

Information for applicants – Director recruitment 2021

Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings seeks to appoint a dynamic, energetic Director to lead the Museum to a new exciting, sustainable future.

Over the past couple of years, the Museum has been through a difficult time: a fall in visitor numbers, reduction in income and loss of key staff, intensified by the devastating effects of lockdowns and restrictions introduced to combat the Covid-19 pandemic.

The new Director will have the opportunity to devise and implement a recovery plan for the Museum, recruit a new staff team when finances permit and lead the Museum into to a bright new future as the primary open-air museum of historic buildings in the Midlands.

Background

Avoncroft Museum of Historic Buildings is part of a Europe-wide movement of open-air museums, established in 1963, regionally significant, and in its portrayal of vernacular architecture, nationally important. Avoncroft Museum is a registered charity (No. 241644) and company limited by guarantee without share capital (No. 830659). <https://avoncroft.org.uk>

The historic buildings that comprise the main Avoncroft collection have been acquired over 60 years with the aim of saving historic buildings at risk. Twelve of them are listed Grade II, and one at grade II*. In addition, Avoncroft owns two historic dovecotes off-site. The portable and small object collection, archives and library are relatively small scale, less than 14K objects. These are partially owned by the Museum (estimated to be c 98%) and partially on loan (c 2%).

The Museum has a loyal following regionally and surveys show good levels of visitor satisfaction. Trading activities are managed through Avoncroft Enterprises Ltd., our trading arm. Admission ticket sales (charitable activities) are the Museum's largest source of income, followed by private functions including weddings and catering for functions.

Recent history

In 2017, staff and trustees worked together to produce a long term vision for the Museum which it was anticipated would guide future decisions: <https://avoncroft.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Avoncrofts-20-Year-Vision.pdf>. This was well received by funders, members and supporters.

The Museum received an *average* of 41,640 visits per annum from 2013-18, during a period which included a largely externally funded project (2015-18), but these showed signs of decline in 2018-9, when there were significant changes in staffing. As part of our thinking around the '20-Year Vision', financial stability was examined in a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) funded review. Accounts for 2018 (most recent year available of externally inspected accounts) show the Museum was viable but reliant on a bank overdraft (agreed £120,000) for the winter months.

2019	
General admissions	25,319
Schools and colleges	3,120
Total	28,439
(8.6% lower than in 2018).	

In November 2019, the Avoncroft Museum Council of Management (Trustees) considered two options for the future of the Avoncroft: Plan A - Recovery plan, and Plan B - Routes to closure. They chose to follow Plan A and successfully bid to NLHF to begin putting actions in place.

The NLHF funded review showed that options for a future sustainable operation could involve merger or management arrangements with other heritage bodies.

The impact of Covid-19

2020 was to be the next stage in our reinvention of the Museum, having already reduced staffing by not filling vacancies, we advertised to recruit some posts, including Director, when the long-term impact of Covid-19 became apparent. Recruitment was deferred and the Museum closed to the public. We had no Director, only half of our planned permanent staff complement, no income from admissions, functions, catering or retail. We abandoned events, rearranged hospitality bookings and stopped courses; significantly cut running costs and raised external funding. At that point, all but 2.6 FTE of the staff were furloughed. Without a Director, the leadership of the Museum devolved to a Recovery Working Group of four trustees and two excellent middle managers.

In the following 8 months this Recovery Working Group has

- Raised over £300,000 in emergency funds and donations (NLHF, CRF, and over £85k from appeals, donations and other grants)
- Reopened the Museum on 40% usual hours, delivering a Covid-safe experience
- Planned a major staff restructure.
- Closed the Museum down again in response to the second lockdown.

This has given us some breathing space, but we are acutely aware of our duty as trustees to ensure the long-term sustainability of the Museum. Therefore, in our successful application to the Cultural Recovery Fund (CRF) we said:

“If CRF can support us to the end of March 2021, we should then be able to trade at a more normal level with a reduced staff complement and improved cost management. We will also use this window to examine alternative business and governance options. This, along with redundancies, must enable us to maintain our historic assets - our core purpose.”