

Norfolk Archaeological Trust Strategic Plan 2016 – 2021

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INTRODUCTION

Background

The Norfolk Archaeological Trust was established in 1923. Its Memorandum of Association states that the objects of the Trust are to:

promote and foster the discovery, excavation, preservation, recording and study of sites and objects of archaeological and/or historical importance within the County of Norfolk for the public benefit.

The Trust in 2016

The Trust is managed by a Council of circa twelve Trustees with varied backgrounds including heritage and land management; charity law; finance; education and ecology. The Council meets four times a year, with a separate AGM in October for members to attend and approve the accounts. The Trust has 82 members.

Day to day work is managed by a full time Director, part-time Company & Membership Secretary and part-time Accountant.

The Trust owns and/or manages under agreement, eleven properties:

Binham Priory
Bloodgate Hill Fort, South Creake
Burgh Castle
Burnham Norton Friary
Caistor Roman Town
Fiddler's Hill barrow, Warham
Filby Chapel
Middleton Mount
Pykerell's House, Norwich
St Benet's Abbey, Horning
Tasburgh enclosure

With the exception of Pykerell's House, which is a privately let residence, all these properties are open daily to the public for no charge. They include diverse archaeological sites ranging from prehistoric earthworks; well-preserved Roman monuments; medieval ruins and an 18th century mill. None of the sites has a visitor centre or paid staff. Most of the sites have free car parks adjacent.

The properties are not spread evenly throughout the county. They can be loosely grouped into three main areas – the east coast and Broads; the north-west; and south of Norwich. The north-east coast, central and south-west Norfolk are not represented in the portfolio.

The Trust benefits from the support of circa 40 volunteers. Roles include site wardening, guiding, site maintenance, event management, leading school visits and visitor surveying.

Some of this activity is delivered through association with separately constituted 'Friends'-type groups: The Friends of St Benet's Abbey and the Caistor Roman Project

In the period 2000-2015 the Trust increased its portfolio, and invested significantly in conservation research and development of its properties.

During the period two major projects were completed: the installation of a new landscaping scheme at Burgh Castle including a visitor car park and interpretation scheme, funded by Natural England; and the Heritage Lottery-funded Conservation, Access & Community project at St Benet's Abbey. During this period the Trust also supervised the consolidation and repair of the precinct walls of Castle Acre Priory, owned by the Holkham Estate, and funded by Natural England.

Acquisitions during the period included Dunston Field (22 hectares) on the west bank of the Tas at Caistor Roman Town funded by the National Heritage Memorial Fund; St Mary's Friary, Burnham Norton, through a management agreement with Holkham Estate; and Fiddler's Hill round barrow, which was bought from Norfolk County Council for £1.

Research at our sites included geophysical survey and excavations at Caistor Roman Town, conducted by the University of Nottingham over four years from 2009. These were attended by up to 5,000 visitors each year during the annual three-week seasons. The surveys and excavations have transformed understanding of the site, and have been used to inform the new interpretation scheme installed in October 2015.

Geophysical survey and some limited excavation were undertaken at Bloodgate Hill fort, the results of which were published in *Norfolk Archaeology* XLV Part 1 (2006) and included in two new interpretation panels on the site; and geophysical survey of the area south of the church was completed at St Benet's Abbey under the Heritage Lottery scheme

Action to support biodiversity has included creation of a flowering hay meadow on Dunston Field at Caistor.

Sourcing funding to acquire, conserve, maintain and interpret the Trust's properties is an ongoing issue. Currently the great majority of the Trust's revenue income is derived from the Rural Payment Agency's Basic Payment Scheme and 10 year Higher-level Stewardship agreements (replaced from 2015 by the new Countryside Stewardship scheme). Our capital works projects rely on grants from external bodies such as the Heritage Lottery Fund and Natural England. The Trust's greatest challenge for the forthcoming period will be to identify alternative independent streams of funding to support future sustainability.

Our Memorandum of Association states that our work should be for 'the public benefit'. The Trust currently holds limited data with which to measure public benefit, such as the number and type of visitors to our properties, satisfaction with their experience, and/or support of our work and priorities.

Understanding our audience better will be vital in measuring public benefit, and in developing our future funding strategy, for example through crowd sourcing, events and local fund raising.

The Trust in 2021

Our sites will have become embedded at the heart of their communities, and given greater relevance and value to local people, through the development of opportunities for enjoyment, and for involvement in their conservation.

We will have continued to conserve and maintain our current portfolio and will have included at least one new property (Castle Acre Priory Precinct). Our fund raising strategy will have begun to provide more diverse sources of income to help support our conservation work.

We will have a much better understanding of our audience – who visits us and why. With this knowledge we will be able to ensure greater public benefit through activities and events which develop interest in archaeology, heritage and wildlife within our existing audience and also reaches out to more diverse groups.

Nurturing stronger relationships with local communities and volunteers will have extended the Trust's capacity to provide activities and events at our sites for a wider audience. This will have begun to provide increased opportunities for fund-raising to support our conservation work.

We will have developed and maintained stronger ties with sister organisations such as the NNAS, NHARG, and the Norfolk Wildlife Trust in order to share capacity and provide a co-ordinated approach to developing engagement in archaeology and cultural heritage in the county.

Vision

Norfolk's archaeological heritage is conserved for communities to enjoy and value.

Mission Statement

We are a charity which seeks to protect Norfolk's significant archaeological or historic sites through acquisition, repair and interpretation; and by fostering active community engagement in their future conservation.

PLAN CONTEXT

Opportunities and Challenges

To know our audience

The Trust currently holds almost no data on the numbers of visitors to its site, or the reasons they visit. Collection and analysis of this information would help support future bids for funding; would help us to plan appropriate events and activities for our current audience; and would help inform our strategy for reaching new audiences.

To increase the level of support for our work

Most visitors have little or no knowledge of our work. Until recently some of our sites did not provide any information on the Trust or how to get in touch with us. If the public profile of the Trust can be raised it is likely that we will benefit from greater support for our work, both financially and practically.

To actively involve the local community in our work

Our connection with local communities is currently very limited. The Friends of St Benet's Abbey have demonstrated over the past year the benefits of establishing local groups of volunteers to take forward events and activities such as guiding, as well as keeping an eye on sites and reporting issues.

Limited surveys and discussions with local users of other sites have revealed some unexpected local negativity regarding our management of properties – related for example to car parking issues, and dogs. Greater community involvement in our work will ensure that these kinds of issues can be identified and dealt with through positive discussion and negotiation, and will offer the opportunity for communities to develop a sense of ownership and responsibility for their local site.

Provide opportunities for people to enjoy our sites

Burgh Castle, and Caistor are already busy with visitors. Anecdotal evidence suggests that a high proportion of our current audiences at these sites are dog walkers. Organised groups also visit Burgh and Caistor regularly for health walks and annual outings. At these two sites we should explore ways of increasing the proportion of visitors who come to experience, appreciate and learn more about the archaeology and cultural history of the sites.

Apart from St Benet's Abbey, our other sites appear to be much less visited. There are ample opportunities to develop better information, events and activities to entice new audiences. Wildlife conservation is an integral part of our site management which provides another aspect of visitor enjoyment to be developed. There is also much scope here to develop our partnership working with other organisations such as the Norfolk Wildlife Trust.

Financial sustainability

The Trust's main source of revenue funding is through the Rural Payment Agency Basic Payment Scheme (BPS) and Higher-level Stewardship Agreements (HLS). While the Trust has

been successful in accessing this funding for five of its properties, there is no regular income or endowment to support site maintenance at St Benet's Abbey, Binham Priory (Gatehouse and precinct walls), Fiddlers Hill or Middleton Mount, and the HLS scheme for Burnham Norton provides only a fraction of the maintenance costs of the site. Funding through BPS/HLS is vulnerable to cuts and changes of government policy which could affect the Trust's future sustainability.

Above-ground monuments – Binham (precinct wall and gatehouse), Burnham Norton Friary, St Benet's Abbey, Caistor Roman Town (and Castle Acre once leased) – will all require capital funding for repairs in the medium to long-term, and this needs to be planned for¹. Finding alternative sources of revenue and accessing capital funding to support our conservation work are significant challenges.

Staff and volunteer support

Compared to many other local charitable Trusts which depend entirely on voluntary staff, the NAT is fortunate in being able to fund a full time Director post and two part-time posts. However, there is a capacity issue relating to the Director post – in the year August 2014 -15 the post-holder worked on average 30 hours over-time per month. If the Trust wishes to increase its portfolio and expand its programme of activities and events it will need to recruit a committed and active volunteer base to support paid staff, and may need to consider creating new posts, funded initially through grants or sponsorship.

Compliance

Recruiting a significant volunteer base provides opportunities for more engagement in site management and activities but also brings with it issues of compliance regarding volunteer Health & Safety and management. Increasing visitor foot-fall will bring with it increased pressures on managing and maintaining site safety. Ensuring compliance is not difficult but is time-consuming.

¹ Burgh Castle Roman Fort fabric is maintained and repaired by English Heritage Trust under a management agreement

PLAN DELIVERY

Aims and objectives 2016-2021

The main objects of the Trust as set out in the Memorandum of Association are to promote and foster the discovery, excavation, preservation, recording and study of sites and objects of archaeological and/or historical importance within the county of Norfolk for the public benefit.

In pursuance of those objects, either on its own, or in association with other organisations, the Trust has adopted the following aims and objectives:

A1: To conserve archaeological sites in Norfolk

Objective 1a: conserve all heritage assets in the Trust's care, to comply with national standards, and ensure long-term protection

We will continue to make conservation and management of our sites our highest priority, which will include medium to long term planning for repairs and maintenance. Developing a heritage partnership agreement with Historic England for all sites will enable us to carry out regular maintenance tasks, such as renewing fencing or installing benches, in a timely and effective way. The instigation of a programme of quinquennial surveys will ensure that future repairs and maintenance requirements are anticipated and can be planned for.

Objective 1b: produce new Acquisition Policy

As part of our object to preserve sites, monuments and objects of archaeological and/or historical importance, we will proactively identify monuments at risk and take measures, where appropriate, to ensure their conservation, including acquisition. A revised set of detailed criteria will provide a standard and transparent procedure for decisions on acquisition.

Objective 1c: produce Fund-raising Strategy to increase revenue funding by at least 3% year on year throughout the 5-year plan period.

We will explore and develop existing and new opportunities for income generation to help provide financial sustainability in the longer term. A new funding strategy will explore sources of revenue, and will set additional objectives for increasing income.

Objective 1d: retain and renew where applicable BPS and Agri-environment scheme funding for all eligible Trust sites by ensuring compliance throughout the Plan period

As part of our funding strategy we will work to ensure our current agri-environmental agreements are implemented successfully to retain funding; and we will ensure agreements are renewed in a timely fashion. We will also explore ways to ensure that existing funding is used effectively across all our sites.

A2: To facilitate opportunities for community and volunteer engagement

Objective 2a: Continue support and liaison with existing volunteers/ organisations active at our sites

The Trust currently benefits from volunteer help from about 40 people. Some of these are members of The Friends of St Benet's Abbey and Caistor Roman Project, others are individuals with a local interest in their site.

Objective 2b: establish and/or support new active volunteer groups to support our conservation aims at three Trust sites by 2021

Increasing volunteer support at our sites will increase the Trust's capacity for managing its current sites effectively and for acquiring and conserving more sites at risk.

A3: to encourage and promote interest in the conservation of Norfolk's sites and objects of archaeological and historical importance

Objective 3a: Commission analysis of our current visitor base during 2016-2017 to provide framework for future Visitor Development policies

Collection of data on our current visitor base is necessary to inform future strategies for visitor development (including schools), to increase public benefit and the potential for active support of our conservation work.

Objective 3b: Commission Interpretation Plan for Trust site collection by 2018

Interpretation, such as site panels, guide books and website content need to be updated regularly to keep up to date with current research and to take advantage of developing technologies; and on-site panels require periodic replacement due to weathering. An Interpretation Plan will provide a structured programme of replacement and renewal as well as exploring the potential for developing additional interpretation materials.

Objective 3c: Create opportunities for archaeological survey and research at two sites during the Plan period.

The discovery, excavation, recording and study of sites and objects of archaeological and/or historical importance are priorities encapsulated in the objects of the Trust. Developing opportunities for learning will assist in informing conservation strategies for our sites, and in engaging new and diverse audiences.

Objective 3d: Develop regular school visits to Burgh Castle and Caistor Roman Town - 4 annually at each

Facilitating school visits to our sites is a good way to engage young people in archaeology and cultural heritage. This is also an area in which volunteers can provide effective and enjoyable support.

Objective 3e: Collect data on flora and fauna at each of our sites by 2021 to provide framework for future policies on maintaining or increasing biodiversity

Conservation of wildlife goes hand-in-hand with conservation and management of our archaeological sites, and a significant proportion of our funding is derived from agri-environmental schemes. Wildlife at our sites attracts another potential audience prepared to support our work.

Aims and Objectives Summary 2016-2021

Aims	Objectives
A1: To conserve archaeological sites in Norfolk	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 1a: conserve all heritage assets in the Trust’s care, to comply with national standards, and ensure long-term protection • 1b: Produce new Acquisition Policy in 2016 • 1c: Produce Fund-raising Strategy to increase revenue funding by at least 3% year on year throughout the 5-year plan period. • 1d: retain and renew where applicable BPS and Agri-environment scheme funding for all eligible Trust sites by ensuring compliance throughout the Plan period
A2: To facilitate opportunities for community and volunteer engagement	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 2a: Continue support and liaison with existing volunteers/ organisations active at our sites • 2b: establish and/or support new active volunteer groups to support our conservation aims at three Trust sites by 2021
A3: to encourage and promote interest in the conservation of Norfolk’s sites and objects of archaeological and historical importance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 3a: Commission analysis of our current visitor base during 2016-2017 to provide framework for future Visitor Development plan • 3b: Commission Interpretation Plan for Trust site collection by 2018 • 3c: Create opportunities for archaeological survey and research at two sites during the Plan period. • 3d: Develop regular school visits to Burgh Castle and Caistor Roman Town - 4 annually at each • 3e: Collect data on flora and fauna at each of our sites by 2021 to provide framework for future policies on maintaining or increasing biodiversity