**Ashwell Village Museum Forward Plan 2014**

This plan replaces the Forward Plan 2012, approved April 2012.

It has been prepared for submission with our Accreditation Return, October 2014.

Approved by the Trustees September 2014

To be reviewed: September 2015

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**1. Statement of Purpose**

Revised wording was approved September 2014 for use in all new policies and documents.

As stated in the Trust Deed the purpose of the Museum is to ‘preserve objects of interest associated with the past history of the said Parish of Ashwell and the immediate neighbourhood.’

The key aims were originally outlined in the Museum Trust deed as follows;

* To accept any gifts suitable for preservation
* To accept suitable objects on loan
* Regulate the opening of the Museum to visitors
* Co-operate with the education authority to utilise the Museum as an object lesson in past history of the Parish for children attending the local schools.

The Trust deed was written in 1930. Over the years these original aims have generally been maintained in principle but modified in detail by the Trustees to accord with the times. In particular objects are not now accepted on loan. Additionally the catchment area for school children has been extended to reflect the geographical position of the museum.

This museum’s aims are achieved by

* maintaining a permanent collection adding items where space and resources allow,
* developing and refreshing the permanent displays of objects, documents and information,
* encouraging members of the local community to use the collection for research
* continuing a programme of temporary exhibitions, lectures, walks, and other outreach activities.
* the use of new technology where advantageous to the above objectives

This is only possible through the work of a large community of multi-skilled volunteers

**2. Introduction**

Ashwell Village Museum was formed as a Trust in 1930 providing a permanent home for the collection of John Bray, Albert Sheldrick and others. As stated in the Trust Deed the museum is run by the trustees who have overall responsibility for the running and maintenance of the museum. They also act as the museum management committee and meet at least twice annually. The Friends Association supervises public access, outreach events and many fund raising activities. They meet at least twice annually. The Honorary Curator is responsible for the collection and attends all meetings.

The museum has had Full Registration and Accreditation since 1989 and continues to be committed to maintaining a high standard of service and an efficient museum operation.

The museum is staffed entirely by volunteers, numbering between 50 and 80 individuals, who give varying amounts of time and expertise. They contribute about 3000 voluntary hours, equivalent to at least 3 full time staff members, to the local community in a year.

Professional support is given by the appointment of a Museum Mentor and the services of the Museum Development Officer.

Trustees are re-elected every three years. It is planned to appoint an assistant curator is to be trained to take over as needed. A Schedule of Policies and Statements has been implemented to ensure their regular review.

**3. Review of Previous Forward and Spending Plans**

The Accreditation Standard published in 2011 has placed a greater emphasis on the need for detailed planning. Previous Plans have been of a general nature dealing with long term objectives. Short term objectives and projects have been selected from a long list (see Work Scheme Table 2014) within the limits of urgency, funding, on-going routine work (eg conservation and documentation) and perhaps most of all volunteer time and expertise.

The previous plan was: “The Forward Plan is generally to maintain the objectives outlined in the Museum Trust deed as modified and noted above. Spending is strictly limited to the resource available. The Museum is funded only by donations and events such as the annual ‘Ashwell at Home’. “

The Spending Plan is reviewed every six months at the regular meeting of the Trustees. The current plan addresses the problems of disproportionate increases in regular expenses over income and the reliance on extra fund raising to maintain the services provided by the museum. An annual spending plan will in future be enhanced by separating basic operating income and costs from project income and expenditure. The Friends of Ashwell Village Museum association regularly makes a valuable contribution to the museum by funding a variety of improvements and capital projects which would otherwise be very difficult to complete. A reserve fund approximately equal to one year’s basic costs is maintained in case of loss of funding.

**4. The Local Environment**

Ashwell is recognised as one of the most attractive villages in Hertfordshire and the museum stands at its heart both physically and culturally. The museum is situated in the local authority of North Herts District Council and operates in a very good environment of support from it. Our Museum Mentor, Ros Allwood, is their Cultural Services Manager. We are also fortunate to have an excellent Hertfordshire county Museum Development Officer, Jane Munns.

Our support group, the Friends of Ashwell Village Museum, organises essential volunteers for the opening of the museum; raises much needed funding and provides a social addition to the museum’s work environment for those who are members.

In this environment it is always much easier to raise funds for interesting capital projects than for unexciting but essential revenue costs, without which the museum could not operate. And although many are attracted to Ashwell for the benefits of a rural life and a vibrant community it is becoming increasingly hard to recruit volunteers of any age who are willing to take on responsible roles.

**5. Consultation and Analysis of Views**

* All volunteers are encouraged to participate in discussion about the museum operation and put forward suggestions. These are discussed at the Trustee and Friends Meetings and adopted if agreed upon.
* Suggested changes to policy and spending are presented to the Trustees for discussion and action as agreed.
* Consultation with our Museum Mentor and Museum Development Officer is frequent and helpful.
* Visitors are encouraged to sign the visitors’ book which has space for comments and suggestions. This information is analysed to tell us who our visitors are and where they come from to allow better targeting for display content, publicity and to identify gaps and problems. Comments and suggestions are discussed as above.
* Local schools especially Ashwell Junior School are actively consulted and their views are taken into consideration

**6. Key Aims**

To maintain the key aims in the mission statement and trust deed and further maintain standards recognised by the award of Accreditation in 2010.

**Key Aims:**

* To complete or make further progress with projects carried over from the previous work scheme.
* To create and participate in new projects which will enhance the museum operation and service.
* To continue to improve all aspects of our museum operation in order to increase visitor numbers, broaden the range of users and provide a greater range of services to the public.
* To maintain the documentation standard as set out in the revised Documentation Plan
* To carry out conservation where appropriate in accordance with the Collection Development Policy.
* To continue and improve volunteer recruitment and training in museum operation, collection care and customer care
* Review all policies and other documents by their review dates and replace with reworded policies where necessary.
* Maintain Accreditation standards

**7. Specific Objectives**

**Museum Services**

Our collection contains material primarily of local concern although the interest in it is worldwide. A vast quantity of relevant information is stored in our archives and computer files. This information should be made as accessible as possible.

The emphasis is now on making this available on-line. Information on a large proportion of the museum’s collection is searchable through our online catalogue. The community archive website provides a place for the publication of small pieces of research and the addition of comments. Photographs of artefacts may be supplied by email, photographs can be supplied by email if free from copyright restrictions, and documents can be scanned and printed or sent by email.

Digital supply of information forms a large part of our response to access requests and is very well received.

With the opening of the Family and Local History Resource Centre there is on site access to a wide range of sources and space to work although there is always a need for supervision. Stored material can be viewed by request to the curator.

School children engaged on curriculum related research are provided with material and advice on how to research further.

Our service to users includes

* provision of exhibitions and displays for education and enjoyment
* regular opening times for visiting the museum and its exhibitions and displays
* response to visitor enquiries
* access to parts of the collection not on display by appointment
* special opening for events and visits by groups by arrangement
* arrangement of outreach events using handling materials at the museum and at schools or similar venues
* providing volunteers to give talks and lead walks for the public and for groups by arrangement
* access to the collection and information for research
* provision of learning and discovery activities to widen and complement interpretation of displays and broaden our range of users
* extending, modifying and changing displays and activities to encourage new users and respond to surveys, consultations, tourist initiatives and local providers
* maintenance of an online catalogue and community archive website
* a wide range of interpretive methods

To improve our service our objectives are to

* continue to develop and improve all the successful initiatives undertaken between 2007 to 2014 which increased our service, efficiency and profile and which are now a regular part of museum operation
* continue to collect research material and make it available to visitors
* develop a public access computer for visitors to provide extra information and virtual access to parts of the building.
* answer queries from visitors or make contact as quickly as possible to suggest resources and avenues for research which enquirers can follow themselves
* encourage writing of books, booklets, leaflets and articles by volunteers and promote these through the museum shop and other outlets
* organise and participate in special Family Days, Finds Days, and other special events as opportunities occur, including Ashwell at Home and the Festival of Archaeology.
* welcome visits to or by school and youth groups engaging children whom we hope will reach out to other age groups
* capitalise on good contacts made with schools, youth groups and special interest groups to share events and promotions, arrange visits to groups and at the museum, provide speakers for local groups and participate in national events
* regularly review the visitors’ book for comments which would suggest changes or improvements to the service
* to take advantage of training courses for volunteers and continue in-house training and induction for new volunteers
* attract new users and broaden the range of users through existing and new initiatives
* increase the amount of publicity and retrospective reporting on all museum activities
* increase interaction with specialist groups such which serve the local community
* make more information available via the Internet
* maintain and improve the website
* encourage further research by volunteers to provide more depth of information about our collection for visitors and external researchers
* encourage external researchers to share the results of their work with us
* continuously review, and improve where necessary, signage within the museum, provision of posters and advertising outside the museum and circulation of publicity through available outlets
* renew efforts to recruit volunteers to restart oral history recording and also digitise and transcribe the existing recordings
* encourage short term volunteering by students and young people seeking work experience to both help the museum and give experience in the sector to the volunteers

**Collection**

For a detailed review and plans see the Collection Management and Development Plan

**Documentation**

The review of documentation of the collection and resultant actions are contained in the Collection Management and Development Plan, the Acquisition and Disposal Policy and the Documentation Procedure Manual. Specific aims can be found in the Work Scheme Table 2014.

Objectives are to

* work to the museum’s Documentation Plan
* complete documentation of all parts of the collection in accordance with consistent practices, in accordance with Spectrum standards and in accordance with the museum’s Documentation Procedure Manual
* complete accession, marking and cataloguing of new items and maintain any backlog at a manageable level
* to train volunteers and hold refresher training for existing volunteers, taking advantage of external training courses whenever available

**Care and Conservation**

For a detailed review and plans see the Collection Management and Development Plan

Our objectives are to familiarise any volunteers involved in handling any items in the collection with the Care and Conservation Policy and Plan and continue to

* monitor the condition of items in store and on display with special vigilance for insect or other pest attack. Treat any damage and take steps to prevent further contact between pests and items.
* maintain the cleaning schedule
* make routine checks for insects or other pests within the museum building using traps and during regular cleaning
* monitor temperature and relative humidity and adjust heating and use of dehumidifiers to maintain conditions at as constant a level as possible
* monitor and control light levels and minimise UV impacts where relevant
* quarantine new items until their condition is assessed as satisfactory. Treat any items if necessary or refuse items if this cannot be done
* train volunteers in new recommended practices as they are adopted and continue to take advantage of external training courses
* select specific items in need of specialist treatment

**Volunteer Recruitment and Training**

New volunteers regularly come forward and serve either as custodians or for collection based work.

The curator and the Friends association organises contacts, rotas, events, newsletters, induction and training and act as a mentor to new volunteers.

A small but regular number of Duke of Edinburgh Award candidates, students and graduates have joined us and they are involved in both day to day curatorial work and special projects.

For all our volunteers training includes customer care, awareness of all current policies, security, safety and emergency provision. Specialised training for collections based work is provided internally or on external courses. An information pack is available in the foyer.

Our objectives are to

* circulate all volunteers with new policies and supporting documents and all documents which replace informal guidelines.
* continue to provide attractive opportunities for new and existing custodians, volunteers and researchers within a friendly and secure workplace
* provide a safe, welcoming and attractive environment for visitors and strive to enhance facilities for visitors with disabilities of any sort
* give individual induction training to all new volunteers
* continue the close relationship with the ‘Friends’ group.
* use regular feedback and discussion to identify areas where additional volunteers are needed
* seek new volunteers through additional advertising and connections with other local groups.
* comply with all existing legislation and good practice in care and safety of volunteers and visitors alike
* conduct a new risk assessment annually or whenever there is a change in the museum’s operation.

**Visitors**

Visitors are encouraged to use our visitors’ book. These show a high level of interest and visitor satisfaction shown by a diverse group of people.

Our objectives are to maintain and improve standards as stated in the ‘Museum Services’ section above.

**Contacts outside the museum**

The museum enjoys regular and rewarding contact with a number of organisations and the village community.

We intend to continue to maintain and use links with professional bodies in the museums sector, to maintain links with local schools through activities and events, supply guides for walks and speakers for interested groups and participate in local heritage events.

The museum supports two self-funding interest groups researching local history and archaeology.

**Security, Safety and Risk Assessment**

The fire precaution system and the intruder alert system is checked regularly.

To ensure security and safety we intend to

* continue a programme of annual risk assessment with additional checks when any new activities or changes occur
* comply with all existing legislation and good practice in care and safety of volunteers and visitors alike.
* familiarise all volunteers with the Emergency Plan and all health and safety precautions
* conduct a full security assessment with professional assistance during 2014

**8. Implementation of the Plan**

A detailed ‘Work Scheme’ has been prepared which is a current list of possible projects that could be executed given unlimited resources. Each category is arranged according to perceived urgency or relevance and will be started, when continuing tasks are completed, as resources become available.

Volunteer time is always our principal requirement in day to day running and future planning, and successful implementation of our plans depends heavily on this. We have regular curatorial working sessions twice weekly with additional sessions for special events. Some IT associated work can be carried out off site.

The responsibility for implementing the Forward Plan falls to the trustees, the curator, the Friends association, and the teams of volunteers.

Professional help is provided by our Museum Mentor and our MDO and specialist advice is sought when necessary.

Volunteers are encouraged to attend training sessions to improve their skills and share their knowledge.

Reporting and feedback in a small work community is effectively continuous.

Changes to the way in which any objectives are carried out can be made with confidence that sufficient volunteers have been involved in the decision. It is most unlikely that a situation in which the Trustees are not fully aware of either progress or problems could occur.

**9. Resources and Spending Plan 2014 and 2015**

Income and expenditure projections of basic costs and projects are considered separately.

Revenue income and spending on basic costs are expected to increase in line with inflation. Basic income and basic costs are expected to remain at similar levels for at least 2014 and 2015. Projects are usually dependent on external funding or dedicated fund raising.

Visitors provide our main source of income. They enjoy the experience of the museum as their generosity in the donations box and comments in the visitor book bear out. However more effort could be put into making it easier for them to donate on site and on-line.

At the end of 2013 all funded projects and new acquisitions had been completed with assistance from the Friends Association and the Herts Heritage Fund, which provides support acquisitions. 2014 projects include Foyer renovation, funded by a Section 106 grant.

Spending during 2015 is expected to follow the same pattern as previous years with basic income and expenditure closely matched to maintain museum operations. Basic income is expected to continue without any major changes and running costs have been estimated in line with spending in previous years with a modest increase. New project spending will depend on funding. In the long term there seems to be little likelihood of great changes to the current situation.

The details of the Spending Plan 2014 – 15 form part of this Forward Plan and are presented in a separate document.