site.

"The children understood that archaeologists use what is left behind as evidence... about the types of waste we produce and how that is different to waste in the past"

Teacher comment following the learning session



"I think we should recycle more and not throw it all in the black bin because recycling makes it into new stuff and throwing it away pollutes the world"

Pupil comment following the learning session

Above: Waste not, want not: Children learn about what happened to rubbish in the past and what we do with it now

Future plans

Museums cannot afford to ignore issues of sustainability, and with uncertain times ahead, it is clear that these concerns are not going to disappear, but will become even more significant.

The ultimate aim of this regional Sustainability Project has been to make more museums aware of the opportunities available to them. Some museums have joined the debate by attending training or the conference; others have selected to become more engaged through direct action suited to their site. The Rural Museums East Partnership has to date provided practical and inspirational case studies, readily transferable to other sites.

As carbon reduction and energy efficiency have also moved up the agenda for local authorities, more and more museums will feel the pressure to make cuts. Linking to colleagues in Conservation, we need to ensure that such measures are not to the detriment of the collections that museums hold in care, but are viewed as opportunities to become flagships for carbon reduction programmes which deliver against local authority corporate agendas.

Through this work, it is clear that there is no 'one size fits all' solution. Museums certainly need support to identify how best to approach this agenda, and where to focus improvements suited to their site.

New gardens, Stockwood Discovery Centre, Luton



The Rural Museums East Partnership

Gressenhall Farm and Workhouse
Gressenhall, Dereham, Norfolk
NR20 4DR
www.museums.norfolk.gov.uk

Museum of East Anglian Life (MEAL)
Crowe Street, Stowmarket, Suffolk
IP14 1DL
www.eastanglianlife.org.uk

Stockwood Discovery Centre
London Road, Luton LU1 4LX
www.stockwooddiscoverycentre.co.uk

The Farmland Museum
Denny Abbey, Ely Road, Waterbeach,
Cambridge, CB25 9PQ
www.dennyfarmlandmuseum.org.uk

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