



20-year Strategic Vision



Our 20-Year Strategic Vision

Following an 18-month process, including discussion at trustee level, a staff and trustee away day, six-month's research and work by a joint staff and trustee steering group and consultation with staff, volunteers and stakeholders, we have arrived at our 20-year Strategic Vision. Its purpose is not to predict the future but to help shape it. We will regularly review our progress towards achieving the challenges we have set out in this Vision.

The journey so far

Avoncroft was established in 1963 as an independent charity and company limited by guarantee. It opened 50 years ago as England's first open-air museum of rescued buildings. Founded by a group of committed volunteers and the contributions of its early membership, the Museum has since collected 30 buildings and structures. Many were threatened with destruction or demolition and have been re-erected on our rural site close to Bromsgrove in Worcestershire.

A clear strategy was adopted in the early years to rescue timber-framed buildings which were under threat. Over time, and with a need to respond to the changing planning environment, the original concept of the Museum was extended to include a wider range of buildings. Owing to financial constraints there was no active rescue of buildings between 1996 and 2012, however, when the process recommenced, inevitably questions arose such as; where would any new additions to the collection be located? What type of buildings would we collect in the future? Where would they come from? These discussions led to this document where we ask where will Avoncroft be in 20-years' time and what will a visit to the Museum look like for the visitors of 2037? In considering a long-term future, it is clear we need to set out our vision in order to steer our course towards it.

The 20-year Strategic Vision Statement

Avoncroft will be the open-air museum of Midlands life that collects and shares the stories, buildings and belongings of Midlands people through the generations



The Strategic Vision will:

- ◆ Encourage visitors and users to engage more closely with us
- ◆ Provide a framework for our public services, collecting, fundraising, business and site development
- ◆ Provide our partners with an avenue for input into the future of the Museum
- ◆ Provide staff and volunteers with a sense of long-term direction
- ◆ Serve as a cornerstone for Avoncroft Museum's Council of Trustees when planning and making decisions with respect to services, infrastructure, sustainability and governance

Our business

Avoncroft Museum will continue to be a complex business, which needs to meet a wide range of expectations by balancing many different areas of activity:

- ◆ Delivering an open-air museum and heritage attraction – providing fun and leisure opportunities. Avoncroft is a tourist attraction, a learning environment and a social amenity
- ◆ Ensuring that our heritage is preserved for future generations – effectively deploying resources, undertaking research and recording collective memory
- ◆ Running a well-managed business – funding facilities, events and functions in ways that ensure financial sustainability
- ◆ Working with partners to improve our communities' continuing access to their history





Our strengths

- ◆ Trusted as experts in the rescue of historic buildings
- ◆ Valued and viewed as authentic, safe and attractive by current users
- ◆ Loyal supporters – people value what we do
- ◆ A local amenity and community space
- ◆ Established in a rural environment
- ◆ Sited on a location close to population centres and the motorway network
- ◆ Diverse and stimulating collections within an attractive leisure destination
- ◆ Accessible, both physically and intellectually, to visitors of all ages and ability
- ◆ An independent charity with a 50-year history of raising its own revenue
- ◆ Skilled and committed workforce, both paid and volunteer
- ◆ Resilient through recent recessions, increasing income levels and re-investing in the business

Our challenges

We have identified eight key challenges which we will need to address in order to deliver our Vision:

1. Providing an innovative and enjoyable visitor experience
2. Growing visitor numbers in a changing society
3. Growing the significance and relevance of our collections for future audiences
4. Raising our profile and improving our reputation
5. Maintaining our rural setting
6. Increasing and developing our financial resources
7. Increasing and developing our people
8. Contributing to environmental sustainability





Making it happen

Implementation of our 20-year Strategic Vision requires ongoing planning and resource commitments. However, the implementation process cannot be unchanging, predefined or regulated. We must be responsive to external factors and to opportunities which we cannot yet imagine.

Our future 3-year Business Plan will address these challenges in detail, giving actions, targets and performance indicators to help the Museum measure its progress over time. Nevertheless, the enduring quality of our challenges will guide future decisions that must, cumulatively, move us towards achieving our long-term goals.

Assessing our direction of travel

- ◆ We will continue with our use of rolling 3-year business plans and staff appraisals to deliver the Vision
- ◆ Trustees will expect the Senior Management to ensure that future business decisions and plans align with this 20-year Strategic Vision
- ◆ All future reports will outline how the various proposals and actions support the Vision
- ◆ The Trustees will review progress towards the Vision annually and the Chairman will include a summary of progress-to-date in each Annual Report to the Museum's membership





Challenge One - Providing an innovative and enjoyable visitor experience

Where we are now?

We know visitors to Avoncroft Museum enjoy the stories that our collections provide and the experiences we offer. However, our potential customers are diverse and the stories that we tell need to reflect that diversity in order to engage them. Refreshing our methods of interpretation must also be undertaken regularly, incorporating innovation, while ensuring authenticity is maintained. Reactions to our current visitor facilities are less positive, and visitors' expectations have changed. Our facilities and services must be excellent if we are to keep people returning.

Goal: Every visitor will have a rewarding and memorable experience which matches their expectations

Aim: We will fully-exploit all our resources to improve and extend the visitor experience:

Actions

- ◆ Our core offer is made accessible and available to be experienced by every visitor
- ◆ Invest in quality visitor facilities which meet modern expectations and adapt to changing technology
- ◆ Ensure there are sufficient building interpreters each day we are open
- ◆ Empower and encourage our staff to build their knowledge and share it with visitors
- ◆ Learn lessons in creating experiences from practitioners outside the heritage sector

Aim: We will know our visitors, their breadth and depth, their diversity and demands:

Actions

- ◆ Invest in customer relationship management systems and continuously collect visitor information
- ◆ Ensure the stories we tell reflect the diversity of the people of the Midlands and are accessible to all through differing delivery methods
- ◆ Provide shopping, food and services which feel a natural part of the visit and meet customers expectations and needs
- ◆ Enter into partnerships with other heritage organisations to share experience

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Regular internal visitor satisfaction surveys and public feedback via our volunteers
- ◆ Regular access audits which are acted upon
- ◆ External surveys that measure our performance against industry standards
- ◆ Employers and learning bodies engage with us in delivering public benefit
- ◆ Consistently high performance in online reviews and mystery shopper exercises



Challenge Two - Growing visitor numbers in a changing society

Where we are now?

The majority of the Avoncroft's income is from admissions and without growing our numbers, we limit what else we can achieve. Visitor numbers have been steadily growing, so the challenge is to maintain or add to that growth. However, there are still too many days when there are relatively few visitors on a site that can accommodate more. Furthermore, the number of those visiting on formal educational visits has been falling for some time. We need to improve the learning experience for all our young visitors as they are our future visiting parents and grandparents.

Goal: Avoncroft will reach at least 100,000 visitors per year by 2037

Aim: To know our demographic environment and untapped audiences and invest in reaching them:

Actions

- ◆ Commission an audience development plan including profiling and segmentation
- ◆ Collect accurate and current data and ensure it is used by all staff
- ◆ Ensure that our information management systems and structures are robust and appropriate
- ◆ Develop clear marketing messages for differing ages, skills and interest groups, communities and geographic areas
- ◆ Make our digital profile current, contemporary, clear and highly-visible
- ◆ Focus on undeveloped audiences such as non-participating locals, businesses, schools and colleges
- ◆ Regularly review the business case for investing in marketing (including digital)

Aim: We will focus our major investments on developments that grow our numbers, raise our reputation and improve our financial sustainability:

Actions

- ◆ Grow our historic buildings collection for future generations
- ◆ Give Avoncroft an attractive and significant approach and entrance
- ◆ Develop the Museum's site and educational offer to reach the standards required by our audiences
- ◆ Increase staff and volunteer numbers engaged in outreach activities

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Increase in overall footfall (baseline – 41,300 general visitors in 2016)
- ◆ Increase in education visitors (baseline – 5,000 education visitors in 2016)
- ◆ Digital profile increased
- ◆ Increase in repeat visits



Challenge Three - Growing the significance and relevance of our collections for future audiences

Where are we now?

People's everyday lives are continually changing and so too are the buildings they use. We must ensure that our collections develop over the next 20 years to reflect these changes and remain relevant to younger generations. Avoncroft's historic buildings are from the Midlands, but this diverse region has neither a strong regional identity nor a clear definition, other than for those people who consider themselves 'Midlanders'. Avoncroft should explore the diversity that has made the Midlands so important.

Goal: Avoncroft reflects the continuity of Midlands life through the generations, up until living memory, by collecting, conserving, displaying and interpreting relevant buildings and supporting collections

Aim: Our collections will reflect the continuity of life in the diverse communities of the Midlands:

Actions

- ◆ Develop policies for research about Midlands communities
- ◆ Ensure our criteria for collecting buildings and objects takes into account the diversity of communities and their buildings
- ◆ Identify and collect buildings types which represent the Midlands in the later-20th century
- ◆ Re-visit the original site planning documents and develop a new long-term site masterplan incorporating recognisable themed zones
- ◆ Acquire or develop high-quality appropriate storage for the Museum's collections
- ◆ Prioritise 'saving' and 'conservation' of historic buildings over 'fabrication' or 'reproduction'

How we will measure progress

- ◆ All new acquisitions of buildings fulfil the objectives of our collections policy
- ◆ There is an increase in collections from unrepresented geographical areas of the Midlands
- ◆ Increase new acquisitions for periods and building types not currently represented in the collection



Challenge Four - Raising our profile and improving our reputation

Where are we now?

Avoncroft is a locally-recognised attraction and asset and is well-known in the heritage community. However, the Museum has had a higher, well-earned, profile in the past. Becoming a nationally-recognised attraction and heritage body again would encourage recruitment, partnerships and collaborations. Funding bodies are experiencing increased demand and we need to be visible, credible and recognised. We need to share our stories more widely and have confidence to talk as experts in our field.

Goal: Avoncroft is seen as an asset with a national profile, regarded for its expertise in building rescue and regional heritage. We are seen as relevant, positive, worthwhile and forward thinking

Aim: We will be recognised for our expert understanding of our Midlands subject area:

Actions

- ◆ Grow active relationships with scholars and experts in our field
- ◆ Invest in research and curatorship as active elements of the business
- ◆ Engage the public in conversations about preservation
- ◆ Share information online and at the Museum
- ◆ Maintain and build on sector standards for collections care
- ◆ Ensure that all our people promote Avoncroft's curatorial ethos

Aim: We will develop and maintain strong partnerships that deliver our charitable objectives:

Actions

- ◆ Encourage senior staff to develop strategic partnerships
- ◆ Develop relationships with education providers and community groups
- ◆ Promote the significance of our work to Local Authorities
- ◆ Ensure our people become more visible participants in activity across the region

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Advice/guidance on regional heritage and the rescue of buildings is sought by other bodies
- ◆ Increased enquiries from the public about our subject areas
- ◆ Increased coverage of Avoncroft in the press and specialist publications



Challenge Five - Maintaining our rural setting

Where are we now?

Our Green Belt location is vital to our success. However, as Bromsgrove continues to grow, this could be threatened. We need to find a way to protect the views from our perimeter. At the same time, fulfilling the 20-year vision might require a larger site to continue adding buildings and to extend the dwell time of our visitors and the range of activities they can enjoy.

Goal: In 2037 Avoncroft will still be situated in a semi-rural setting which complements our historic properties and fulfils the sense of a day out in the countryside

Aim: Our existing site will be entirely used to deliver our vision:

Actions

- ◆ Review how well all parts of the current site are used to deliver our vision
- ◆ Plan and zone the site to enhance the visitors' experience of spirit of place
- ◆ Invest time in spatial planning
- ◆ Put phased and planned development at the heart of our fundraising strategy
- ◆ Maintain active friendships with major funders and statutory bodies
- ◆ Extend staff skills to include rural skills and countryside management

Aim: Land surrounding our existing site will contribute to our rural character and visitors take away a sense of both environmental and heritage conservation:

Actions

- ◆ Study how well adjoining land use helps us to achieve our goals
- ◆ Constantly ensure that relationships with neighbours is excellent
- ◆ Lead discussions with potential local partners and authorities to develop a rural heritage corridor to the south of Bromsgrove to boost day/weekend tourism for the area
- ◆ Fully engage with Bromsgrove District Council's development plans as an active player
- ◆ Engage with county and west midlands regional strategic policies
- ◆ Actively use all available means to protect our rural setting

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Site still sparingly populated, with historic buildings encountered, where appropriate, in green spaces
- ◆ Our historic windmill still overlooks a rural valley
- ◆ Sufficient space remaining for rural demonstrations and to add further rescued historic buildings
- ◆ The facilities required by a larger visitor attraction will be in place



Challenge Six - Increasing and developing our financial resources

Where are we now?

We have a history of more than 50 years as a charity, adapting and surviving on relatively-low levels of regular funding. However, every business requires financial stability to enable it to weather difficulties and move forward. Investment in the product and income-generating services have successfully raised visitor numbers and income, but this has also required increased expenditure on staff and activities.

Goal: Avoncroft's business model will allow it to plan development projects five years ahead and build sufficient reserves to be financially sustainable

Aim: We will think like a business to generate income and act like a charity to deliver our objectives:

Actions

- ◆ We will trade efficiently, so that our enterprises provide great services and generate income
- ◆ All areas of the business will be supported by financial systems, information and training
- ◆ All project proposals will be fully-evidenced so we have the confidence to exploit commercial opportunities

Aim: We will have a well-supported fundraising profile which generates significant income:

Actions

- ◆ Build an active membership and friends
- ◆ Increase corporate partnerships and engagement
- ◆ Develop and maintain relationships with high net worth donors and patrons
- ◆ Widen the range of charitable trusts that support our projects
- ◆ Increase value of individual and regular giving

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Income continues to increase year-on-year and our bank balances are in credit for the majority of each year
- ◆ We have reserves to cover three months' operating costs
- ◆ We have sufficient surplus reserves to enable us to react to new opportunities
- ◆ Our trading generates a monthly profit for more than half the year
- ◆ Project funding is supported by contributions from a wide range of sources



Challenge Seven - Communicating with and developing our people

Where are we now?

We have a loyal, committed and enthusiastic team in Avoncroft's staff, volunteers and trustees, but our workspaces and facilities are cramped and outdated. As the Museum grows we will need even more people, with an increased range of relevant skills and from a wider variety of backgrounds. A larger, more complex business will need efficient, motivated and productive people who are fully-involved in delivering the overall Museum plans.

Goal: All staff, volunteers and supporters will engage with the values of Avoncroft, reflect the diversity of the catchment area and contribute individually to the success of the business in return for appropriate rewards

Aim: We will value all our people as individuals, enabling them to grow and be fulfilled:

Actions

- ◆ Avoncroft's organisational values are defined and publicly available
- ◆ Our people are provided with appropriate workspaces and up-to-date technology to enable them to deliver effectively
- ◆ We will have an active training programme and good relationships with awarding bodies
- ◆ Our staffing and volunteering policies are developed and their application is regularly monitored
- ◆ Improve effective internal communication with our people

Aim: We will regularly review the performance of our people, and our performance as employers:

Actions

- ◆ Fully-resourced and trained staff and volunteers are qualified and able to deliver Museum developments
- ◆ Our appraisal scheme is fully-embedded and we conduct regular staff and volunteer surveys
- ◆ We will gain external recognition for our employment practices

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Regular staff and volunteer surveys indicate a happy, motivated workforce proud to promote Avoncroft
- ◆ Volunteer numbers and volunteer engagement increases
- ◆ Staff contributions to business success are assessed annually and recognised
- ◆ We achieve industry standard of staff costs as percentage of turnover



Challenge Eight - Contributing to environmental sustainability

Where are we now?

Avoncroft has been introducing measures to improve our energy consumption and therefore reduce our carbon footprint, but inevitably, as a visitor attraction that most visitors arrive at by car, our impact is significant. While our buildings are largely made out of recycled materials, overall our facilities and workspaces are not designed for low-energy use. We have improved waste recycling and water usage, but have further to go in terms of reducing waste and choosing sustainable products .

Goal: Avoncroft will be an environmentally sustainable organisation making a positive contribution to our Worcestershire environment.

Aim: We will encourage our visitors to lessen their environmental impact when visiting the Museum:

Actions

- ◆ Work with partners to promote cycling, walking or using public transport to visit Avoncroft
- ◆ Encourage recycling on site and promote activities which encourage sustainable living
- ◆ Ensure an overall environmental sustainability plan is adopted and publicised across the Museum

Aim: We will work to reduce the carbon footprint of the process of rescuing buildings and increase the sustainability of our daily operations:

Actions

- ◆ Undertake an environmental audit of our operations and the impact of our visitors to use as a baseline to measure future improvements
- ◆ Promote sensitive methods of reducing carbon-energy usage within our historic buildings
- ◆ Use materials from sustainable sources when undertaking large projects
- ◆ Improve sustainability in our workspaces and facilities
- ◆ Encourage biodiversity, low water and low chemical usage in the Museum's grounds

How we will measure progress

- ◆ Our suppliers will have robust environmental policies
- ◆ Environmental sustainability targets set out in our 3-Year Business Plans will be met
- ◆ Visitor surveys will show an increase in sustainable transport usage to visit the Museum



The Next Steps

We will formulate and deliver our next rolling 3-year Business Plan to define the first stage on this journey, turning the goals set out in this Vision into concrete actions which we will implement.

To do this we will ensure the Plan sets out the next stages regarding:

- ◆ Audience development
- ◆ Proposed physical development of the Museum
- ◆ Long-term financial planning
- ◆ Marketing
- ◆ Fundraising
- ◆ Staffing and volunteering
- ◆ Engagement with local and regional stakeholders
- ◆ Technology and infrastructure planning
- ◆ Environmental impact

We hope this Vision will last in terms of a clear direction for the Museum for far longer than the next three years and that, when the organisation looks back in 2037, the aims we have set will hold true and that our challenges will have been met, ensuring that we are:

Avoncroft the open-air museum of Midlands life - sharing the stories, buildings and belongings of Midlands people through the generations.

Avoncroft Museum is a registered charity (241644) and a company registered by guarantee (co. no. 830659)

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