



## Happy Museum Project – for the wellbeing of people, place and planet

*“The future is not some place we are going to, but one we are creating. The paths are not to be found, but made, and the activity of making them changes both the maker and the destinations.” (John Schaar)*

'It's the final call', say scientists, warning of the risks of rising global temperatures. We need to make urgent and unprecedented changes to respond to the threats of climate crisis, species extinction, the end of cultures and civilisations. We face increasing inequality, declining wellbeing and social polarisation. How can we build momentum with others in and beyond museums to support these wider concerns?

Happy Museum Project works for the wellbeing of people, place and planet both now and for the future. For us, wellbeing and sustainability are a continuum – a spectrum from personal to planetary. Deep compassion and human values are at the heart of our work.

We are a community creating change and are committed to people, supporting them to lead and thrive as agents of change, positivity and innovation.

We convene and support people working in museums to enquire into the deep, complex challenges that we face. We create space, focus, provocation and permission to experiment, cutting across disciplines and hierarchies. We encourage people to collaborate and scale up our responses through networked action.

We expand and enrich our thinking with other voices and perspectives from beyond museums through connections with civil society and thought leaders – Common Cause Foundation, Rapid Transition, Ctrl Shift and others.

In all these ways, we raise aspirations, transform attitudes, spark new ideas, and build capabilities and skills. Members of the Happy Museum Project community have described our programme as:

‘A space to experiment with museum practice, through principles of care, inclusion and collaboration, in a critical time of change.’

‘A light in the darkness.’

‘Expanding my world.’

‘Working from the edge.’

‘Forcing us to do different kinds of collaboration.’

## Why museums?

We make the case for the distinctive role of the cultural sector – what, and how, can museums contribute?

Happy Museum Project's founder Tony Butler observed: 'If our business is really to change lives, then action to avert catastrophic climate change has to be the predominant point of entry'.

We support museums to connect wellbeing and environmentalism - an essential connection for resilient people, places and planet. Here is some of what we've learnt about the potential of museums:

- Museums are full of humanity and human stories; they contribute to our wellbeing and resilience both individually and communally. Those of us working in museums can become part of the growing movement calling for a [Wellbeing Economy](#).
- The [lack of conversation](#) around climate change is a major factor in our limited response. Museums are largely trusted institutions at a time of fake news and exploitative big data. People working in museums are able to open up these conversations in a positive and future-facing way – for example, Manchester Museum's award winning [Climate Control](#) exhibition.
- Museums offer shared public space at a time when the public realm is being challenged both in real and virtual terms. They are places for encounter, where we can meet and connect beyond our immediate social bubble and where we can promote and cultivate our universal values. Research from the [Common Cause Foundation](#) shows that raising awareness of the centrality of compassionate values for most people helps to increase pro-social and environmental behaviours. Happy Museum has partnered with the Common Cause Foundation to [explore the role of museums](#) in promoting shared values.
- Museums are places to experience awe and wonder - feelings that [research shows](#) us help us to understand ourselves as communal and pro-social beings and to act accordingly.
- Museums are in a unique position to engage us in longer-term thinking, acting as an antidote to what the [Long Now Foundation](#) identify as the 'acceleration of technology, the short-horizon perspective of market-driven economics'. Museums can use their buildings and collections to prompt deeper longer-term perspectives such as the [Coal Forest](#) exhibition at Woodhorn Colliery Museum which explored our continuing and complex relationship with coal.
- Museums are ideally placed to show us our potential for change. Museum collections evidence the adaptability of the human race and show the enormous societal shifts we are capable of, shifts in energy, production, consumption, transport, arts and culture as well as in ethics and morals. Andrew Simms of the Rapid Transition Alliance [challenges us](#) in Museum ID to use museums to show that change is possible and people can make it happen.
- Museums have the potential to offer leadership in responsible environmental practices and to use their unique role to foster environmental values, understanding and action with their audiences and communities - as evidenced in the resources and case studies from the [Museums Environmental Framework](#) from Julie's Bicycle.