



the happy
museum

Case Study – real practice, real impact

Godalming Museum –
co-creating a new gallery
with local people

Godalming Museum, Sussex

A small, community museum overseen by a trust. It has one full time employee, a large volunteer base, and some 16,000 visitors a year.

Godalming Museum – co-creating a new gallery with local people

This case study is about how deciding on a community engagement approach to developing a new exhibit rather than defining the exhibit at the outset led to unexpected results – a whole new gallery, new partnerships and investment in reducing the museum’s energy use.

This case study is relevant to:

- Senior management team
- Learning and community engagement teams
- Curators and collections teams

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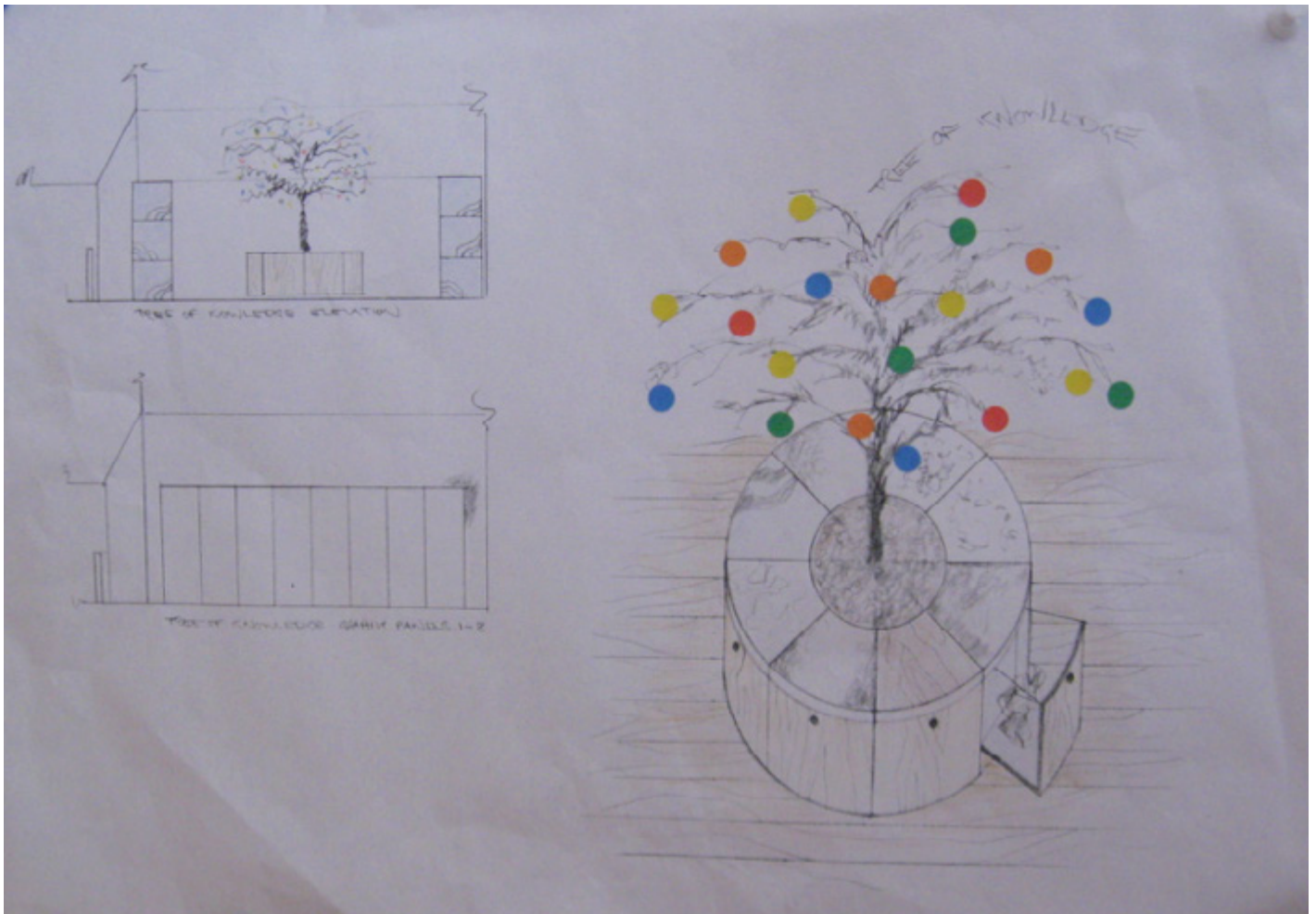


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**Alison Pattison, Director,
Godalming Museum**

Highlights

- **Museum has co-created a new gallery with local people, artists and craftspeople**
- **The theme of the gallery is local history and environmental sustainability**
- **This project inspired a review of the museum’s environmental impact and creation of an environmental policy**
- **Investment in low energy lighting has been agreed**
- **The project helped the museum develop a range of new partnerships**



Museum profile

Godalming Museum was founded in 1921 and is administered by a Trust. This small community museum relies on donations and sponsorship, as well as on funding from Waverley Borough Council and Godalming Town Council. The museum is housed in a medieval timber-framed Wealden house

built in 1446 – one of the oldest buildings in Godalming. The museum has one employee and depends on a large volunteer base. It has some 16,000 visitors a year, around half of the people that visit live within two miles of the museum.

“This project was about taking direction from outside the museum, engaging with local people, asking them what they would like to see. It’s definitely improved our relationships with our visitors, many of whom live locally and visit us several times a year.”

**Alison Pattison, Director,
Godalming Museum?**

Happy Museum funded activities

Godalming Museum worked with local people and community groups to create a new interactive exhibit linking local history and geography with the theme of environmental sustainability. A working group was formed from local people and organisations that responded to a call for participation. The group developed the concept of a ‘Living Landscape’ gallery, which was then built

with the help of local artists and craftspeople. The process of community collaboration strengthened the museum’s links with local people and helped it establish new partnerships with a range of local organisations. The museum has gone on to review its environmental impact and has committed to investing in low energy lighting.



What happened?



“Working on this project has made us realise that environmental sustainability is at the heart of the story the museum tells about development and change in the local community, and is important for its own sustainable long term operation.”

**Alison Pattison, Director,
Godalming Museum**

“Our Happy Museum proposal was to develop a new exhibit by engaging with local people and groups. We got the funding for an approach to how we would work, rather than for a defined end product,” says Alison Pattison, director of Godalming Museum. “When we started out we didn’t know what we would produce, whether it would be an exhibit or an interactive display. Instead, the idea grew and grew and we ended up with an entire gallery, because that’s what people said they wanted.”

The museum advertised locally for people interested in creating a new interactive exhibition about sustainability. A working group of some 15 people were recruited, including members of local environmental groups and experienced sustainability professionals. Through a series of meetings, the concept of the ‘Living Landscape’ gallery was

developed. A tree sculpture for the centre of the gallery was designed and created by Mervyn Mewis. He worked with the blacksmith at the Weald and Downland Museum to create a set of iron oak leaves – each one different – for the tree.

The museum is in process of adding stained glass windows to the gallery. The window panels have been bought from a local artist with the help of grants, individual donations and through fund-raising events. The windows show a year in the life of the George Road Allotments in Farncombe and are by Rachel Mulligan (recently voted Surrey Artist of the Year). The next phase is to add a soundscape to the gallery – again created by a local artist. Godalming hopes to also begin using a software app developed by Gwynedd Museum (another Happy Museum Project commission) which allows visitors to ‘tag’ objects with their own audio comments and to listen to the comments of others.

Through this project the museum developed a number of new partnerships: with local allotment venture Allotmore, transition group Greening Godalming, the Puttenham Eco Camping Barn, Charterhouse School and outdoor play company Wild Learning. A partnership with local charity Skillway supported a young apprentice to work with the exhibition fitters.

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The focus on sustainability for the Living Landscapes gallery has laid the ground for pragmatic environmental decisions to be made about the museum. “The board has voted through an investment in low energy bulbs and motion sensor technology, even though it’s meant dipping into financial reserves – they have accepted the cost benefit and environmental arguments.”

Greening Godalming has carried out a free environmental audit and the museum has joined Operation Green Museums. Museum Director Alison Pattison has been on a course (‘Utilise’, run by the Sustainable Business Partnership) designed to help organisations save money through improving energy and environmental efficiency.

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What’s changed?

Participation and engagement:

Co-producing a project with local people and community groups was a new approach for the museum. The positive experience and outcomes means the museum will definitely work in this way again.

Partnerships: The museum has developed new links with a number of organisations and companies locally and in the region.

Sustainability: The project’s sustainability theme led to action at an organisational level, with the board agreeing to a sustainability audit and to investing in low energy lighting. The museum now has an official environmental policy. There is now a ‘suggestion tree’ so visitors and volunteers can put forward ideas for how the museum can be more sustainable.

Happy Museum success factors

Since 2008, The Happy Museum project has been testing a set of working principles through commissioned projects. These 'action research' projects have helped us identify critical success factors of how, what and why museums might re-imagine

themselves in the light of these principles. The table below is a summary of our 'Story of Change' tool (More information here: www.happymuseumproject.org). This case study best demonstrates the aspects of practice highlighted in red.

Principles	How? Drivers	What? Delivery	Why? Difference we make
Measure what matters	Share a wellbeing vision Share a Story of Change	Use time, resources and scope creatively Measure what matters to people	To re-think what matters
Be an active citizen	Encourage active engagement Anticipate challenge and change	Work experimentally Use everyone's potential	To create happy, resilient people
Pursue mutual relationships	Share ownership Ensure mutual benefit	Work across hierarchies and teams	To create happy, resilient teams
All of which help re-imagine museums for better community LIFE*			
Create the conditions for wellbeing Learn for resilience	Consider playfulness, creativity, activity and aesthetics	Be a good host Broker relationships	Communities are: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Learning • Interacting • Feeling happy, satisfied and worthwhile • Environmentally aware
Value the environment and be a steward of the future as well as the past	Consider the social and financial benefits of being green	Use the museum's unique resources. Lead by example: care of people, place and planet	

* The Happy Museum Project is conducting a national LIFE survey, where LIFE = Learning, Interactions with others, Feelings and emotions, and Environmental awareness. More: www.happymuseumproject.org

Tools used

The Godalming Museum team used the 'story of change' to define their vision for the project and to plan the route to achieve that vision. The purpose of this tool (which is similar to theory of change, or logic modelling) is to make sure we start by focusing on the difference we want to make rather than on the activities we may use to achieve those ends.

Using a story of change challenges 'business as usual' thinking by starting with the overall purpose and working backwards. The process of 'measuring what matters' can then start at the planning stage – by defining the success factors for a project, a strategy or a change of direction. The tool is also valuable for helping to communicate a vision to staff, volunteers and all stakeholders, as well as the thinking that underpins it.

More on using a Story of Change can be found here:
www.happymuseumproject.org

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Online resources

Museum website: www.waverley.gov.uk/godalmingmuseum

UTILISE: *Sustainability in the workplace*