

Case study



Mansfield Museum

In Nottinghamshire showcases the collections of William Edward Baily, a wealthy local collector and natural historian. The museum alongside Mansfield Palace theatre is run by Mansfield District Council (MDC).

See what they had to say



“If we hadn’t had the support in 2020 lots of staff would have struggled to continue and none of the projects would have happened, becoming an NPO wouldn’t have been possible, and we wouldn’t be planning a capital project.”

Sian Booth,
Cultural Services Manager,
Mansfield District Council



01. Summary

Mansfield Museum's mission is to bring people together to create healthier, proud communities. They are all about helping local people discover the world around them, cherishing Mansfield's unique stories, and bringing them to life.

Their big dream is to be a place where you belong in the hope that everyone can be inspired.

From 2020 – 2023 MDC staff received transformational support from Museum Development East Midlands (MDEM). Through the engagement in programmes, networks, and training events the museum has clarified its mission and vision, developed its volunteering programme and strengthened its equality and inclusion work.



"The timing of 21st Century Visitor Attractions was really significant. At that period, we felt at our lowest ebb personally and strategically."

**Sian Booth,
Cultural Services Manager,
Mansfield District Council**

02. Creating a vision

In 2020 the museum faced significant challenges. Alongside the pandemic there was a turnover in staffing which led to a period of great uncertainty.

Previous staff had been in post for a long time (20-30 years). The new team were faced with some big questions, what was their vision, what and who was the museum for and what values does it embody?



The 21st Century Visitor Attractions sessions helped to set the direction of travel and vision for the museum. The programme which was led by Morris Hargreaves McIntyre and Julie Aldridge allowed the museum to pick itself up and refocus. It provided the Cultural Services Manager with the opportunity for a strategic reset.

Participation in the sessions led to a restructure, a new service plan and the museum joined the Arts Councils National Portfolio in 2023.

“We identified that we are delivering council priorities, helping the health and wellbeing of our residents. Having that clarity helps us to have more confidence when things are challenging, difficult and confusing.”

Sian Booth,
Cultural Services Manager,
Mansfield District Council

03. Equity and inclusion

MDEM’s equity and inclusion programme has helped Mansfield Museum to focus on areas of need.

The museum had a good track record of community work but the collections and collecting policy had been quite narrowly focused on industrial heritage and natural history. It wasn’t proactive in collecting diverse histories or in providing diverse interpretations.



There have been four diversity related projects which followed on from the museum’s participation in this programme:

1

A lottery funded project which aimed to increase disability representation in the collection and workforce and visitors.

“It can be very isolating and lonely in the profession. It shouldn’t go unappreciated having industry peers and professionals you can call upon, when you have a day of things going wrong and when you are left on your own to deal with them it can feel really hard to process and having support from a museum professional can really help. Feeling like you are part of a bigger picture can really help.”

Sian Booth, Cultural Services Manager, Mansfield District Council



2 Windrush: It runs through us, an exhibition which celebrates the district's Windrush generation, migration and black history.

3 A women's project funded through Esmee Fairbairn which involves looking again at the collections which have historically had a male bias. There is only one portrait of a woman in the collection and that woman was connected to the transatlantic slave trade.

4 A social prescribing project which aims to support people with long term health conditions.

Alongside these projects the museum started a partnership with a local housing association with the aim of targeting support for sanctuary seekers.

They launched a sanctuary café which has been very popular.



"By participating in the programme it gave us the agency, the licence permission and time to explore things in the collection. It was good to know we weren't alone, the project helped us feel like we were doing something and that we were making progress."

Sian Booth,
Cultural Services Manager,
Mansfield District Council

Volunteer programme

Mansfield Museum Development Officer, Kirsty took part in the MDEM volunteer programme. It's had a knock-on impact on MDC's cultural services and more widely across the council.

It's given people more confidence in working with volunteers, there are now role descriptions, clearer language, processes for retaining and stewarding volunteers.

"The It Runs Through Us exhibition is one of the most exciting, and innovative co-created projects delivered at the museum in recent years. Not only does it deepen an understanding of Mansfield's Windrush pioneers, but it furthers our efforts to empower communities. As the first major exhibition following the museum's closure, I'm so pleased to see such a range of authentic voices and a real sense of community celebration which surrounds the work. As we look ahead to the 75th anniversary of the Windrush arrival, we're proud to connect Mansfield to be part of that national story."

David Evans, Head of Health and Communities, Mansfield District Council



05. Impact

Making the relevance of the museum known and building advocacy is important as the museum is a statutory service and the council are continuously making challenging financial decisions.

Participation in the MDEM projects has enabled the museum to highlight to others, especially stakeholders how vital the spaces are as a civic asset. The team can clearly articulate how the museum plays a role in health and wellbeing, responds to the climate emergency, biodiversity crisis and other strategic challenges. One of the most valued aspects of the MDEM programmes was the network of support offered.



“We wouldn’t have been able to have the excuse to do that before 2020. Being clear on our purposes helps us to seek out opportunities to further the sustainability of the museum.”

Sian Booth,
Cultural Services Manager,
Mansfield District Council

The museum has responded to the cost-of-living crisis by creating warm rooms. They also run a swap shop where families can take clothes and shoes.

06. The future

In the immediate future the museum is focused on delivering its NPO activity. The NPO projects will focus on developing new partnerships and supporting wider civic initiatives.

Other work the museum will be embarking upon is capital development, environmental and collections care. They will be making a specific focus on the preservation, storage and interpretation of a globally significant rare bird collection. They aim to raise the profile of the collection, its importance and relevance to the local area.

The museum also recognises there is work to do in audience and visitor development, community representation, donor management and commerciality.

They are committed to workforce development and recognise the need to focus on succession planning in the coming years. Inclusivity, diversity and ensuring equality of access will underpin the delivery of all the museums future activities, ensuring all local people can find relevance in what is on offer.

Read more: mhminsight.com/client-stories/future-proofing-mansfields-culture-services/



**Museum
Development
East Midlands**

Contact us

Leicestershire County Council Museum
Development EM, Room 600, County
Hall, Glenfield, Leicester, LE3 8RL

Check out our website: mdem.org.uk