

The Belper North Mill Trust

Registered Charity No. 1068485 Company No. 350918

Report to Belper Town Council on the activities of the Belper North Mill Trust during 2021 and plans for the future

The Belper North Mill Trust receives an Annual Grant from the Council which includes obligations to:

- Provide information, events, educational and entertainment activities in Belper
- Open the museum and visitor centre to the public on a set winter and summer timetable and by arrangement to meet reasonable public demand (subject to the necessary staff/volunteers being available)
- Prepare an annual report for consideration by the Council's finance Committee detailing use of the Annual Grant and compliance with the terms of the Agreement

This Report details how the Trust has met these obligations.

The charitable objects of the Belper North Mill Trust and its principal activities continue to be: the conservation, maintenance and protection for the public benefit of the historical, architectural, archaeological and industrial heritage of the Derwent Valley in Derbyshire and; to advance the education of the public into the industrial heritage of the Derwent Valley, with particular reference to Belper North Mill.

The charity operates both a museum at Belper North Mill and the Derwent Valley Visitor Centre at the same site with the support of Amber Valley Borough Council (AVBC) and Belper Town Council.

Executive Summary

1. The museum re-opened after the COVID enforced closures in May 21. Initially on three days a week and eventually back to the normal five days a week programme.
2. Visitor numbers were very low to begin with but have now returned to pre COVID levels.
3. Despite understandable nervousness from some volunteers to return, we have been able to put on a number of ancillary events and initiatives this year.
4. Financially, in the past year the Trust has been supported with COVID grants and this has compensated us for the loss of trading income.
5. AVBC will end their grant from April 2022 – this materially impacts on our trading position and unless we can secure additional alternative funding and / or reduction in our operating costs, then we will be closing the museum when our lease ends in April 2022.

Purposes to which our Annual Grant is applied

The grant monies contribute towards the overall costs of our activities which are supported by the employment of two part time staff (the part time Manager and the Volunteer Support Officer). These costs cannot be funded from admission income alone and external funding is mainly concentrated on specific projects.

The Volunteer Support Officer post (20 hours per week) has the aim of attracting new volunteers and skills to supplement the dedicated, long serving core group. Additionally the Support Officer is tasked with training and retaining volunteers. This role is seen as essential in securing the number and quality of volunteers and range of skills required to operate the museum and visitor centre and to progress plans for future developments.

Without these base costs being funded with grant support, the Trust would have to use more of its reserves to fund staff salaries.

Our Volunteers and the work of our Volunteer Support Officer

We have around 50 volunteers and trustees. In addition to our guides, receptionists and walk leaders, we have specialist volunteer groups to help to care for our collections, to provide our education offer and a research group.

During COVID we had to restrict our normal volunteer recruitment programme, but resumed in May 2021 when the staff returned from furlough to their usual working hours.

In a normal year, we estimate that Trustees and Volunteers give approx. 5,600 hours to support the offer. This has a notional value of £120,000, using Heritage Lottery Fund methodology.

Activities undertaken in 2021

In addition to our core offer of the museum and walks, over the summer period we have:

- Completed the project to digitise a virtual tour of the museum and basement. This provides a high quality “record in time” of the museum and basement.
[Virtual Tour - Strutts North Mill Museum Belper \(belpernorthmill.org.uk\)](https://belpernorthmill.org.uk)
- Started a new online only, free of charge tour, via Heygo. Our volunteer, Trevor Griffin has been instrumental in this. This has been very successful in terms of numbers. We have had online visitors from across the world, with America being the most popular (obviously due to our existing links with Pawtucket). Trevor plans to develop more volunteers into this area.
[Heygo - Belper - Live-streaming tours with local guides](#)
- Delivered the pilot project for the Derwent Valley Tours minibus offer in collaboration with the Arkwright’s Society. Numbers on this were very low and we are awaiting a full evaluation.

- Produced a number of children themed activities – including summer craft sheets to download from the website, a children’s / family quiz and mouse hunt in the River Gardens (ran on various dates in the six weeks holiday). We have Halloween themed craft activities planned for October half term.
- Ran a number of town market stalls on event days – aiming to get leaflets out and promote the museum.
- Ran an exhibition in collaboration with Arts Council England in the Upper Wheel Pit area during October. This was a free to enter exhibition.

Opening periods in the year to October 2021

Unfortunately COVID restrictions meant that we had to operate with reduced capacity in autumn 2020 and had to formerly close the museum in November 2020 in line with Government guidance.

We re-opened the museum in May 2021, a few weeks after technically we could re-open per Government guidelines. This was to ensure that the volunteers were re-trained on new procedures. We have been open throughout the summer and have experienced an increasing number of visitors at the museum. Our general admission numbers are now at pre COVID monthly visitor levels. Tour bookings from schools and other groups have just re-commenced.

Our walk programme restarted in May 2021. Numbers have been very low and we aim to work more closely with Belper Town Council on the 2022 programme.

Looking forward to 2022 and beyond

The Trust was informed in August 2021, that the previous month, the Leader of AVBC had made an Executive Decision to end the (£47,600) annual grant from the Council to the Trust (to operate the museum & visitor centre), from April 2022.

This will end the Council’s 24 year plus association with the Trust in supporting the operation of the museum and visitor centre.

As we currently stand, we would have budgeted annual losses of £70,000, which is clearly not sustainable.

<u>Income</u>	<u>£'000</u>
Amber Valley Borough Council Grant	-
Belper Town Council Grant	11
Museum takings	28
Other income	3
	<u>42</u>
 <u>Expenditure</u>	 <u>£'000</u>
Lease costs (for museum)	60
Staff Costs (two part time staff)	30
Other running costs	20
	<u>110</u>
 Budgeted loss – say	 <u>70</u>

We are in discussion with the Landlord and other funders on options for post April 2022.
If the Trust cannot secure a viable future business plan, then we will have to close the museum when our lease ends in April 2022.

The Trust will have circa £0.4m of reserves at December 2021. The majority of this (£340,768) is from a bequest received from Canon Ross (a former Trustee) in 2016. There are no restrictions placed against it. The balance of reserves are from COVID support grants.

Why don't we just use our £400,000 reserves to continue to operate the museum?

We can - if Trustees decided that this was the best use of the reserves, however this has never been the preferred trajectory for reasons explained below.

So what is the Trustees plan for the £400,000 reserves & the museum?

The reserves policy is published in the Charity's financial statements - the policy is: An earmarked reserve has been created with the Canon Ross bequest of £340,768 and it is the intention of the Trustees that this original sum is not used to fund day to day costs, but towards securing the Trust's future operations, described as its 'Development Program'. This is predominately linked to securing long term accommodation for the Trust.

The balancing unrestricted general funds of circa £60,000 provide a contingency to cover unforeseen costs and losses in the short term.

The "long term accommodation" preference would be a financially viable quality heritage offer at the Belper Mills site, integral with the overall redevelopment. The recent Derbyshire County Council report "Options for a Visitor Centre at Belper" identified various options for how such a centre could operate. The Trust is in support of development at the Belper Mills site as identified in the report.

Additionally, the current owners in their opening paragraph of the planning application for the Belper Mills site paragraph stated "First Investment Real Estate Management ('FIREM') has a Vision to provide new homes, leisure and business uses to the Mills **to complement the North Mill Museum and existing business to create a visitor destination that celebrates the importance of Belper Mills as part of the Derwent Valley Mills World Heritage Sites**". We share their vision of a visitor destination worthy of representing the World Heritage Site.

The Trust would look to use the majority of its earmarked reserve as match funding towards external funding linked to creating a heritage based visitor centre to interpret, develop and preserve the heritage of the DVMWHS with a particular emphasis on the Belper Mills site.

Funding leverage. Most external funding grants require some contribution as match funding – some require a 10% match funding, so potentially a £300,000 contribution from the Trust could lever in a further £2,700,000 of external funding towards the heritage deficit of the site. Other stakeholders would consider match funding also, adding to the grants available for the site.

Conversely, for every £1 that is used from our reserves to fund current operations, there is potentially £9 lost from futures grants for the site.

Hence the need to protect the Trusts reserves, to help realise the long term aim for the DVMWHS and Belper Mills site.

We continue to search for revenue related external funding to reduce our reliance on Local Authority funding and support our day to day running costs. This is extremely challenging. We subscribe to the Grants Online directory and search for potential grants <https://www.grantsonline.org.uk/>. We also subscribe and search the Heritage Trust grant directory. <https://www.heritagefundingdirectoryuk.org/>.

We have the support of a professional fundraiser who is also a volunteer of the Trust. He is directly contacting organisations he has dealt with in the past to sound out if any support could be granted. We would not “get through the front door” if approaching these organisation direct with a cold calling request for support.

Contingency site options

We have looked at a number of Belper sites as a possible alternative location if we have to leave the North Mill. We are willing to discuss these privately with the Council, but due to the commercial nature of rents quoted and the impact this has on the business plan, it is not appropriate to disclose the sites considered and currently dismissed in this public update.

Greater collaboration with Belper Town Council

The Trust recently responded to the Town Councils Corporate Plan consultation exercise. There is a lot of alignment in the Councils aims around heritage interpretation, expansion of tourism and working in partnership with communities (like our volunteers) and other organisations.

Irrespective of our lease position post April 2022, we would like to discuss with the Council how both organisations can progress collaboratively where there are mutual aims and objectives.

Conclusion - Our request to Belper Town Council

As a consequence of the current funding uncertainty, we request that the Council consider our grant request in two stages – one based on our continued occupation of the North Mill, the other if we do leave the North Mill:

1a) Subject to the Trust continuing in the North Mill and continuing to provide the current offer we ask that the current grant agreement is maintained as planned to March 2023.

1b) Additionally where there are opportunities to work together on the Councils Corporate Plan actions, we look to develop these with the Council. Any funding associated with these additional opportunities would be separate from the grant towards the museum offer.

2) If the Trust is not able to continue in the North Mill (possibly from April 2022), we understand that the current grant agreement will end. We would look to concentrate on working together on other projects that deliver mutually beneficial outcomes linked to the Councils Corporate Plan.

We thank Belper Town Council for its continuing support and look forward to continue working collaboratively with the Council. We extend an open offer to the Council to a tour of the museum if that is desired.