

# 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 2022/23 and plans for the future**

The Belper North Mill Trust (BNMT) 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

The charitable objects of BNMT 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.

BNMT currently operates both a museum at Belper North Mill and the Derwent Valley Visitor Centre at the same site with the sole Local Authority support of Belper Town Council (BTC) following withdrawal of grant support by Amber Valley Borough Council (AVBC) from March 2022. Details on what the BTC grant funds within BNMT is detailed in Appendix 1.

With the announcement that BNMT is to close the museum to the public at the end of September 2022 and to vacate the premises by the end of October 2022, this Report details to BTC how the Trust intends to meet the grant obligations in 2022/23 and in future years.

### **Background**

BTC were informed in last year's letter that AVBC was to end their annual £47,600 grant in March 2022. The underlying losses of BNMT would increase to around £70,000 assuming all other income and expenditure items remained constant. This was not financially viable to BNMT, in particular because of the continued uncertainty on when (and if) the wider Belper Mills site was redeveloped to include a viable heritage offer from the site. BTC were informed that the Trust would need to close the museum in April 2022 if alternative funding and / or a reduction in lease costs could not be identified.

The Trust, in discussion with the Landlord, First Investments, agreed to a peppercorn lease to the end of October 2022, from which time the Landlord intends to let the premises on a commercial basis. This arrangement will enable the bulk of the 2022 season to be delivered to the public. We thank First Investments for this support, worth around £35,000 to us.

First Investments subsequently approached the Trust on 1<sup>st</sup> July and have provisionally offered a discounted lease for the museum premises from October 2022. At the time of drafting this update, Trustees have not had chance to fully evaluate their proposal. An initial review indicates, that despite the discount, the Trust would still incur substantial financial losses each year. Trustees would need to decide if losses at those levels were suitable uses of the charity's reserves, particularly when there is no certainty for how long this would be required for.

The remainder of this update assumes that we will be vacating the museum in October 2022 and:

- Clarifies what we can and can't do per the BTC grant agreement in 22/23 – following our public closure in Sept 22.
- Updates on our plans for 23/24 and beyond
- Reiterates that we believe the Trust can work alongside the Council to deliver some of your Corporate Plan objectives (as previously notified)
- Requests that a three grant (from April 23) is considered based on a new grant agreement.

*Registered office: The Derwent Valley Visitor Centre, Bridge Foot, Belper,  
Derbyshire, DE56 1YD*

*Website: [www.belpernorthmill.org](http://www.belpernorthmill.org)*

## **Activities undertaken in 2022**

With public access to the museum secured to the end of September 2022, this will cover the bulk of the 2022 season. Our normal opening periods are:

- March to October – Wednesday to Sundays
- February and November – Weekends only
- January and December – Closed

We normally attract around 2,600 paying visitors to the museum and a similar number to the visitor centre (effectively our reception which acts as a Tourist Information Centre, which is free to enter).

For the reduced 2022 season we are forecasting around 2,300 paying visitors to the museum, this is nearly 90% of a full year, which is why BNMT (and First Investments) were so keen to agree to make an arrangement to enable provision of the offer to cover the busiest months of the 2022 season.

In addition to our core offer of the museum, during 2022 we have:

- An extensive local heritage walks offer, supplemented with an extended walks programme in conjunction with the Arkwrights Society.
- Developed our schools outreach offer and have attended local primary schools to deliver sessions
- Produced a number of children themed activities – including half term and summer holiday craft activity sessions, a children's / family quiz and mouse hunt in the River Gardens (to run on various dates in the six weeks holiday).
- As part of the Georgian Derbyshire Festival – offering free to enter events at Belper Mills during the festival weekend of 16<sup>th</sup> to 18<sup>th</sup> September.

In relation to the BTC grant, although BNMT have been forced to make the unwanted decision to close the museum in September, we will be able to deliver in 2022:

- Information, events, educational and entertainment activities in Belper
- Open the museum and visitor centre to the public for a period which covers nearly 90% of normal visitor periods

The 2022 delivery alongside the plans being developed for 2023 onwards, as detailed below, result in our request that there is no change to the currently awarded £11,355 annual grant to BNMT.

## **Looking forward to 2023 and beyond**

We are currently aiming to maintain public access to the Belper Mills site (via a site based tour) and our collections through a collaboration with the Arkwrights Society for them to be displayed and interpreted at Cromford Mills. Our Education offer to primary school aged children will continue on an outreach delivery basis.

This would be an interim measure whilst the longer term future of the Belper Mills site is agreed. The long term vision remains to operate a heritage based offer from Belper Mills that supplements the developed offer both at the Silk Mill and Cromford Mills, as per the vision of the DVMWHS co-ordinating team and its partners.

The business plan does require Local Authority grant to supplement takings from tours to support the annual running costs (mainly staffing and building costs). BNMT receive no financial support off Derbyshire County Council, nor AVBC, it is Belper Town Council who are the sole provider of grant support. This continued support is vital to the viability of the future plans.

BNMT will discuss with Arts Council England about the current museum accreditation and how that can be managed during this transitional period. We believe it can be maintained via the arrangements with the Arkwrights Society

### Belper Mills offer

BNMT are currently assessing the viability of leasing a smaller premises at Belper Mills, Archway House, from which a site based guided tour (including access to the basement) could be offered. This would concentrate on interpreting the story of the Strutts and how they and Belper formed part of the start of the industrial revolution.

Archway House could also be a base for a tourist information centre like our current reception. BNMT would also continue to provide local heritage based walks – we currently do these fortnightly over the summer months.

The running costs of Archway House would be a fraction of the current museum costs and we are confident that the offer to the public would generate sufficient footfall for a viable attraction. We are currently modelling the offer based on a three day a week (Friday to Sunday) opening during the core months of the year (March to October). It will be predominately volunteer delivered, as current, led by paid staff.

We intend to model our Education (to primary schools and other children's groups) offer exclusively on an outreach basis. This could be sessions from an hour to a full day and can be flexed depending on the customers' requirements.

### Public Access to the collections

Most of our current collections are on loan from their owners. BNMT along with Arkwrights Society (and the collection owners) are exploring the feasibility of moving the majority of the collections to Cromford Mills to enable them to remain publically accessible and the Strutts & Belper story interpreted alongside the Arkwrights story by volunteers. This would complement the established Arkwrights experience and open up the Strutts & Belper story to the circa 200,000 visitors a year to the Cromford Mills site.

The Arkwrights Society have ambitious plans to develop further the public offer at the Cromford Mills site, including making fuller use of vacant buildings.

### Longer term future

BNMT and the Arkwrights Society have an intention for greater partnership working in the future. This will be in areas such as the volunteers, staffing arrangements, marketing and co-ordination of a DVMWHS visitor offer. The wider DVMWHS Management Plan – co-ordinated by the Derbyshire County Council based team can only be delivered with joint working across all partners.

BNMT have circa £0.4m in unrestricted reserves, the majority of this (£340,768) is from a bequest received from Canon Ross (a former Trustee) in 2016.

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, ideally at the Belper Mills site.

The balancing unrestricted general funds of circa £60,000 provide funds to cover set up costs for the new 2023 offer and likely "acceptable" levels of operating 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 DVMWHS/ 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 have reiterated their long term intention for a heritage offer based at the Belper Mills site in a letter dated 10<sup>th</sup> May 2022 to BNMT in which they stated:

*FI Real Estate Management (FIREM) recognises the importance of the North Mill in Belper Mill's complex heritage and is committed to helping the Museum Trust to retain a Visitor Centre on site.*

- FIREM supports the Trust's ambition to become a world-class visitor destination and is willing to work alongside the key stakeholders (e.g. Historic England) to achieve that aim.*
- However, the immediate priority has to be the preservation of the Trust's existing financial reserves, so that it has the leverage to secure the significant investment that will be required to realise its plans.*
- In that context, the (temporary) relocation of the Visitor Centre office to Archway House will realise significant savings for the trust and help to ensure that it is best-placed to capitalise on future opportunities as they arise.*

BNMT believe that the most appropriate strategy is to:

- Short to medium term - operate a financially viable interpretation based offer from the Belper Mills site, supplemented by a collections based offer at Cromford.
- Long Term – utilise BNMT reserves as match funding towards heritage based external funding invested at the Belper Mills site to enable the delivery of a viable heritage based visitor centre to interpret, develop and preserve the heritage of the DVMWHS with a particular emphasis on the Belper Mills site.

#### Greater collaboration with Belper Town Council

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

BNMT 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**

Based on the explanations given in this update, BNMT request that the Council:

1. Maintains the 2022/23 grant as currently awarded
2. Offer a provisional three year inflation linked grant from April 2023 – subject to the Trust preparing an annual report to the Council on delivery against the grant conditions. This would give BNMT significant assurance that the short term plans would be viable.
3. Explore opportunities to work together on the Council's Corporate Plan actions

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.

## **Appendix 1**

### **Purposes to which the BTC 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 (in 2022) and to progress plans for future developments as outlined in the main letter.

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.

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.