

VISION FOR THE HEART OF THE COTSWOLDS

Vision

The vision for the *Heart of the Cotswolds* project is to engage people in the inspiring story of the Cotswolds landscape and its people.

We aim to:

- preserve the significant Cotswold countryside agricultural collection
- preserve the Grade II* listed Old Prison building
- tell the stories of people who have lived and worked in this unique landscape
- introduce people to the natural environment of the Cotswolds
- engage people in rural crafts for leisure and for learning.

Centuries of human intervention in the Cotswolds, through farming and building, has enhanced the natural beauty of the landscape rather than detract from it. It is the story of that interaction between landscape and people that will be told at Northleach. We want to re-connect visitors and local people with the landscape and farming traditions. Many have lost all sense of local food production from the land and yet almost all visitors will have ancestral links with agriculture. We want to take people back to their roots, change their attitude towards agriculture and bring that story right up to date, making it relevant to people's modern lives.

The Friends of the Cotswolds have three rich assets with which to interpret the story. The first is the Cotswold landscape itself. Northleach is a place where visitors can see characteristic limestone grasslands, Cotswold stone walls and an historic market town that was once at the very centre of the Cotswold wool trade, strategically placed on the crossroads between Oxford and Gloucester and the Roman Fosse Way. It is a perfect starting point to explore the heritage of the Cotswolds.

The second is the significant Lloyd-Baker collection of domestic artefacts, workshop equipment, farming implements and machinery. The specific collection of traditional farm wagons one of the finest ever gathered and provides the opportunity to interpret the specific farming practice and traditions that shaped the Cotswolds.

Thirdly, the House of Correction itself, which houses the heritage collection. Built in the 1790s as one of the first model prisons in the country, it has significance as an influence on the design of prison buildings, both nationally and internationally. The site was selected for its central and accessible location and it functioned as a focal point for justice in Gloucestershire for nearly two hundred years right up to 1974. Its 200-year history reflects the rich social history and lives of the rural communities it served.

The proposed themes for the displays weave these three assets together – the Cotswolds, the collections and the House of Correction. The displays will use a range of locations across the Cotswolds to explore the heritage themes, which will be illustrated with objects from the Lloyd-Baker collection, from collections held by Cotswold District Council and from loans from other Museums. For example, the Domesday Book records a quarry at Taynton and we will use Taynton as our focus for our displays about Cotswold stone as a high status

building material, the skilled stonemasons, the quarry owners, the Oxfordshire buildings you can see built with Taynton stone, illustrated with a road wagon from the collection and a mason's bench and tools. The sheep and shepherding theme will focus on Stow, with first-hand accounts of the life and hardship of the Cotswolds shepherds, illustrated by a shepherd's hut for visitors to explore, showing cramped and primitive conditions, and tools of the trade. Northleach will be the focus of law and order enforcement within a rural setting. The displays will shock visitors with stories of prisoners' trials, petty rural crimes, heavy sentences and daily routines. We will also tell the story of the collector, Olive Lloyd Baker, who lived at Hardwicke Court and formed her own collection of 'bygones' to illustrate rapidly disappearing rural life and the role of the Cotswolds in inspiring arts, music, poetry and crafts. We want to give the displays modern relevance, showcasing local food producers and farmers who have been part of the Cotswold landscape for generations and contemporary issues about conservation of the heritage fabric of the countryside.

The themes will be amplified by an activity programme that will aim to engage visitors with the Cotswold land and its history. We are exploring a new Rural Skills Academy, focusing on dry-stone walling and thatching, a Cotswold Craft Apprenticeship Scheme, and public demonstrations of rural crafts such as thatching, blacksmithing, carpentry, wheelwrighting and saddlery. Other activities planned include an oral history programme to capture dying memories (which would be done in conjunction with other rural museums) and conservation-in-action for the Lloyd Baker collections. Programmes to re-engage the local community (who fought to save the Prison from closure) include early years' activities, a schools' programme, a community performance, an annual *Children's Take-over Day* and an enhanced volunteering programme.

For the first time, the collections will be housed in appropriate conditions and will be interpreted properly. In order to achieve this, we will place 50% of the Lloyd Baker collection into a new purpose-built storage facility that will be an extension to Cotswold District Council's existing collections store. This will provide us with the space we need in the displays for the collections to be placed in context and their stories told fully. We will aim to open the stored collections to the public on special heritage open days. The collections for display will be restored and cleaned and a conservation-in-action programme, which visitors can watch, will ensure ongoing maintenance and restoration of the collections in store.

Our target audiences

- Local people (couples, solos and families)
- Volunteers
- Young people (11 – 18 years)
- Primary schools (Reception, KS1 and 2)

Local people fought to keep the Prison open as an attraction. They are still loyal supporters of the café and the large events, but we would like to engage and involve them in the site through volunteering programmes that will cover every aspect of running the site; we want to engage them through family holiday activities, activities for mums and toddlers in the village and using our venue for their community meetings.

Volunteers. We want people to engage people with site through the volunteering programme. Roles will include every aspect of the site welcoming visitors, helping with

schools and children's activities, undertaking oral history, researching the history of the site, web development and use of social media.

Young people. There are several secondary schools in Northleach's catchment area and they see great potential for using the Prison as a site for study at GCSE and for exploring the theme of crime and punishment. They see opportunities for work experience, Arts Award, Duke of Edinburgh, CREST Awards and Extended Project Qualifications. In addition, we are working on plans for the Old Prison hosting a Cotswolds Crafts Apprenticeship Scheme to ensure those crafts which contribute so much to the Cotswolds heritage and landscape are given a secure future..

Primary schools. The collections and proposed themes respond well to the National Curriculum, KS 1 and 2. Schools can focus on changes within living memory, significant historical events and people and places in their own locality. Study areas can also support STEM topics, literacy and Design and Technology areas of the curriculum.

Our core audiences

These are the people that we think will come anyway and we already attract over 20,000 of them each year:

- Families with children aged 7 – 11 years
- Older people aged 50+
- Day visitors
- Staying visitors
- Overseas visitors.

We will grow these audiences by offering the *Heart of the Cotswolds* as a place to visit to find out about the history and heritage of the Cotswold people and the landscape. The Prison is located on a busy road (the Fosse Way) and is just half a mile from the A40 and on the edge of the historic market town of Northleach. With the combination of new interpretation, an activity programme a café and a shop, we will be able to entice people to stop and become a destination where visitors start their exploration of the Cotswolds.

QUESTIONS ABOUT OUR VISION

Why is this the best place for the collection?

The collection is situated in the heart of the Cotswolds, is very accessible and because we have the space to interpret it well. If the overarching vision for the interpretation is to focus on the heritage of the people and the landscape, then the Prison setting reflects a particular slice of the Cotswold human story.

Why do we want to keep the collection?

The collection represents the lost farming traditions of the Cotswolds and is recognised as being of national importance. We want to use the collection to reconnect people with the land and make those stories resonate with modern day life and contemporary issues.

How are we going to do better now than in the past?

The Museum opened in 1982 and essentially remained unchanged until its closure 20 years later. Those displays were very much of their time, when museums were more about the objects than people and modern ideas about interaction, engaging audiences and making displays relevant to people's modern lives were not even thought of. Our displays will be about people and our programmes will actively engage people with their heritage and farming past.

Why do we need to do it now?

The project needs to go ahead now because the collection is fast deteriorating in its current display conditions. Housed in open-fronted shelter sheds, every year there is more water penetration, rusting and damage through fading from the elements. The Grade II* listed Old Prison building also needs repair and maintenance.

Through the project our organisation will become more resilient. We wish to engage local people fully in its operation, gain from the increased capacity, knowledge and skills of our volunteers. We will work seek to collaborate with our local museums and with members of the subject specialist group, the Rural Museums Network, of whom we are members.