



THE TOWN MILL LYME REGIS

VISION & STRATEGIC 5 YEAR PLAN

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Published by the Board of Trustees on behalf of the Town Mill stakeholders

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Introduction

As we begin to emerge from a very difficult eighteen months due to the pandemic, the Town Mill trustees are able to reflect on how we have been affected and to look forward to better times with optimism. The Trust, and our tenants, were able to avail of support in the form of grants and the furlough scheme to remain viable. Despite the pandemic, the Mill has been able to continue its operations to some extent, with volunteers preserving the heritage of the old mill and milling flour, artists exhibiting their works, artisan tenants doing their best to keep their businesses running and welcoming visitors, albeit in a more limited and controlled way. We were also able to use the time to plan our strategic direction over the next few years. This builds upon the consultancy work produced by Emmett Design (commissioned by the former Board of Trustees) whose visionary ideas may not have been taken forward, but which fed subsequent consultancy exercises commissioned more recently.

Previous Strategic 5 Year Plans have also been used as a basis for forming this current version, consolidating what we believe are sound ideas for taking forward; and we have taken on board much of what was contained in the two consultancies that reported early in 2021, “Developing Our Spaces Further” by Simon Williams of Footprint Futures and “Developing the Arts at the Town Mill” by Cleo Evans of The Arts Development Company.

Some developments are already underway, as the trust was able to respond expediently to evolving circumstances, such as the purchase and reissue of the cafe lease. Others are also works in progress, such as the “Grain to Loaf“ project, or are anticipated to be started over the forthcoming year or two, such as enhancing and extending the arts offer at the Mill.

We are in a time of transition, not just because we have had to adapt to the pandemic, but because we have a relatively new board of trustees. During the past few years we have said goodbye to trustees Gary Willis, Peter Coe, Ian Bark and Sue Atkinson, and much appreciation must be paid to them for all their efforts. Our new trustee board consists of Hilary Highet, the longest serving, and new trustees since 2019 Rob McLaughlin, Andy Davies and Jocelyn Bailey. We also have a change of personnel on the staffing: our longstanding Finance and Operations Coordinator Sarah Clark leaving and her replacement Pippa Rex joining the team. It is an appropriate time to establish our vision for the future, and this document will outline that thinking. Not everything contained herein may eventually prove to be feasible, but the trustees have considered the ideas very carefully and believe that they can be achieved.



New exhibits being prepared for when internal mill tours can begin again



Historic Background

There was a flour mill on the site in Saxon times. The current mill and leat was built in 1340, and underwent several structural changes over the centuries, including being partially destroyed by a fiery Royalist cannonball during the siege of Lyme Regis in 1644. For hundreds of years it faithfully served the parish and surrounding area by providing it with flour and other milled products. Closing as a mill in 1926, the site served other purposes for several decades, including as a hydro electric generating station during the war years; but it gradually became a neglected and ruined old building, with much of its milling machinery still in place. West Dorset District Council proposed demolishing the mill and making better use of the site, for housing and car parking, in 1991. This plan was resisted by a group of influential local citizens, including the author John Fowles and led by David West. The site was given to the Town Mill Trust, who were able to inspire the support of a large number of volunteer enthusiasts, and to raise substantial funds through public fundraising and grants. The mill was restored and reopened in 2000. Since then, there were further acquisitions and improvements.

In the more than twenty years since the restoration, the Trust has endeavoured to meet its charitable mission aims:

- To secure the preservation, protection, development and improvement of the features of the Town Mill at Lyme Regis including its related waterways and environs.
- To educate the public in the history of the architecture of the Town Mill and mills in general.
- To promote, improve, develop and maintain public education in and appreciation of the visual performing and written arts in all their aspects.
- To implement and promote good environmental practice.

The operating model has been to run the flour mill by volunteers, who maintain the machinery and exhibits, mill, bag and sell the flour, conduct tours for visitors and various other activities; to rent out the other spaces on the site to artisan tenants, conducive to the ethos of the mill, whose rents and leases provide income and add to the ambience of the site; to provide gallery space for artists to exhibit their work, and to actively promote the arts in other ways, which again produces income; the garden is also maintained by volunteers. A hydro electric plant installed several years after the restoration reduces the energy costs substantially, and is in itself a promotional feature for good environmental practice. Staffing consists of a Finance and Operations Coordinator, an Activity and Volunteer Coordinator, and a Site Coordinator, overseen by a Board of Trustees.

The challenge going forward is to ensure that The Town Mill has a sustainable future as part of the historic, economic and artistic life of Lyme Regis and the South West. This future must ensure the well-being of the unique historic and architectural dimensions of The Town Mill, whilst providing a vibrant home for a range of historic and artistic endeavours. Underpinning all of this is the obvious requirement for an operational model that balances the need for financial stability with the pursuit of our broader objectives.



The Picture Today

Our standing as a high quality visitor attraction based in the South West has grown and grown and is well established. We have won 3 highly prestigious awards for our flour, as a visitors attraction and as best guided tours .

The biggest change to our structure was in 2019 when the Arts at the Town Mill moved to being managed by the in-house-team. This has made the Galleries financially viable and from a deficit position we now have a sustainable surplus which delivers an attractive and competitive return for the Town Mill and especially for the artists who show with us.

This success has been driven by the effort and dedication of the whole Mill community. Despite the pandemic of the past 18 months we are in a healthy financial position which has enable The TMT to give our tenants some extra much needed support. We have been in receipt of various Government grants which will enable us to move forward with some major plans.

Over the last five years we have or are currently:

- Developed the visual arts at The Mill so that we have a clear community based art operation providing vibrant and interesting exhibitions all year round.
- Built up an experienced and able band of volunteers who run The Watermill, engage with visitors, produce high quality flour, maintain the garden and keep The Mill buildings up and running. However after the Pandemic of this past 18 months we now need to build up again.
- Supported and consolidated a group of artisans working at The Mill – Brewery, Cafe Pottery, Silversmith, Dress Designer, Seaweed Design, Graphics Designers, Web Design who add significantly to the community and the experience of those visiting The Mill.
- Developed our staff team to enable better use of our limited funds and drive activities that add real value to the operation of The Mill: effective financial control; supporting /attracting visitors/volunteers; directing/running the galleries; ensuring the integrity of our buildings and our safe operation.
- Dealing with some of the maintenance challenges that have built up: painting the mill; sorting out our emergency lighting; getting our health & safety and fire safety under control; dealing with engineering maintenance; getting the hydro operating effectively; sorting out the gallery lighting; to highlight but a few.
- Expanded the range of grains we mill – adding Spelt and Rye - and updated the packaging of our flour. We also provide 'bulk' supplies to several local businesses.
- Moving our income from tours of The Water Mill from an entry fee to donation based, which significantly improved the visitor numbers (in line with our objectives) and slightly increased the overall income. However, recently we have trialled paid internal tours again for limited numbers as part of Covid management.
- Significantly raised our profile within the South West Tourist based economy by winning 3, previously mentioned, major awards at Gold and Silver level, which recognised The Town Mill as a unique and high quality destination.



- Restructured the Trustee Team to give clear focus and responsibility to individuals. However, after the Pandemic we now need to recruit more trustees to be able to continue this process.
- Together all of these activities have enabled us to significantly improve our finances. A few years ago our reserves were drastically low, dropping to around £10,000 at one point, and our income-base was unstable and too low. All the hard work in recent years enabled us to put in place unrestricted reserves of over £50,000. Together with obtaining a Bounce Back Loan this year, it was this healthy state that allowed us to buy back the cafe lease, thus giving the Trust more control over developments that can now be implemented in that area of the overall operation. It is anticipated that the reserves can be replenished post cafe lease purchase to the desired level. These reserves are needed for three primary reasons:
 1. An amount which would cover our full running costs for at least 3 months if all our income activities were to fail - £25,000 minimum .
 2. An amount that would enable us to deal with an event which compromised one of our buildings or the fabric of the historic watermill - £15,000 minimum.
 3. An amount that allows us to undertake small scale developments to enhance or add to the operation of The Town Mill, or to enable fundraising for a larger development - £15,000.

To summarise:

- We must keep everything in good order and safe.
- Our volunteers and community based supporters need to be held close, valued and supported.
- We must keep what we have to offer 'fresh' and vibrant.
- We need to be seen and heard – the message must be exciting and get to our potential audience.
- We need to nurture and support our artisans so they can play an active part in our community.

We must meet these challenges and focus our activities in such a way as to continue to create a sustainable future for The Town Mill and all those who 'sail in her'.

During the pandemic the Mill adapted and continued to welcome visitors to the site when lockdown eased; here we have a family from West London who very much enjoyed themselves, even though their experience was limited to looking in from the outside.





The Town Mill's Vision

During 2015 a small group of volunteers and Trustees developed a Vision for The Town Mill; this vision still holds true to this day: its purpose is to give some additional substance to the charitable objectives detailed above. It provides the second yardstick, helping us judge the suitability of our development ideas. The Town Mill Vision is:

MISSION

**To be a vibrant, historic and cultural centre in the heart of Lyme Regis
&
An outstanding and sought after visitor attraction**

CORE PURPOSES

- To preserve, and promote, the historic water-driven flour mill so that visitors are encouraged to visit the Town Mill complex and experience the mill in action.
- To provide a dynamic and engaging environment and spaces for promoting the arts within the local community and raising the profile of artists' achievements, for all who visit the Town Mill.
- To engage with organisations, both locally and regionally, to enhance the Town Mill's profile and volunteer interest.
- To recognise and value the input and experience of volunteers and staff, thus creating an interesting and stimulating environment which allows the Town Mill to thrive.
- To attract and support artisan businesses which will embrace the ethos and Vision of the Town Mill.
- To strive constantly to enhance and develop the Town Mill complex to ensure that it provides the best possible experience for visitors.
- To forge mutually-beneficial links with educational organisations to promote the historic and artistic purposes of the Town Mill, and to provide space for workshops and events to be held.
- To ensure long-term financial stability to enable achievement of the core purposes and a sustainable future.

OUR GUIDING VALUES

- **Conservation**
- **Inclusion**
- **Considered decision-making**
- **Creativity**
- **Openness**
- **Clarity**

Conservation

- The first priority in all actions is seen to be the safe and historically appropriate maintenance of the Town Mill complex.



- Past contributors to the history and resurrection of the Town Mill are honoured and valued when future development projects are being considered.

Inclusion

- Equality and diversity are recognised and valued.
- The views of visitors are listened to and appreciated.
- Stakeholders are valued and involved in the decision-making process.
- Working relationships are valued.
- Community links are nurtured.

Considered

- Information-based decisions are made.
- The core purposes drive decisions.
- The making of decisions which are supported by all is aspired to.
- People commit to what they can realistically deliver.

Creativity

- Be prepared to be different.
- Be prepared to be bold and take 'big steps'.
- Ensure that visitors leave satisfied but wanting more.
- Facilitate educational and artistic ventures.

Openness

- The reasons for decisions are shared with all when appropriate.
- Ideas and views are listened to and taken into account.
- Communication in all directions.

Clarity

- Stakeholders know what to expect of each other – roles are clear.
- Processes for making things happen are defined and transparent.
- Expertise is sought and harnessed to improve outcomes.
- Stakeholders are empowered to get things done.
- Actions are linked and aligned to the core purposes of the Town Mill.

Much of the activity at the Mill relies on the dedication of a range of volunteers, including here the team of bagging ladies, Ann, Pat and Ania. The whole Town Mill community is grateful for their contribution over the years.

“Stakeholders must be valued and involved in the decision making process.”





The Next 5 Years and Beyond

The overwhelming requirements at The Town Mill are to ensure the operation is sustainable, in keeping with our charitable objectives and our Vision and constantly in touch with the changing needs of its community and visitors. Now is a good point in time to review everything that goes on at The Mill to ensure it:

- Fits with our overall Objectives and Vision.
- Is helping deliver a sustainable future.
- Is fair and balanced.

Before and during 2017 the Town Mill community was asked to supply ideas for development, and again in subsequent years, which informed the trustees about what direction to take.

Then, during 2020 the TMT commissioned 2 reviews - one for the Arts and one for the Mill site buildings and spaces and possible best usage. Through conversations between stakeholders and our two consultants we have gathered information and ideas from The Town Mill community about what we should strive to achieve in the future.

The Five Year Plan 2021, consolidating and developing the ideas put forward in the 2018 Five Year Plan, and some of the ideas proposed in the two 2021 Consultancy reports, is striving to enable The Town Mill to:

- Be the centre for creative excellence in Lyme Regis - supporting artisan enterprises, artistic endeavours and traditional milling.
- Play a greater role in the economic prosperity of Lyme Regis, Dorset, Devon, Somerset and the South West, potentially bringing more full-time, year-round jobs to the local economy, both as part of The Town Mill team and via those who run their enterprises here.
- Harness the potential of The Town Mill to help drive the 'out of season' economy.
- Become a destination in our own right, articulating clearly what we want to be known for and communicating it effectively.
- Sustain our heritage for future generations by ensuring long-term economic stability.

The following pages lay out the top level action plans for these areas over the next 5 years. These plans contain a mix of activities, some further improving/consolidating what we currently do and must do to keep up and running, others involving new aspects that will provide new strings to The Town Mill's bow.

Running through all of these plans is the desire to develop out of season economic activity, and to engage more with the local community. Visitors to Lyme are our life blood, but the heritage of the Mill needs to be promoted more effectively to the immediate community. The summer season, half-term holidays and other breaks are the focus for The Town Mill's economic activity. We have started to challenge this calendar and our plans, in part, are aimed at developing activities, and hopefully income, during Lyme's less busy periods.



Arts at the Mill

The Arts organisation at The Town Mill has passed through several incarnations. The current structure has been in place for nearly 3 years and has provided an effective mechanism for enabling the potential for visual/craft arts at The Mill to be understood. During this period the Arts have grown and prospered.

The intention is to build on this success in order to:

- Enable the Town Mill Arts Spaces (TMAS) to be the centre for creative excellence in Lyme Regis in relation to the visual arts and arts & crafts via exhibitions, workshops and educational activities throughout the site.
- Allow TMAS to explore arts related activities beyond the confines of The Town Mill.
- Develop awareness of the visual arts by raising the profile of the Malthouse and TMAS's activities within the broader (south west and national) art community.
- Arts and crafts retail space: explore the possible positioning within the Mill Complex or as outreach to drive TMAS sales as well as that of other creative tenants
- E-commerce set up for arts and crafts sales.
- Educational programme aimed at adults, children, special needs etc – again utilising facilities developed as part of Education @The Mill; include within this the possibility of having an Artist in Residence to promote interaction with the general public, local arts community and educational community.
- Develop links to other organisations – Lyme and Dorset-based arts organisations and others further afield.
- Elect an Artist's Governor to serve on TMT's Board of Trustees.
- Enhance the Malthouse as the primary Art Space at the Town Mill including its outside space.

These intentions above to be explored and pursued from 2021, implementation as soon as can be accomplished. There is a need to agree how best to steer these aspirations, and the role of a specialist arts trustee, possible artist in residence and the current arts programme coordinator, or any other influential personnel.



The Malthouse Gallery aims to be at the core of the Town Mill's Arts offer, providing a centre of excellence for the arts in the region.





Developing Our Spaces

The Watermill:

- Reinstate the Front of House, Shop and Flour Mill floors to accommodate internal conducted tours by volunteers as well as visitors' self guided tours. 2021 - 2022
- Install new exhibits such as "Grain to Loaf" interpretative boards and artefacts and the restored winnower, and reinstate existing ones. 2021 - 2022
- Provide secure storage for grain on the Stone Floor landing. 2021
- Relocate Site Coordinator base from Sack Floor to Storage Loft. 2021
- Provide a suitable location and method for the bagging of flour. 2021
- Install a welcome porch at the entrance to the Front of House. 2022 - 2023

The Cafe:

- Town Mill Trust purchase Cafe lease and engage a new tenant in a larger cafe footprint, including the former Courtyard Gallery. Modifications to be made to garden to facilitate extra seating space. 2021 - 2022
- Works within the cafe to provide dedicated toilet. 2022
- Works within cafe to separate cafe from floor above, replacing mezzanine by installing new ceiling. 2022

These works to be done by the Trust in collaboration with the new cafe tenant

The Bakehouse:

- New floor to replace open space above cafe to provide extra space for storage or letting to a tenant. 2022
- Modifications to the former artists studio on first floor to provide a multifunctional room that can be used for workshops, temporary exhibitions, meetings, courses, short term bookings or other uses. 2021
- Bakehouse Attic to be let to a new tenant. 2021

The Garden:

- Modify the garden to provide extra space for seating and events. 2022 - 2024
- Explore possibility of providing a new stepped entrance from the leat into the garden, and providing secluded storage for bins. 2022 - 2024
- Seek to install a canopy or covered area in the vicinity of the garden and courtyard to provide shelter from rain and sun. 2022 - 2025

General Site Improvements:

- Cosmetic improvements to site, including cleaning and essential painting. 2021-2022
- Replacement of defective or unattractive railings. 2022 - 2024
- Resurfacing Mill Lane to provide an improved surface in keeping with the mill character; to be undertaken by Highways England, in consultation with the Mill at no cost. 2021 - 2023
- Interpretative exhibits to be installed in the outside areas of the site. 2022 - 2026



Stakeholder Cohesion:

- Explore and develop collaborative courses, tours and activities with tenants, and nurture greater cohesion within the Town Mill community. 2021 - 2026

Corporate Image:

- Consider rebranding the corporate image of the Mill, reviewing all publicity materials and its online presence. 2023 - 2026

Hydro Electric System:

- Review the effectiveness and likely lifespan of the current hydro electric system; investigate viability of replacing with a waterwheel driven system. 2022 - 2026
- Install safety improvements to the external grid area 2021

Governance and Management:

- Review staffing, management structure, trustee structure and roles, protocols and procedures. 2021 - 2022

Archiving:

- Secure grant funding for organising physical and digital storage of information, artefacts and materials to safeguard the heritage and enable effective retrieval of important items in danger of being lost and forgotten. 2022 - 2024

Our Financial Resources

The income generated by The Town Mill flows from four main sources:

- Renting spaces to tenants.
- Income generated by Town Mill Arts Spaces
- Donations and sales associated with The Mill and milling activities.
- Grant Funding for major projects

We also reduce our overall energy costs by using our own hydro generated electricity or selling the surplus back to the National Grid.

Much of the above developmental aspirations will require mobilising help from our volunteers, use of some of our reserves, as well as donations and grant funding. We have already received several grants over the past year for specific projects, and further grants are anticipated. Putting together grant applications takes a lot of time and energy, and are often unsuccessful. The better we can perform without the need for external funding the better our scope for further improvements will be.



Conclusion



In June the Trustees were pleased to welcome Ed and Giselle of Strawberry Tree as the new tenants running the Courtyard Cafe.

An enhanced cafe offer on site, including evening opening and a more prominent cafe presence in the courtyard, promises to raise the quality of experience for visitors and the overall success of the Mill site generally.

This Strategic Five Year Plan has been produced after various consultations with stakeholders over the past few years, and after commissioning two consultancy reports, financed by part of a grant obtained from the Heritage Lottery Fund during the Covid pandemic.

The small team of four trustees and three staff have worked as a cohesive team to take forward the views and opinions of all stakeholders, and to consider the proposals in the two consultancy reports, to identify sound and feasible areas for improving the Town Mill so that we can ensure a bright future for all the stakeholders. This also ensures that we are endeavouring to fulfil our charitable objectives.

The main developments outlined above will require much effort to drive forward, including securing the necessary funding, some of which will be substantial. The trustees and staff will continue to lead, but will also rely on the efforts and support of the Mill's stakeholders - volunteers, tenants, artists and supporters, for many of these ideas to be realised.

These developments are not absolutely set in stone, and can be subject to change; there may also be other developments that arise during the period of this plan. The opinions and fresh ideas of the Town Mill stakeholders are always welcome and will be carefully considered. We hope that all stakeholders will view this plan positively and give it their support.

Rob McLaughlin (Chair), Hilary Highet, Andy Davies, Jocelyn Bailey (Trustees)
Sarah Clark, Ian Prudence, Petrina Muscroft (Staff)
The Town Mill
Lyme Regis

July 2021