

TORQUAY MUSEUM

Statement of Purpose

Torquay Museum's aim is to safeguard, collect and preserve objects relating to Torbay's natural environment and cultural and historic heritage. To present them in an accessible and relevant form as a source of inspiration, enjoyment and learning for everyone.

History

The Museum's collections were begun by Torquay Natural History Society which was founded in 1844. The Museum at that time was established with the primary objective of illustrating the natural history of Devon, this soon expanded with a whole range of collections alongside the natural history. The Museum now holds more than 350,000 items, of which only about 1 % is on permanent display. These collections include items of regional, national and even international significance.

Torquay Museum is an independent charitable trust relying on income from admissions, retail, café, donations, fundraising and small grants including one from Torbay Council.

The Collections

The Resilience Project will focus on ensuring the Museum is organisationally fit and able to care for its collections in a sustainable way. The Museum holds vast collections covering Natural & Human History, including our Designated (2016) Quaternary Cave collection, of key relevance to the English Riviera UNESCO Global Geopark. Our collections, built up over 175 years, reflect the history of the area and interests of the learned society who founded it. In addition to our nationally and internationally important Designated collection some highlights (from 330,000 items) include the following: an ethnographic collection of about 2,800 objects - particularly rich in Chinese and Oceanic material - The 'Explorers' gallery draws heavily upon many of these artefacts. Social history - The Devon Folk Collection is extremely rich in domestic objects from Devon farmhouses, mainly of 17th – 19th century date. It is regarded as being of both regional and national importance. Local history - large collections of photographs, prints, watercolours, drawings and ephemera relating to Torbay and the neighbourhood, which form the best source available for local history study of the area. There is also a particularly good photographic archive of Dartmoor dating to the beginning of the 20th century. The collections also contain many examples of pottery from the local Torquay potteries and other local products such as objects made from local 'marble'. The geology holdings comprise very large collections of Devon palaeontology and a modest collections of mainly Devon rocks. The palaeontology collections are of international, regional and national importance. The remainder of the geology collections are of regional importance. Zoology- There are large British and foreign collections of entomology (mainly Lepidoptera) and conchology and smaller collections of vertebrates (especially birds) and marine invertebrates. Botany- The Museum has a large herbarium, rich in British and foreign material, with some particularly important local collections (e.g. marine algae). For more information about our collections see:

<https://torquaymuseum.org/collections>

The Resilience Project – an outline

On the 8th April 2024 we were notified by NLHF that we had been successful with a £250k Resilience Grant application. This is a significant opportunity for the Museum and the first step towards building a sustainable future and a serious strategic partnership with key funders.

This has been a long time in the making. Detailed discussions with partners began in July of 2023 and the application followed a review by a NLHF appointed business consultant and several meetings between staff, Trustees and principal partners (Torbay Council, Arts Council England and NLHF).

This is not a Project Grant. It focuses on the medium to long term and is strategic in nature. It does, however, offer to solve one significant short term issue which is the replacement of the heating system at the Museum. As a result of this grant we have already commissioned our building surveyor to deliver on this aspect of the grant and the aim is to have a new system installed by the end of August, subject to a successful application for Listed Building Consent and a favourable tender process.

This 'new, partnership led' approach is already bearing fruit and not just with the successful Resilience Grant. We received additional financial support from Torbay Council last financial year because we are developing a sustainable approach in cooperation with them. Also, on the back of our burgeoning partnership, we have been encouraged and supported to go for the final round of MEND and we have submitted an Expression of Interest for a series of urgent works to the museum in the region of £350k. If successful works will proceed in April 2025 and will be another significant step in achieving the long term future of the museum.

So how do we characterise this resilience bid?

The main thrust is to fill certain gaps in how we operate, principally at the wider strategic levels.

The driving force behind this will be the recruitment (short term 12 month contracts) of a senior executive (alongside an audience development officer and a fundraising officer) to deliver on some key processes given in the annex below. This will include a new vision, business plan and governance review. During parts of this all staff will have the opportunity to be involved in workshops to discuss and input to the process.

There will be a strategy developed for future grant applications to make further positive changes at the Museum.

In short this is a major opportunity for Torquay Museum to forge a sustainable future for our vitally important collections and demonstrate the key role we play in the cultural offer in the Bay.

The Resilience Project – some detail

The project will address some fundamental issues to move the museum onto a sustainable footing where it is better able to care and develop its collections with agreed policies and plans in place. Firstly, through the recruitment of three new posts allied with increasing the capacity of existing staff to help deliver and engage. The project will utilise the new and expanded staff resource to develop a new vision, strategy and business plan, governance and financial review alongside vital policies. The audience development role will enable customer research, identify opportunities for growth and engage new audiences. A fundraising role will develop new opportunities to raise

income. Board training and recruitment will be delivered alongside developing partnerships in the Bay. Money will also need to be spent on replacing the boiler which has failed and is a significant risk to the continued running of the Museum and care of the collections

The future of the museum has demonstrably been important to our local community as well as to the English Riviera Global Geopark. Our collections relate directly to the local area and in particular our Designated Collection relates, in large part, to the nearby Kents Cavern with whom we have a working partnership. When we have faced difficulties in the past we have received many letters of support from local people. During Covid lock-down we ran a crowdfunding campaign to raise money for the museum and raised £12,000. Strong support for the Museum was expressed. Subsequent campaigns to raise money have also been successful. We enjoy a strong following on Facebook with many engagements to the posts that we put out on a near daily basis. The importance of Torquay Museum's role is highlighted in The Torbay Heritage Strategy, specifically on page 16, Objectives HMN01 and HMN02. A stated measure of success under these objectives is 'Torquay Museum is adequately resourced to conserve and interpret its early human collection to a level appropriate to its importance'. Currently the Museum is not adequately resourced.

The Museum is at risk because without secure income streams the Museum faces closure and the potential sale or break-up of the collections. We have low levels of certainty around our current income such as from grants, admissions and donations. We struggle with the core support received from our local authority and have failed to proceed with development proposals at the Museum due to low levels of core funding and perceived risk from potential supporters because of our lack of financial reserves and an unclear plan to address income generation going into the future. If we can't generate more income, we lose capacity to carry out basic maintenance. We are at risk of having to cut opening hours due to the financial pressure of increased staffing costs and energy price rises. The collections are also at risk if we are unable to maintain the correct environmental conditions due, for example, to the heating system failing. Should the Museum close it would also put at risk the status of the English Riviera Global Geopark. Significant efforts have been taken to cut costs and there is now no room to make further cuts. In particular staffing levels have been cut drastically and it is difficult to function as a museum with such low staffing levels. This includes difficulty with maintaining accreditation standards and the core duties that a Museum should carry out such as documentation and dealing with enquiries. This has also included cutting the number of opening days reducing opportunities for people to access the galleries and collections.

The Project will begin with the recruitment of three new posts (a senior executive role, a fundraiser and an audience development officer) allied with increasing the capacity of existing staff to help deliver on the changes required and be fully engaged and on-board with the change process. The project will utilise the new and expanded staff resource to develop a new vision, strategy and business plan, governance and financial review and develop vital policies for the Museum and its development. This has proved impossible with the existing levels of staffing. By carrying out this work the museum will move to a position where it is better able to care and develop its collections with clear policies and plans in place. Money will also need to be spent on replacing the boiler which has now failed and is a significant risk to the continued running of the Museum and care of the collections.

Training of and recruitment to the Board will also be addressed alongside developing partnerships and our role in the future cultural offer in the Bay. A governance review will identify skills gaps and targeted training will improve confidence and enable the trustees to fully contribute and support the management team. The three new posts are critical to making the necessary changes and embedding them within the organisation alongside existing staff. The senior executive role will lead

on the business planning, policy development and Board development. An audience development role will carry out customer research, identify opportunities for growth and engage people who would not normally expect to visit a museum and produce an audience development plan. A fundraising role will develop new opportunities to raise income and set this out in a fundraising strategy.

Maintaining the benefits of the project are an integral part of the project itself. In essence it is about creating a set of policies and more detailed plans with the full engagement and input of existing staff and Board of Trustees. The legacy is therefore intended to be a fully signed up set of plans to deliver a sustainable future for the Museum. The Board and all staff will understand what we are doing and why with sustainable plans in place to deliver. Costs of delivery will be fully set-out in a business plan for the future created as part of the project.

Torquay Museum is at a critical stage in its development. It has been running for a number of years at very low levels of funding and as a result staffing levels have been cut drastically and there has been insufficient resource to build and develop the Board, a coherent vision and business plan, or deliver on the needs of the organisation and its collections. The cuts in staffing capacity also need to be dealt with urgently to help move the Museum onto a more sustainable footing – low staffing levels have prevented the appropriate care and development of the collections. Alongside a reduced ability to generate additional income. A significant deficit budget in the 2023/24 financial year has hastened a partnership coming together of Torquay Museum, NLHF, ACE and Torbay Council to work together in finding a path to sustainability. This Resilience Grant is the next step in developing the Museum onto this sustainable path.

We have been unable to plan better for building and collections sustainability and the project will address this matter putting the museum in a better place in terms of caring for its collections into the future. The museum will be better placed to provide an improved and increased visitor offer. Improved governance and financial stability will make the organisation more resilient and better able to take up further opportunities for development and care of the collections. The risk of closure will have been reduced substantially securing the collection for the local area and for visitors from further afield. This project will improve skills and the condition of the building, increase awareness of what the museum has to offer and widen audiences. Staff and Trustees will be clearer on the vision, strategy and business plan for the museum's sustainable future. This project aims to secure the future of the collection which would otherwise be at risk of loss to the Bay. We also urgently need to replace our ageing boiler with one that would be more efficient, provide more consistent temperature and humidity levels and reduce fuel bills. This brings greater surety in terms of keeping our collections in good condition

Through this project we will employ an Audience Development Officer whose role will be to work within the local community to better understand our actual and potential audiences. We will use this information to develop programmes that would be part of future funding bids, to increase participation and ensure we are delivering what the local community wants to see. We will also extend the capacity of our Engagement Officer to allow more time to work with schools and home education groups to bring more young people into the museum. Both of these roles are going to build on previous project work carried out by the museum to engage audiences. The difference, through this project, will be a more coherent and comprehensive engagement process to determine who exactly our audiences are or could be, endeavouring to increase inclusion, access and participation.

All aspects of the organisation will be examined to ensure we have the right people with the right skills, that everyone understands his or her role in delivering the museums' objectives. We will increase staff capacity to free up time to fully engage with the process. The project will involve the development of new business plan with clear strategy for the next 10 years. We will measure all future potential opportunities against the targets and milestones set out in the plan to avoid distraction from the main objectives. The plan will be reviewed at least annually to assess progress and the impacts made. Most of our policy documents are in need of review and new ones are needed to keep pace ever changing circumstance and climate. A full policy review will be undertaken and this will include the creation of a detailed risk register that will be discussed at the quarterly board meetings. These elements will strengthen the core of the organisation and ensure that potential problems are identified and dealt with at an early stage. We will examine the financial management process to ensure that financial information is accurate, timely and relevant, with full engagement with budget holders and the board. We will seek expert advice to undertake early stage planning for new large scale projects and explore alternative income streams such as other uses for the building or expanding our online retail activity.

The collection belongs in Torbay. It has been housed here since 1876 and the Society that set-up the Museum has been operating since 1844. Staff have a clear and detailed understanding about the collection and are best placed to make it accessible to the local audience and engage them meaningfully with such a significant collection. Some of the most significant finds are from nearby sites such as Kents Cavern. We have a proven track record of engaging with local people and more recently have done so very successfully through Social Media as well as a weekly article in a widely distributed local paper. We have all the necessary expertise and offer a value for money approach to house and care for the collections and engage people with them.

The new Senior Executive will manage the project on a day to day basis, with support from the existing management team. The project will be overseen by a working group comprising three members of the trustee board, the Museum Manager, Senior Executive and the Finance Manager. Including a sub-set of the board allows the group to have delegated authority to act on findings and make decisions.

Annex 1

Key Resilience areas of delivery:

1. Vision – developed with the Board and staff of the Museum and benchmarked against our key stakeholders.
2. Strategy – to deliver on this vision
3. Governance Review
4. Business Plan
5. An integrated risk register
6. Financial management review
7. Financial delegation policy.
8. Fundraising strategy
9. Audience development plan

10. Marketing strategy

11. A whole range of key policy documents including –

- a. equal opportunities policy
- b. Recruitment policy
- c. Accreditation documentation in association with and not otherwise developed by the Collections Team.
- d. Inclusion policy
- e. Procurement policy
- f. Sustainability Policy
- g. Data protection policy

The steering Group for the Senior Exec and the Resilience Project comprises: Senior Exec (once appointed), Three Trustees, Museum Manager, Finance Manager.

This steering group will collectively be responsible for successful delivery of the project and reporting to the Board.