



**Wirksworth  
Heritage  
Centre**



## **Background Information**

Wirksworth Civic Society formed Wirksworth Heritage Centre (WHC) in 1986 with the aim of interpreting the town's history for visitors and the local community. It is a company limited by guarantee with charitable status. Over many years it has developed its collection, becoming a registered museum in 1999 and accredited in 2009. The Trust currently has 7 trustees, 60 paying members, around 30 active volunteers, but no permanent employees. The organisation's purpose (or mission) is 'to preserve, promote and make accessible the stories of the town and people of Wirksworth.'

For thirty years the heritage centre operated from the Crown Yard site, however the location had long presented problems for the trust, and visitor numbers had steadily declined over a number of years. Access was via a steep hill from the market square and there were significant access issues for people with physical disabilities. Lack of investment had led to dated interpretation and facilities. In 2012 the trust was bequeathed a three storey shop/townhouse in Wirksworth on St.Johns Street, a more central 'high street' site, and trustees decided this site provided an opportunity to re-invent the Heritage Centre as a new more accessible operation which could be better used by visitors and residents alike.

In 2014, the organisation was awarded an HLF grant of £100k for the Development Phase of a potential long term project to develop the St.Johns Street site. In December 2016, it was awarded a further grant of £1.34m by HLF for the Delivery Phase, which commenced in March 2017.

## **Our Project**

Our project involves extensive repair, adaptation and modernisation of the building on St.Johns Street to include interpretive exhibitions, safe storage for our museum collection, a studio & meeting room, shop and a new café – to be named after the Websters family who kindly bequeathed us the building in 2012. Exhibitions and displays will illustrate Wirksworth's long history and the qualities that make it so distinctive today.

The centre will also be the base for a big programme of new heritage, learning and cultural events and activities over the next few years. This will help to attract thousands of new visitors to Wirksworth, widening the economic impact of our project amongst local shops and tradespeople.

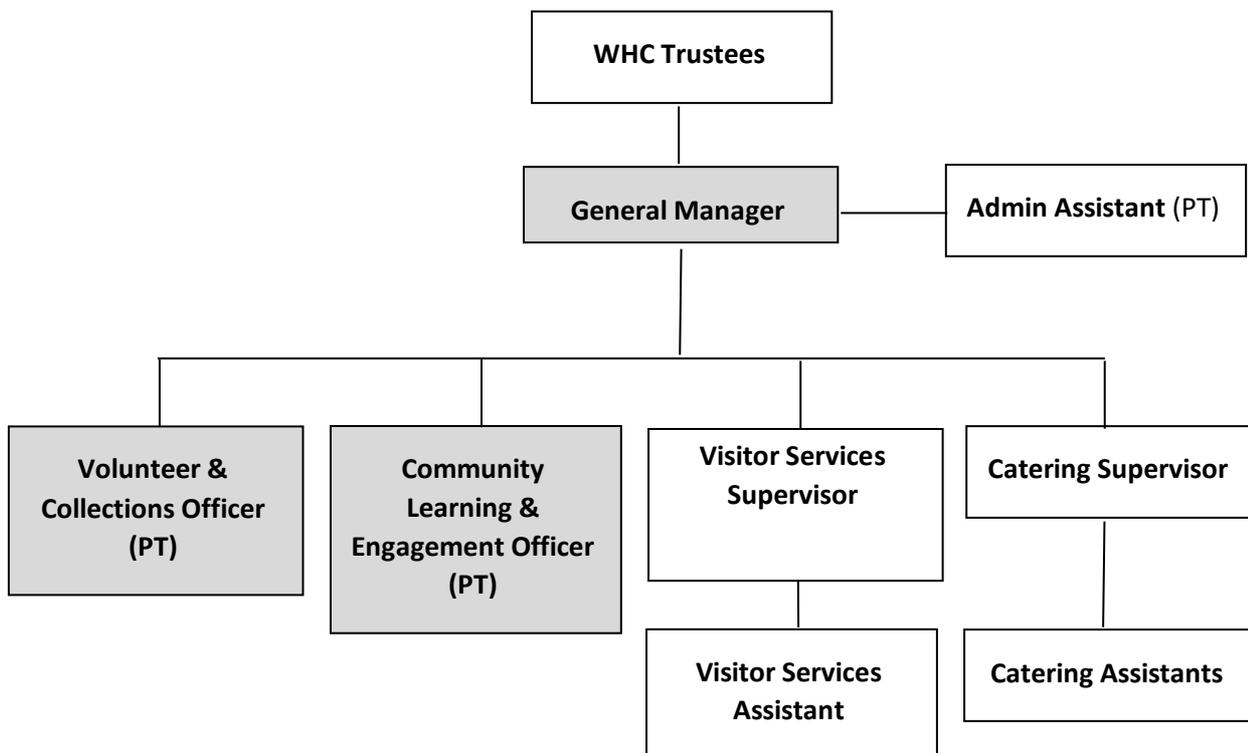
Our plans for a new modern heritage centre and focal hub for the community are on schedule, and we expect the doors of the new building to open to the public in the late summer of 2018.

## A new operations team

Our new centre and its activities will rely on a big team of trustees, employees and volunteers to keep it running. By the time it opens there will be three new permanent roles in our organisation:

- A General Manager to oversee the organisation's operations, building and staff.
- A Collections Officer responsible for the management and development of the museum collection.
- A Community Learning and Engagement Officer responsible for the co-ordination and delivery of our Activity Plan.

Some new full and part time jobs will also be introduced by the summer to run the café, reception and shop, supported by a team of part-time volunteers.



## The building and design team

Our contracting team of builders and designers comprises.

- Lathams Architects from Derby are specialists in heritage work. They're passionate about preserving, restoring, repairing and reusing existing buildings whilst introducing contemporary features which complement the heritage of the site. Lathams are working closely with our highly experienced local quantity surveyor Nigel Winters.
- Bonsers Restoration, based in Newark, are our main contractors. They've been working on historic buildings for over 50 years, and their team is made up of skilled craftspeople and dedicated conservationists, all with a real passion for restoring and protecting heritage.

- William Bailey, based in Derby, are our Mechanical and Electrical consultants. With nearly 90 years' experience in the business, they have built up a first-class reputation across the region. They are working closely with our structural engineers GCA, also based in Derby, recognised for their award-winning historic and conservation work.
- And once the builders work is done, our highly experienced exhibition and interpretive designers Headland move in. Headland, based near Chester, are already busy working with the project team, developing concepts and design proposals for the reception and museum areas of the building.

### **Our building and exhibition plans**

As we've worked out the details, there have been a few tweaks to the layout over the last few months, but the basics are still the same –

- A ground floor reception, shop and 50-seater café including a small outside courtyard
- 2 upper floors of museum exhibitions and displays
- A large first floor studio / meeting room
- A museum store
- A lift to all floors

Our museum rooms will include spaces for temporary exhibitions, and special security facilities which will allow us to borrow items from other museum collections to display on a regular basis. The studio will be large enough and equipped to accommodate visiting groups and school trips.

### **Activities and events**

Although building work at St.Johns Street has taken a while to get moving, there's been a lot of activity going on behind the scenes throughout 2017 – planning the building and its contents, but also making a start on our 4 year Activity Plan. This is a major part of our HLF project which will bring with it around £130k of funding for work delivered by the new team, both in the heritage centre itself and around the town, and will include:

- Guided walks & trails
- Family activities
- Art & crafts sessions
- Drama workshops
- Music concert
- Film making
- Heritage lectures & talks

There will also be regular and frequent learning activities for schools and other visiting groups throughout the year.