



Museum of
Cambridge



Strategic Plan
2022-2027

www.museumofcambridge.org.uk



MUSEUM

Two women sitting at a yellow table on the left side of the courtyard. One is wearing a patterned top and dark pants, the other is in a red floral dress.

A man in a blue t-shirt and brown pants sitting at a yellow table in the middle ground.

A woman in a colorful geometric patterned dress sitting at a blue table in the foreground, holding a coffee cup.

A woman in a white t-shirt and blue patterned pants sitting at a blue table in the foreground, also holding a coffee cup.

A woman in a light blue top sitting at a blue table in the middle ground.

Two women sitting at a white table on the right side of the courtyard.

Antique machinery, including a large metal wheel and a wooden structure, located on the right side of the courtyard.

Who we are

The Museum of Cambridge is dedicated to sharing the histories of Cambridge and the surrounding region. Set in the Grade II-listed 17th century White Horse Inn – on the important Roman road from castle to river to university – the Museum has told the extraordinary stories of ordinary people since 1936. We care for our collection of over 40,000 everyday objects which evoke the diverse daily lives of those living in this region over the last 300 years.

In a city rich with museums full of priceless art and artefacts from around the world, the Museum of Cambridge is distinctive as a place for a very different kind of history: the stories of the inhabitants of Cambridge and the surrounding areas that might otherwise be overlooked, silenced or forgotten.

The journey so far

Over the last five years, we have welcomed thousands of visitors to our museum. We have run innovative community-curated programmes, from our exhibition exploring LGBTQIA+ experiences of living in Cambridge, to our partnership with Oblique Arts showcasing the stories of Gypsy, Roma, and Traveller communities in the region.

In 2018 we welcomed 190 volunteers to support every aspect of the Museum's activity. We have been safely caring for our unique collection of social history objects – from a lucky mole's paw to a much-worn family recipe book; a child's beloved doll's house to letters home from war.

Our social media audience has risen to over 10,000 followers across our four platforms, and we have had over 237,000 visitors to our Museum of Cambridge website since it launched in 2018, with over 100 unique daily users. Capturing Cambridge, an online social history map of Cambridge, is thriving and now contains more than 12,000 posts sharing the wide-ranging history of the city and its residents, with contributors and users both locally and from around the world.

Our Vision, Mission and Values

Vision

We want Cambridge - and the surrounding area - to be a place where:

- Everyone is able to explore, enjoy and contribute to their local histories;
- Our shared heritage is accessible, open to investigation, and preserved for generations to come;
- A creative connection with heritage inspires communities and fosters a sense of belonging.

Mission

Connecting communities through objects, memories and conversation.

- We take care of a unique collection of objects, photos, documents and recordings and ensure it is available to everyone;
- The Museum is a space for everyone to share their memories, be inspired by others', and create their own;
- We are as committed to conversation as we are to conservation, and we will welcome the voices of all Cambridge's communities.



Values

Inclusive

We want the Museum to be a place where people can connect with one another and create shared understandings of local histories, identities, and a sense of place. Mindful that we are located within a city that is culturally rich yet also the most economically unequal in the UK, we believe that the stories shared by our Museum should reflect and empower all those who call Cambridgeshire home.

We are committed to ensuring everyone can unlock their creative potential through access to our shared local heritage, whatever their ability, age, belief, cultural background, gender, race, sexuality, or wealth, by minimising or removing the barriers that prevent people from engaging with our work.

Courageous

We are committed to innovating, taking risks, and questioning the status quo. We want to ask difficult questions and listen to the answers. We aspire to being brave in our work: delivering important, challenging, and impactful events, exhibitions and programming.

Responsible

We will hold ourselves to the highest standards of responsible museum practice, from our fundraising activity and financial management to the care of our collections. We also take our responsibilities to the planet seriously, making environmentally conscious choices to reduce our carbon footprint. When we make mistakes, we will reflect on them and implement meaningful change.

Creative

We see the Museum as a place for people and communities to be creative. Our visitors' creativity is a continual source of inspiration, whether they're exploring their great-grandparent's Fen-skating exploits, cooking up recipes at home from a 100-year-old local recipe book, or competing with one another to win the prestigious 'Liar's Medal' (by telling the most outrageous of lies, of course!).



Opportunities and Challenges

Cultural Cambridgeshire

Cambridgeshire abounds with cultural and leisure opportunities; there is a great deal on offer for residents and visitors to the area. This presents us with some fierce competition for people's time, money and attention. Our work must ensure that the Museum stands out from the crowd and offers an experience that is distinctive and valuable.

Inclusion and Accessibility

The diverse populations of Cambridge and its surrounds should see themselves reflected in our displays and digital presence – and in our staff, volunteers, trustees and visitors. We know we have some work to do to remove the barriers that prevent access for all, but we are committed to making our organisation a welcoming and safe space.

Partnerships

We have a strong track record of collaboration and will continue to make sure that working in partnership is a fundamental feature of the way we work. We already have well-established relationships with local authorities, local and regional museums, as well as charitable organisations such as Share Museums East and Cambridge's Council for Voluntary Services. We plan to grow our local and regional networks and our strategic partnerships over the next five years.

Finance

We are an independent charity and must generate funds to cover our running costs as we receive no regular core funding from local authorities or other large bodies. In this extremely tough economic climate, this

funding model presents us with some real financial challenges. We are committed to forging a sustainable business model that allows the Museum to not only survive but thrive.

People

We are supported by a raft of enthusiastic and skilled individuals in the form of staff, trustees, and volunteers. Supporting our people properly takes time, effort, and resource, and this must be fully captured within our future plans.

Covid-19

The ongoing Covid-19 pandemic presents us with multiple threats, with potential ongoing impact on the health and wellbeing of staff, volunteers, and trustees as well as core museum activity such as visitation and programming. We will need to remain flexible, innovative and prepare to grow our connection with communities through digital means.

Environment

The climate crisis impacts us all, and the Museum of Cambridge is no different. Our staff and volunteers, our visitors, our building, and our collection are all placed at risk as the natural environment continues to degrade. We take our responsibilities seriously, and strive to be a force for positive change by taking meaningful steps to reduce our own environmental impact by lowering our carbon footprint and increasing our use of sustainable materials. We will also use our influence in the community to encourage others to do the same.

Our Strategic Objectives

Our strategic objectives set out our priorities for achieving our vision and mission:

1 Grow and diversify our engagement

2 Care for our collection and building

3 Nurture our volunteers, staff, and trustees

4 Achieve financial sustainability





1. Grow and diversify our engagement

1.1. Dramatically improve the way we share the region's stories

The Museum of Cambridge exists to share the histories of the people of Cambridge and its surrounds. Through our collection, our building and our digital presence, we will continue to build opportunities for people to come together to learn, create and connect. So that we can further grow the Museum as an institution that is relevant to those around us, we plan to invest in our long-term development, reimagining our spaces and reshaping our onsite and digital experiences. Capturing Cambridge, our online local history portal, will form a key part of these plans. Further, we will explore opportunities to make best use of new digital technology to improve visitor experience – both in the Museum's display areas and online.

1.2. Prioritise inclusivity

To achieve our goals, we must make our services meaningful to all. Our aim is that every visitor or digital user can be included in an event, exhibition and digital programme in the way that works best for them. We acknowledge the barriers that prevent us from making our Museum accessible to everyone; barriers that are financial, physical, and societal. We will make inclusivity a major priority in every aspect of our service development. We will use research to better understand the needs of our current and potential audiences, and partner with expert agencies to support us as we undertake an accessibility audit and develop an action plan. We will place inclusivity front and centre in all our plans for redevelopment, ensuring access for future generations to come.

1.3. Offer dynamic, inclusive, and engaging programming for all

We are the only cultural organisation in the local area that embraces Cambridgeshire's expansive and diverse local histories, memories, and stories. We will continue to do what we do best by developing innovative onsite and digital events and exhibitions that invite our visitors to reflect, to

celebrate and to connect with one another.

We will develop bold and ambitious exhibitions which start conversations across the region.

We will also expand our programme of regular and one-off events that inspire curiosity and creativity, and improve wellbeing. We will expand our already extensive engagement with local communities in Cambridge, Fenland and beyond by maximising residents' and groups' engagement with the design, delivery, and enjoyment of our programmes.

1.4. Engage with school pupils and their carers

We believe there is no better place to spark pupils' curiosity than in our Museum. Our collection provides a unique opportunity to explore a variety of learning objectives across primary and secondary curricula, from History and Geography to Art and Music. Over the next five years, we commit to exploring the ways we can grow our engagement with school pupils, through the provision of handling boxes, on-and offsite sessions, and digital resources. We will work with pupils, teachers, carers and learning professionals to ensure our offer is distinctive, good value and sustainable.

1.5. Invest in marketing and communications

We want more people to know about the Museum of Cambridge; where we are, what we do, and why we exist. We will strengthen our identity to ensure that we stand out in a competitive market. We want to better understand the motivations of our current and potential audiences and embed that knowledge in all that we do. We will develop our social media content and digital communication to maximise our connections with our communities and create consistent and recognisable branding across all our digital outlets. We will use our research and analysis to make sure we get our message to the right people and use strategic partnerships to help us reach new audiences.

2. Care for our collection and building

2.1. Develop a collection for Cambridge and the surrounding area

Our distinctive collection of over 40,000 objects – including significant documents and photographs – is our greatest asset, and we are proud to be caretakers of Cambridgeshire’s treasured history. The pioneering work of Enid Porter, curator from 1947-1976 – including her notebooks and other materials in our collections – provides the Museum with a unique and nationally significant legacy of oral history. We are committed to taking the best possible care of this collection and to making it available to all.

However, storage is a pressing challenge: we have simply run out of room to store new items safely. We will continue to undertake a sustained, ethical, and well-managed rationalisation of our collection over the long term. This means that we must assess our collection carefully, examine each its relative significance, and consider if objects would be better housed by alternative caretakers. Once this process is underway, we will examine our acquisitions and collections development policies. We will review how our collection can best represent the people of Cambridge and its surrounds and ensure we collect objects that convey their stories.

2.2. Invest in the care and conservation of our collection

Our objects tell unique stories, evoke forgotten memories, and connect communities past, present, and future both in Cambridge and beyond. Our collection must survive so it can continue to be enjoyed for generations to come; by preserving this collection, we preserve our cultural memories and allow for new interpretations. We will continue to invest in preventative conservation procedures to ensure we are keeping our objects – including documents,

photographs and sound recordings – in the very best conditions for their long-term preservation. We will review their storage to ensure that they are kept safe and sound in dedicated storerooms. We will continue to ensure all access to our objects is safely managed. We will also continue to identify major conservation concerns and seek to fund restoration of our priority objects. Last but not least, we will continue to invest in the training for our staff, volunteers, and trustees to ensure we maintain the expertise required to provide the very best care possible and a safe working environment.

2.3. Invest in records management

Just under half (around 17,000) of the objects in our collection are catalogued in our database; we know that our collection is full of untapped potential, with undiscovered objects ready and waiting to tell their stories. Over the next five years, we will record a digital inventory of our uncatalogued objects. We will use this as a springboard to explore the ways we can digitise and catalogue targeted tranches of the collection, so that we better understand the objects that we care for. We will also explore options around improving our digital database to ensure it is powerful, agile, and user-friendly. Lastly, we will explore options for making our database publicly accessible, so anyone can find out about Cambridgeshire’s history, wherever they are.

2.4. Consistently meet accreditation standards

We are proud to be a fully Accredited Museum. This means that we meet nationally agreed standards set by Arts Council England. We do this by maintaining up-to-date policies and procedures, ensuring effective governance, and though taking exceptional care of our collection. By maintaining our Accredited Museum status,



we demonstrate our commitment to being a sustainable, well-managed and trusted organisation. This strategy therefore commits us to dedicating the resources necessary to maintaining accreditation.

2.5. Connect with our collection

All our objects have a story to tell. Over the next five years we will learn more about our collection and share that knowledge so it can be accessed by staff, volunteers, and visitors for decades to come. This means examining what 'good collections knowledge' means for the Museum of Cambridge – and then developing projects to deliver this. We will also ensure we approach our collection with a critical eye, engaging in conversations about the nature and origins of our objects and the way minoritised communities are, or are not, represented.

2.6. Invest in the care of our building

Our museum building is a Grade II listed 17th-century inn – the only publically accessible timber-framed building of its kind in Cambridge. Our site sits on an old Roman crossroads at the base of Castle Hill, on the edge of a Roman fort and close to the Norman castle mound. We have a duty of care to ensure the site is appropriately maintained and cared for while working with our landlord on larger- scale maintenance and management. We are committed to exploring environmentally sustainable maintenance practices and to ensure the site is used to its best potential. We plan to redevelop our site including the refurbishment of our building to prolong the life of the site and breathe new life into the space.



R. MAYNARD
ENGINEER
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3. Nurture our volunteers, staff, and trustees

3.1. Maintain our knowledgeable, engaged, and ambitious Board of Trustees

We have a committed Board who can deliver the variety of skills and experience that will allow us to achieve the aims of this strategy. We are grateful for the service of past trustees and thank them for the work they have done to get us here. We will invest in the training of our Board to ensure we maintain strong and skilled governance, and continue to review our structures to ensure they are fit for purpose. We will maintain a team of strategic Board Advisors – senior volunteers who advise the Board and staff on specific areas of development such as collections care, fundraising, community engagement and retail.

3.2. Empower our dedicated volunteers

Our volunteers, past and present, are the heart and soul of the Museum of Cambridge. They contributed over 7,000 volunteering hours in 2019 (our last year of full opening before the pandemic) and no strategic plan would be complete without acknowledging their huge commitment and expertise. We are proud to offer a robust volunteering programme with staff and trustee support – from welcoming and engaging visitors at Front of House, to taking special care of our valuable collection, our volunteer teams will remain central to the delivery of all activity. They also represent the enormous potential for the Museum to foster close connections across the local community including through schools, businesses, and other organisations.

Going forward, we will continue to develop a robust volunteer strategy to ensure all our volunteering opportunities are safe, inclusive and properly managed. We will maintain a regular dialogue with our volunteers through socials, forums, and surveys, and ensure volunteers can input in operational and strategic decision-making. We will empower our volunteers to support the Museum to make and maintain vital community connections across the city and beyond.

3.3. Maintain a team of skilled and creative professional staff

We are clear that we cannot achieve our aims without a consistent team of experienced and ambitious professional museum staff. We must therefore commit to investing in a skilled and effective staff team. Staff will be well cared for by the Museum, with appropriate HR policies and procedures in place to support them to perform to their very best, and a salary structure that is fair for those living and working in Cambridge. Staff will also be provided with appropriate training opportunities to inspire them to develop their skills and undertake meaningful professional development.

3.4. Take representation seriously

We seek to serve the people of Cambridge and the surrounding area. We are committed to ensuring that the region's communities are represented within our staff, volunteer, and trustee teams. We acknowledge that the museum sector is highly inaccessible to groups or people with certain protected characteristics, and we want to change this. Over the next five years, we will commit to take significant action by conducting our first Equality, Diversity, and Inclusion (EDI) audit of our teams, and use the knowledge gained from this to amend our recruitment, training, and management practices. We will form an internal EDI working group to manage the transformation required across the organisation and ensure that everyone involved in running the Museum is held accountable to delivering meaningful change. We will also partner with larger organisations to address this issue at a sector-wide level, ensuring we lend our voice to support regional and national initiatives.

4. Achieve financial sustainability

4.1. Grow the number of paying visitors

The Museum thrives when people come to visit, whether that is virtually or in person. We also need to increase our income from visitors, and this will be a significant priority in future years. We will ensure we offer a welcoming and exceptional visitor experience that fosters opportunities for creativity, engagement and learning, as well as being good value for money. We will offer dynamic programming which provides an incentive to return time and time again. We aim to be an essential and meaningful experience for everyone who lives in or visits Cambridgeshire. We will also continue to broaden and deepen our external partnerships and relationships, including with community groups, educational organisations and tourist bodies in order to increase our visitation.

4.2. Develop our retail experience

Our retail offering is a key aspect of our visitor experience; it is one of the first things a visitor encounters when they enter our site. Our retail space needs to reflect the Museum's identity, activity, and exhibitions, and we will ensure our offer links to seasonal considerations such as half terms, religious and cultural festivals, and annual holidays. We plan to create a unique retail experience that reflects who we are and what we do. It is important to us that we showcase local makers, stories, and experiences. We will also explore the potential of a profitable online retail offering, to earn much-needed funds as well as provide a retail experience for those who cannot visit us in person.

4.3. Develop and maintain a commercial museum hire offer

We are fortunate to look after a highly characterful, Grade-II listed central-Cambridge building with significant gallery space and a fully equipped multi-purpose function room. Over the next five years, we plan to develop our site as a cultural hub, and offer our services as the perfect location for events, meetings, workshops and classes. Not only will we be proud to support our

local partners across the charity and commercial sectors, but the hire of our spaces will provide a consistent source of income which will be reinvested in the Museum.

4.4. Extend our fundraising programme

Fundraising income will be a key part of our ongoing financial stability. Here we take the long view: aiming at sustainability that will ensure we hand on a museum that future generations can be proud of. We want to encourage the people of Cambridge to feel invested in the museum – as their museum – and its future success. We will develop the ways that individuals can support us, from adopting one of our characterful objects, to leaving a legacy in their will. We will also seek to forge strategic new relationships with local businesses, as well as trusts and foundations and funders such as Arts Council England and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, to help us fund exciting new programmes of activity. We will take our responsibilities as fundraisers seriously, stewarding our donors appropriately.

4.5. Be responsible with our regular running costs

In order to provide a safe working and volunteering environment, care for our collections and our Grade II listed building, and offer an exceptional visitor experience, the Museum incurs substantial essential running costs. These present a significant challenge to the financial sustainability of the museum. In all circumstances we are committed to exercising financial responsibility, to review our expenditure regularly, and to reduce costs where appropriate whilst still being able to offer a unique experience for our communities and a safe refuge for our collection. One of our biggest financial challenges is our commercial rent, and we will continue to work closely with our landlords to find an equitable and sustainable solution. By keeping running costs reasonable and committing resources responsibly, we aim to offer our funders exceptional value for their investment.



4.6. Manage our growth sustainably

The sustained growth in our activities must be underpinned by effective resource management. From our financial management systems, the care of our collection and buildings to volunteer management, we must ensure that we are performing to the very best of our abilities. That means adopting a positive approach to

managing change; conducting an ongoing review of our processes, implementing change where required, and proactively evaluating all our activity. Environmental responsibility is something we take seriously, and we endeavour to invest in sustainable, ethical, and local suppliers as well as ensure we continue to reduce our carbon output across all our activities.



Thank you

We are very grateful to everyone who has helped to develop this strategic plan:

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Museum of Cambridge

Everyday people. Extraordinary stories.

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