

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 2020 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 and Belper Town Council.

2020 has obviously been dominated by the impact of COVID-19 and in line with Government requirements we closed the museum in March, suspended all of our activities and placed our staff on furlough.

When government guidelines allowed the re-opening of museums from 4 July, we reviewed our capacity to re-open (as the museum is run by our volunteers), revised how we could make the museum accessible to meet Covid-19 Safe Working guidelines and prepared new Risk Assessments for our activities. We re-started our weekly Sunday Heritage Walks programme on 2 August and re-opened the museum on 28 August with a more restricted opening schedule of three days a week (Friday to Sunday). We plan to continue this throughout October and revert to our normal weekend only opening in November. Admission numbers are around 50 a week, about half our normal numbers at this time of the year. This is around two thirds of our reduced capacity.

We have introduced changes to the museum visit to include an external tour of the mills site as well as a more condensed tour of the museum which minimises the amount of time spent inside in a group setting.

The number of participants on our Heritage Walks has also been limited in order to ensure social distancing in accordance with government guidelines.

Our premises

In addition to the limitations placed upon our work by the current pandemic, the basement of the North Mill was once again flooded during February 2020 due to high river levels and the cleaning and restoration work undertaken by the owner's insurers following the November 2019 flood was completely eliminated. The basement was cleaned again in March just as we went into lockdown.

On 10 June a steady flow of water into the basement through the north-east wall was discovered when the premises were being checked during closure. This was immediately reported to the landlord's agent but containment work was not begun until 25 September. The issue has not been resolved and water continues to flow into the basement making it unsuitable for visitors. As such we have not been able to include this area in our revised tours of the museum.

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 some 40 local volunteers (not including our eleven 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 have had to restrict our normal volunteer recruitment programme, but this will resume when the staff have returned from furlough to their usual working hours.

Activities undertaken in 2020

- Prior to the COVID enforced closure of the museum, we had experienced our busiest February for 10 years. This had given us encouragement for the rest of 2020. We had hoped to exceed our budgeted 2,600 paying visitor numbers and were on the way to achieving our longer term targets of 2,800 to 3,000. Note, that these figures excluded around 300 to 350 under 16's who visit annually and are not charged for a visit.
- We were only able to deliver two bespoke tours (for schools, special interest groups etc.) before the COVID enforced closure. We are not yet able to re-start this offer.
- Our winter talks, which provide a lively introduction to the history of the town and surrounding area, took place in January to March as normal. The walks programme,

which normally starts in April was suspended until August. Walks have re-commenced with restricted numbers.

- We provided the February half term programme for children, which attracted a pleasing 62 visitors. But again this is currently suspended.
- The DVMWHS Discovery Days activities which normally take place in October and attract large numbers of visitors, free of charge, are this year being offered online only through the DVMWHS Partnership team.

Other points to note from 2020

- As part of revising the museum offer for post COVID re-opening, we have introduced four ticketed timed tours a day (with limited numbers) which can be booked online. This ensures we can control numbers on each of the four daily tours. Visitors who arrive without pre-booking are accommodated, providing there are places available on the tour. This has proved popular with both visitors and volunteers and we are likely to continue with this arrangement into 2021.
- We have developed two new walks for Belper, the 'Community Walk' (around the Strutt housing) and a fully accessible River Gardens walk. These are being introduced on Thursdays from October 8. We will review this new offer and may extend it to more days a week if there is demand.
- Continued our collaboration with partners to provide the Derbyshire Day Out Discount offer with: Cromford Mills, Crich Tramway Village, Derby Museums. This has been extended in 2020 to include Bakewell Old House Museum, the Peak District Lead Mining Museum in Matlock Bath and the Wirksworth Heritage Centre.
- Our website <https://www.belpernorthmill.org.uk/> remained available for online viewing
- Our Facebook page continued to link in with the wider DVMWHS and was particularly successful with a post relating to a community lockdown activity led by the DVMWHS team
- Improved the visitor centre shop, with a wider range of books including for children, plus an improved drinks and confectionary offer (using local produce).
- The Strutt's North Mill Community Lottery to support the museum, is up and running with over 60 shares
- We continue to showcase our collections on our website with 'Our Favourite Things'
- We had planned to introduce our Great Places funded pilot project Derwent Valley Tours offering accompanied bus tours along the Derwent Valley, delivered as a joint venture with The Arkwright Society. This has had to be deferred to 2021.
- Financially, we have obviously suffered from the loss of income linked to visitors. However, the Trust has received support from the Retail, Leisure & Hospitality Grant and well as utilising the Job Retention Scheme. These have provided much needed support in 2020.

Looking forward to 2021 and beyond

Many of the issues that have been raised with the Council previously remain unresolved as the owner's long term plans for the site are uncertain and the planning application for the Belper Mills site publicised in 2018 remains incomplete. We have made initial contact with the Council's Marketing Officer and will be keen to work with him to enhance the awareness of our activities and if possible achieve greater coordination between the work of the Trust and the aims of the Council.

The Trust has a three-year grant funding agreement with AVBC to March 2023, set at a fixed £47,600 annually. However, this is currently included in possible savings for AVBC's 2021/22 budget, together with all other discretionary grants. Despite this, we have received written

assurance from the Leader of AVBC that it remains the Cabinet's intention that the Council will honour the three-year grant agreement. It is possible that the budget plans for AVBC and hence a formal decision on the 2021/22 grant will not be made until March 2021, giving us a degree of uncertainty in the meantime. This grant is essential to the Trust being able to set a budget that is financially viable.

The Trust's one-year lease for its premises in the North Mill expires in April 2021 and the annual costs of around £60,000 for the rent, service charges and buildings insurance are not sustainable in the long term. We have tried, without success, to date, to negotiate a more financially sustainable lease agreement.

We are anticipating that the impact of COVID will continue into 2021 and have reduced our budgeted income from visitor related activities by half. As a consequence, with all other factors remaining the same as in a normal year we are budgeted to lose £23,500 in 2021 and a further £17,000 in 2022. These losses can only be sustained in the short term, by using our reserves.

The long term plan for our reserves is to use them to fund / match fund accommodation costs that deliver our longer term aim of running a viable and successful heritage based offer from the Belper Mills site. We remain hopeful that this is likely to be a key requirement in any approval for the current planning application put forward by the owners of the site. However, until the longer term future of the wider site is known, we are restricted to our current space and our current offer

We are currently working with our WHS partners on the DVMWHS Great Place funded Options Appraisal, looking at future viable heritage based offers for the World Heritage Site, with Belper as a central hub. This is looking at the Belper Mills site alongside other premises in Belper and it is likely that the strategy arising from this review will shape how and where we look to deliver our offer in the longer term.

We are also considering alternative Belper based premises in the event that our preferred option of remaining in the North Mill is no longer financially viable in the medium term. We will continue to provide walks and talks and look to develop our outreach offer accordingly.

As a consequence of the current funding uncertainty, we request that the Council consider our grant request in two stages:

1. Subject to the Trust continuing in the North Mill and continuing to provide the current offer (subject to COVID-19 restrictions), we ask that the current grant agreement is maintained as planned to March 2023.
2. If the Trust is not able to continue in the North Mill (possibly from April 2021), we look to work together to develop an alternative grant agreement that delivers mutually beneficial outcomes.

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, when the COVID situation allows.