

## **FAQ's regarding the museum development project**

### **The Museum has recently had some good news from the Heritage Lottery Fund**

MEAL has been awarded £1.77m to realise a major development programme which will transform the museum site. The investment will help us promote the museum as a centre for culture, community and sustainability. The museum has spent the last 18 months drawing up plans to which will turn the museum into an exciting visitor attraction and centre for heritage and sustainability. However this grant only goes part of the way to realising our ambitions.

### **You've been awarded £1.77 from HLF why do you need more money?**

Well, the Lottery only supplies a portion of the project funds. They are funding 69% and we have to find the balance. It's a bit like the Olympic Games with Tessa Jowell having to find sponsorship and business support for the balance of the event. Unlike the Olympics we don't envisage our project going over budget!

### **What will the money be spent on?**

The project will restore the beautiful Abbot's Hall a Queen Anne house built in 1709, its adjoining stables, and walled garden and a pair of derelict 18<sup>th</sup> century workers cottages. The Hall was originally the centre of the estate upon which the museum is situated. The hall was only acquired in 2004 and bringing it back into the ambit of the estate is like putting the last piece in the museum jigsaw.

### **What will the hall be used for?**

We plan to create up to 7 exhibition rooms to tell the story of life, work and death in the East Anglian countryside. We're planning to create two temporary exhibition rooms which will show touring and in-house displays each year. We also expect to be able to offer facilities for functions and events like weddings in two of the larger ground floor rooms.

### **What about the other buildings?**

The Abbot's Hall stables built in the 1870s will be restored and we hope that through working with organisations like the Suffolk Horse Society visitors will be able to see horses in residence and working around the site. A pair of 250 year old cottages, 18 and 20 Crowe Street which are situated at the bottom of Abbot's Hall drive are to be restored. These truly are the poor man at the rich man's gate. The museum is also fortunate enough to have the possessions of Mr and Mrs Wilding, the last occupants of the cottages who left in the 1960s. They had lived in the cottages since Mr Wilding a cow man had been employed by the nearby Abbot's Hall estate in the 1920s. The collection coupled with the nature of the vernacular building offer a palpable snapshot of the lives of the rural poor in the first part of the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Abbot's Hall walled garden will be restored as a working garden, growing traditional varieties of fruit and vegetables. Visitors will be able to buy plant cuttings and some of the produce will end up on the menu in our cafe. The museum will operate it as a social enterprise

### **What's a Social Enterprise?**

Social Enterprises are organisations which trade in goods or services and link that trade to a social mission. The business aims to deliver on financial, social and environmental performance targets thereby creating a 'triple bottom line'. The museum's concern named Abbot's Hall Enterprises, after the museum's Queen Anne house, is centred upon the production of plants, flowers and vegetables. The company provides training and skills development for people with disabilities, long term unemployed and offenders. The enterprise brings an income to the museum whilst helping socially disadvantaged people gain qualifications which will enable them to get back into work. Last year the museum helped over 20 people go into full time work. As the moment much of the plant propagation work is being carried out in a poly-tunnel on site. Once the walled garden is restored production will be transferred there.

The museum has a real sense of social purpose and Abbot's Hall enterprises embody the prominent role the museum plays in the local community.

### **In what other ways does the museum contribute to the well being of local people?**

Aside from the valuable work of the social enterprise the museum does all sorts of other work in the community. It's a centre for volunteering where people of all ages and all sorts of backgrounds can come and try their hand at a variety of tasks. Volunteers look after the animals, drive our steam engines, work in our museum displays such as the printing press and blacksmiths forge, help out in our gardens or undertake research into the museums collections. Last year the museum provided over 42,000 volunteer hours.

Through the museums education programmes we've worked with several local care homes to encourage older people to find out more about their local heritage. We've been involved in a reminiscence project which is helping to exercise the memories of Alzheimer's patients. We do a lot of work with schools and have a variety resources and activities available for school children.

The museum is the largest open space in Stowmarket so is a meeting place for many people. We hold a Beer festival every year which is one of the major events in the town's calendar as is our Bonfire Celebration which welcomes around 2000-3000 people.

### **With all that green space what does the museum do to encourage people to care for the environment?**

In the next few years many of the museums displays will be altered to encourage people to think about the sustainability of their lives. Last year we put together a small display looking at food miles called 'how green is your apple?' This through a partnership with Natural England we are hosting a sustainable food day focussing o Suffolk producers and local farm fresh foods. The museum breeds its own pigs which once fattened are sent to slaughter and then served in our cafe and deli, with a total food mileage of about 20 miles.

### **So the future looks bright for the museum**

Yes, the next few years should see MEAL really fulfil its potential as one of the principle cultural attraction in the East of England.