



"I never realised how interesting museums can be"
Young person, Malton School

Children making the film "The Reskue" which explores Ryedale's whaling heritage

"You have all helped to create a fantastic place and people's pride and enjoyment in what they do were obvious...It was really good to see so many people there – and of so many ages – and the education activities were really impressive. I know now why you talk of the museum with such passion and commitment."
Baroness Estelle Morris of Yardley (2008)

'So where is the collection going? Maybe the Victoria and Albert Museum in London. Or perhaps the Hermitage in St Petersburg? Or maybe the Smithsonian in Washington? Not quite. If you want to see one of the finest private collections in the UK then you've got to make your way up to North Yorkshire to the lovely village of Hutton-le-Hole and the Ryedale Folk Museum...'
Eric Knowles on BBC1



Hutton le Hole, home of the Ryedale Folk Museum

"RFM has the ability to catch the wind. To sail into waters others would fear, inspiring and engaging whilst 'bigger' organisations are still having planning meetings. This ability gives us the edge on our competitors. We must have confidence that we are delivering the very best experience we can."
Mike Benson, Director

Which Council Aim does this case study deliver?

To create the conditions for economic success

Background – Why?

Ryedale Folk Museum, a small, independent open-air museum, had been under-performing with steadily falling visitor numbers, little local/community involvement, inadequate financial structures (leading to late returns and insufficient budgeting control) and low staff morale with high turnover. Over-whelmingly visitors were non-local, older and fairly affluent and school visits were declining as a response to a stale offer.

This decline in visitors, income and support meant that, in time, the museum would prove to be unsustainable requiring either a *significant* increased investment from RDC or its closure. This situation was despite the genuine assets that the museum possessed: a collection housed in over 20 buildings on a 3.4 acre site; a broad-ranging collection covering archaeology, domestic and personal social history objects, farming and commercial life, ranging in size from a flint to a manor house and a group of long-term, highly committed volunteers. All of the objects, including the historic buildings, have been donated by local people in response to a fear that they were in danger of losing their own heritage and identity.

The museum receives £6K per annum from Ryedale District Council (its turnover is in excess of 400K from less than 150K in 2004) and significant ongoing officer support and it identifies these resources, particularly officer time, as the factor which gave the internal confidence to move forwards: "The confidence and trust that officer support from RDC constitutes delivers invaluable access and credibility when dealing with regional and national partners. These benefits are intangible and difficult to quantify but the fact that we

have enjoyed such high levels of support is a direct consequence of this advocacy” (Ryedale Folk Museum).

The museum is now enjoying steadily increasing visitor numbers (40K in 2008/9 from 30K in 2004), increasing visitor spend, extremely high levels of visitor satisfaction (evidenced through an Audiences Yorkshire survey, internal visitor evaluation and increased spend/high level of return visits) and an increasingly prestigious reputation in the regional and national heritage sector (cited as best practice in learning and engagement by MLA, the Times Educational Supplement and the QCA) and currently in a *national* shortlist of 12 to be a Paul Hamlyn Foundation “Learning Museum”. The museum is *the* driver for the local economy - local businesses, such as the village pub, café and creative industries, have benefited significantly through increased opening and visitor numbers over the last three years.

What was done?

The museum has had ongoing support from RDC officers and both revenue funding (small amounts ranging from £500 to £2000 for a number of projects) and capital (£40K for an improvement programme which has included a new resource space and a gallery as part of a £600K development). It has worked to have a positive impact on the communities it serves by: developing best practice links with stakeholder schools; working with members of the Community Pay-back team (resulting in over 1000 days of activity and over 50 members gaining Open College Network Certificates); delivering outreach services to over 5000 people each year including schools, older folks homes and healthcare settings; increasing volunteer numbers to in excess of 300 and training them in many elements of work, including the use of cataloguing software.

It has delivered a programme of formal and informal educational activities for the wider community with one primary school going as far as to describe it as an “extension of our classrooms”. Learning projects have included: Elphi the Ryedale Hob – the use of local folklore to help very young children to enjoy the museum; Town Mouse Country Mouse – a cultural exchange programme between young people from local, rural schools and those from urban areas in Middlesbrough, Hull etc.; conservation projects including a new interpretation of a wetlands area, the renovation of a threshing machine and a charcoal burn; partnership with Malton Hospital including a changing exhibition of museum artefacts on the hospital site; work with young offenders including a re-thatching project and the creation of a roundhouse which over 200 members of our communities contributed to; a Polish Week celebrating the contribution Eastern European migrants are making to the culture of Ryedale; “The Reskue” – a film researched and produced by local children and young people which explored Ryedale’s whaling heritage; using digital media to enable young people researching Ryedale whalers to talk, live, to an anti-whaling ship in the Pacific Ocean and a peace campaigner in Ramallah as part of a project researching Ryedale Quakers. In recognition of this recent work the museum was awarded Best Employment and Education Link in the 2009 Press Business Awards.

The museum has successfully repositioned itself and undertaken a long programme of internal, structural improvement including reorganisation, improved financial management, capital improvements to the site and upskilling its workforce.

Who was involved and how?

A large number of partners have contributed to this programme of change including Ryedale District Council, Ryedale schools, NYBEP, Yorkshire Forward, the Universities of Teesside, York and Leeds, Museums Libraries and Archives Council, the Arts Council, York Museums Trust and the North York Moors National Park. Local communities are involved at every level (there are now, for example, two 16 year old Trustees on the Board). These stakeholders/partners and collaborators have worked together to deliver projects, contribute ideas, make decisions and undertake evaluation.

Officer support from Ryedale District Council has included ongoing day-to-day involvement as a critical friend, advocate, provider of information and help making connections and relationships. This support has come from a wide range of officers including the Arts & Heritage Officer, Economy and Community Manager, Head of Service Economy and Housing and at Chief Executive level (through relationship building and advocacy).

Member support has included a Member Champion and strong advocacy from the museum's Ward Member.

What was achieved?

- Increased (and increasing) visitor figures
- Increased turn over and a corresponding decline in reliance on grant aid (increasing future sustainability for the museum)
- Community "ownership" and significant pride – the people behind the counter at Kirkbymoorside chip shop will recommend a visit to the museum, for example
- Increased visitor numbers from those who are traditionally non-museum goers (young men, for example, and people experiencing rural isolation)
- Increased volunteer numbers and significantly increased recruitment from non-traditional groups. The diversity is exceptional including ex-offenders who choose to remain as volunteers at the end of their Community Payback, people with different kinds of special needs including those living with Alzheimers and wheelchair users, and young people who are at risk of exclusion from school who choose to spend a day a week at the museum
- The employment of two young apprentices and two young Trustees (all under 18)
- Increased staff numbers (an increase of 4fte posts)
- The museum is now viewed by its peers as high-performing and delivering best practice in learning. The Qualifications and Curriculum Authority (QCA) have cited the museum in their national campaign for the Every Child Matters agenda.
- The local economy has benefited: *"The museum's increase in visitors and its events all year have had a significant positive effect on our business"* **Manager of The Crown, Hutton Le Hole**

"We're a really successful organisation and a big influence, or factor, in that is our relationship with you [Ryedale District Council]. You've been with us all the way through every fight – we've had the full weight of an army of real supporters behind us. That's not nothing." **Ryedale Folk Museum**

"I talk to you [RDC] first about all of my ideas. Before I talk to my staff even. And it doesn't matter that my ideas are half-baked because you bake them." **Mike Benson, Director, Ryedale Folk Museum**

"You shouldn't thank us, we should thank you [the museum] because we have a place here. You give us a place". **RFM volunteer**

"The relationship between the Folk Museum and its local authority is exceptional. I've not seen it before. It was partly this relationship that made the Board want to invest in you". **Headley Trust (one of the Sainsbury Family Trusts) giving £70K to the museum**

A nationally important new collection, the Harrison collection which consists of over 10,000 pieces, is now being gifted to the Museum which has led to a new development project of c.2.3 million to house it and offer an appropriate, corresponding programme of learning and community participation. The collection has been the lifetime's work of the Harrison brothers who began collecting at the age of five, and it has been assessed by heritage professionals who have concluded that "There are around 800 or 900 objects that are of *major* national significance, many unique, and the rest one of only a handful of known examples...The collection will have a major impact on the museum. It compares with and can stand alongside any major national museum collection...in terms of its unique nature and the rarity of the objects it will eclipse the existing collection." **York Museums Trust**

"The Harrison Collection: possibly the most significant social history collection to come into the public domain in the last 30 years. Certainly the most significant collection in Yorkshire." **Martin Watts, York Museums Trust 2007**

The accession of this collection and the creation of a new space to house it will build upon the work of the last 4 years by making a new, exciting and coherent collection available to the public for the

first time; keeping a major, local collection in Ryedale and preserving it for future generations; ensuring that local heritage becomes accessible to local people in the area; offering new educational opportunities; offering an opportunity to increase visitor numbers to the museum site and so the sustainability of the museum and enhance the profile of the museum on a national basis.

Who benefited and how do we know?

- The museum itself – its visitors, volunteers, staff, trustees, stakeholders and partners
- The communities of Ryedale who have increased access to their heritage and can share their pride in their identity and distinctiveness
- Countless individuals – the young woman who is under-taking anger management work and whose time at the museum researching a “rural radical” has changed how she sees herself; the local artists who say that their work with the Gallery Curator has “meant everything”; the young woman who has gone from a shy 15 year old working the forge pump to a professional blacksmith running her own business; the Polish family who said they had “found their home”; the member of staff with ME who “never thought there’d be a place for me”
- The local economy – local businesses, creative industries and the extended network of heritage and cultural providers in Ryedale (through an improved offer and stronger sector)

Resources and value for money

The Folk Museum has a rolling 3 year Voluntary Sector Funding Agreement with a current value of £6304. This grant provides leverage (for additional external funding) in the region of 30 times from other funders including trusts/foundations, the Lottery distributors (including Heritage Lottery), NYBEP, MLAY (Museums Development Fund) and local fundraising. RFM are clear that the value of their VSFA is in existence (and what it signifies regarding their relationship to RDC) rather than the amount – which could be argued to be negligible in terms of their turnover.

RDC has provided small amounts of additional project funding - £2K for a learning/research project centred around raising awareness of Herbert Read, one of our “Rural Radicals”, £2K towards a Charcoal Burn and Big Draw project etc. The maximum intervention has always been 50% but in practice is actually much less as value is added by intensive use of volunteers and a significant increase in access to opportunity and services for our local communities. As the Folk Museum has developed it has required less of these “pump-priming” grants as it has been able to initiate more activity without financial aid. The museum argues that all the activity it undertakes is because it is “right to do so” – this means that financial sustainability follows naturally.

£40K capital was given to the site improvements and a further £250K has been made available to support the development of the Harrison Project. This is to be matched with £1 million from HLF, c.£370K from Yorkshire Forward, c.800K from Trusts and Foundations and an additional amount from local fundraising and the museum’s own resources.

In terms of added value, the Gallery Manager at RFM states: “Over the last five years, support from Ryedale District Council has directly contributed to the Gallery securing £89,000.00 of external grant-aid for developing professional visual arts in the district, with a further £11,000.00 pending in the current financial year. This figure is extended by the secondary support secured by individual artists who have been enabled by RDC to lever additional resources to their individual practice. As a consequence this must make Ryedale one of the best performing rural districts, in terms of the inward support it attracts for its creative industries.”

Non-monetary resources are more difficult to quantify but it is clear that the benefits of a close working relationship are two way – the museum is willing to support smaller community groups and offers resources (in terms of staff time, a venue, expertise and knowledge) contributing to many partnerships and areas of work initiated by the Arts and Heritage Officer. This collaboration develops audiences in all areas of work.

Next Steps / Further Action

- Ongoing work to develop/deliver the Harrison Project including high level advocacy to ensure political buy in from external influencers/decision-makers
- Supporting the museum in the transition from Voluntary Sector Funding Agreements to commissioning

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Background documents/Links:

Ryedale Folk Museum websites:

<http://www.ryedalefolkmuseum.co.uk/>

<http://ryedalefolkmuseum.blogspot.com/>

<http://twitter.com/Elphithehob>

<http://thegalleryatryedalefolkmuseum.blogspot.com/>

<http://www.facebook.com/pages/Hutton-Le-Hole-United-Kingdom/Ryedale-Folk-Museum/178661527603>

Samples of press coverage (please note that this is a very small example of what is available):

http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/business/awards/winners2009/4769988.Best_Employment_And_Education_Link_Ryedale_Folk_Museum/

<http://www.culture24.org.uk/spliced/objects/art62472>

<http://www.maltonmercury.co.uk/thorntonledaletoday/Big-cash-boost-for-Ryedale.4566679.jp>

<http://www.thisishullandeastriding.co.uk/thejournal/features/profiles/History-making/article-1275009-detail/article.html>

http://www.yorkpress.co.uk/news/business/awards/profiles/4506159.Ryedale_Folk_Museum/

http://www.gazetteherald.co.uk/news/4709851.David_Hill_of_Terrington_becomes_Ryedale_Folk_Museum_s_first_apprentice_curator/

<http://www.yorkshirepost.co.uk/localnews/1m-bid-over-brothers39-bounty.4703865.jp>

Additional documentation available:

Harrison Project Development Plan

Audiences Yorkshire Visitor Satisfaction Survey

Report to Community Services and Licensing Committee (October 2009)

RFM Annual Reports