

What's in Store? Museum store extension update



1.1 Background

The move to Newton's Place from the former Devon Square site resulted in visitor numbers to Newton Abbot Museum increasing threefold with visitors enjoying the modern interpretation and interactivity the new displays offer. There is also a varied programme of creative and engaging events driven by the team's desire to collaborate with the community they serve.

Although the galleries and meeting spaces are a marked improvement on the old site, like most museums, the gallery areas only have enough space to display around 10% of the full collection. The remaining 90% is stored in three locations: one onsite and two in rented storage facilities.

In addition to welcoming visitors an important responsibility of the museum is its commitment to maintain the objects in its care in perpetuity. This requires the objects held in the collection to be stored in conditions that do not damage or shorten their life. It is the role of museums to protect against decay and this can come in many forms, but the common issues are infestation, sunlight, unstable environmental conditions such as greatly varying temperature and humidity.

The main store is onsite at the museum located in the space where the choir and organ would have been at the back of the church with very narrow and angled entrances making access impossible for anyone who requires a mobility aid. The long thin rooms have drafty windows and insufficient insulation causing wildly fluctuating temperatures and humidity levels. It is also not large enough to house the museum's full collection of 17,000 objects and this has resulted in the museum renting two external stores with important collection items stored offsite. These areas are not accessible to the public and are on a monthly rolling contract so could be cancelled at any time. This difficult situation means that conducting regular checks on the whole collection is exceedingly difficult and there is extremely limited workspace for any of the stored collections to be unpacked and examined for auditing, research or conservation purposes.

The current space is difficult for staff and volunteers to work in and we regularly have to use the community rooms or museum space when it is closed on a Monday to bring objects out of the store to work on (to accession objects, research, audit etc.). In addition, when we have groups in to look at objects – whether it is for a research visit, a specialist interest group or a group visit such as a WI group, we have to move objects into a community room as there simply isn't enough space to facilitate these visits in the current store. This movement is not good for the objects, not only physically having to relocate them, but also the change in environment can have a negative effect on the objects over time.

1.1 The What's In Store? project

Recognising the problem The National Lottery Heritage Fund have supported the museum team to develop a funding application to construct a new fully accessible collection store and community space. The museum has been awarded a £78,952 development grant to fund the creation of the plans for a state-of-the-art museum store - an interactive space which will enable members of the community to get more involved with behind-the-scenes museum activities. The grant will allow the museum to progress the plans to the Royal Institute of British Architects (RIBA) Stage 2 – 'Concept Design', and RIBA Stage 3 – 'Developed Design' which will include all the architectural, structural, mechanical and electrical designs for the works.

Throughout the year the museum will connect with local people to find out what they think of the building design and what they would like to get involved in when the store is up and running.

At the end of the consultation year the museum will be applying for a full National Lottery grant to build and fit-out an environmentally sustainable museum store and community space.

Stuart McLeod, Director of England - London & South at The National Lottery Heritage Fund, said: "What's in Store? will continue the positive impact of Newton Abbot Museum's previous redevelopment project. This next phase is the final piece to create a fully accessible space where the community can come together to learn and celebrate its local heritage. We look forward to working with the project team to progress their plans to apply for a full grant at a later date."

2. Staff

We have recently welcomed Helen Smith to the team as the Project Coordinator. Helen has a wealth of relevant experience in the heritage sector, including a store development project at the Fusiliers Museum, Lancashire.

Funding from the NLHF has enabled us to recruit a Project Coordinator, Project Build Advisor, pay for the Community Engagement Officer and to backfill the Curators role one day a week.

Project staff		
Person	Role	Time allocation
Charlotte Dixon, Museum Curator	Project Manager – Lead on Museum tasks and all store related activities.	1 day per week
Helen Smith	Project Coordinator - Lead on all aspects of the project. Reporting to	2 days per week

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	the Museum Curator and Town Clerk	
Kate Green, Community Engagement Officer	Community engagement and activity plan lead	3 days per week
Katie Petley-Jones, Curatorial Assistant	Curator (Curatorial Assistant – acting as back-fill for Curator)	1 day per week
Phil Rowe, Town Clerk	Line manager for Museum Curator.	As required
Samantha Scott, Deputy Town Clerk	Financial and HR support	As required
Charlotte Edwards, Museum Administrative Assistant	Project support & administration	As required
Nigel Canham, Comms Advisor	PR and marketing lead	As required
Jeremy Newcombe, Architect	Project Build Advisor	20 days across the development phase
Consultants		
Design Foundry, MEP	MEP for store environmental and electrical requirements	
Jeremy Newcombe, architect	Architect	
Philip Rumbelow, Quantity Surveyor	To cost up the amended build plans	
Paul Carpenter, Structural Engineer		

3. Building plans

Following early consultation about the project the initial building plans have developed to incorporate a permanent, accessible ramp at the front of the building.

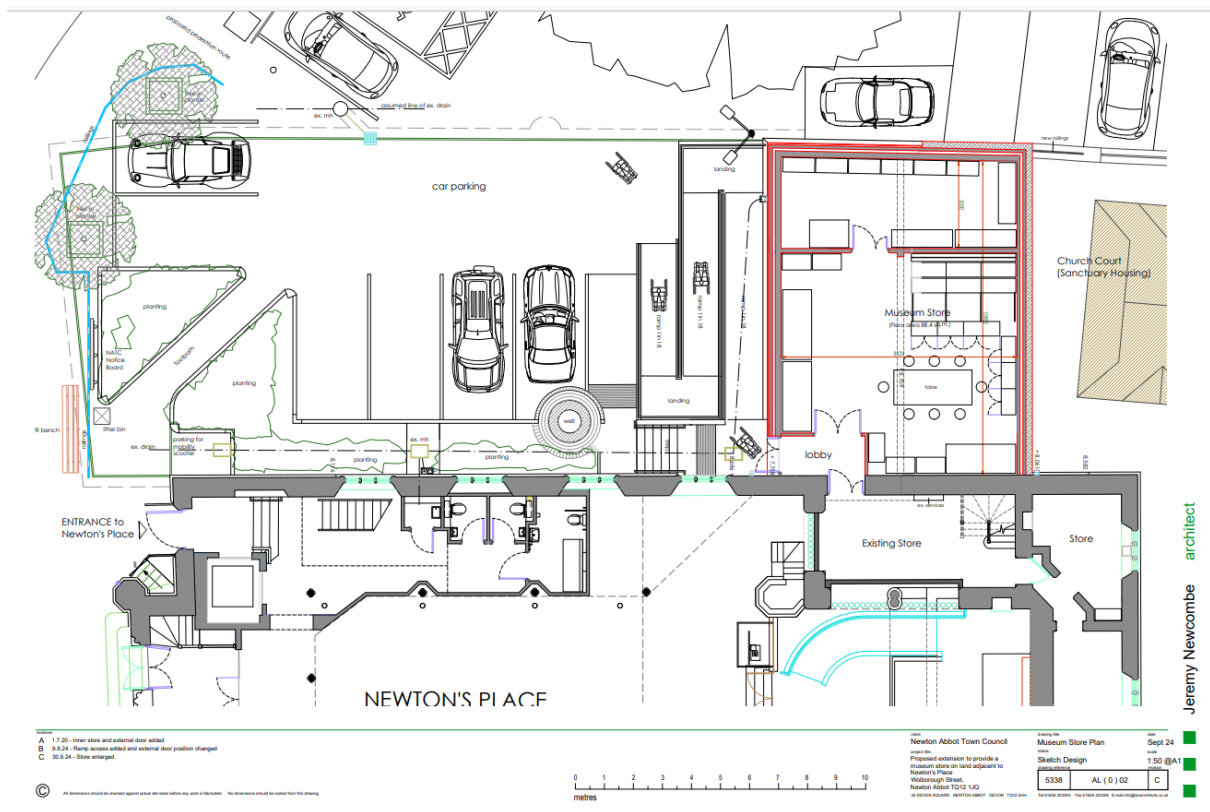
The building has been designed to be a modern building using mirror cladding to reflect the surroundings. This means the new building is very clearly a new addition to the Victorian church.

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Following on from the first Project Board Meeting on the 24th September we are exploring options to enlarge the footprint of the store slightly to bring it out into half of a car parking space. This would provide more storage space which is needed for future proofing space for the collection.

Due to the addition of the ramp and the fact that the current planning application will have lapsed before the build starts, we need to go back to submitting a planning application and listed building consent so it is possible to include the enlarged designs as seen below. We are going to have a conversation with the Conservation Officer for their opinion on this.



4. Community consultation

Throughout the research and development year Kate Green, the Community Engagement Officer, is running a programme of activities to consult with the public about the project. This includes showing groups plans of the building and getting feedback about the design and to help develop ideas for activities we will be able to run in the new store. This could be store tours, community curation (groups selecting objects for displays), sketching objects etc.

As a major aspect of the project and the funding is about the community and access to the collection this is crucial to the project so that we develop activities that the community want to be involved with.

4.1 Groups engaged with so far

Event/Group	Numbers	Date
Information sharing day Museum staff Museum volunteers NATC councillors	23	10 th June
Entomology multi media performance, JUMP	60	25 th June
Marldon Primary school	26	26 th June
Bovey Tracey Memory Café	17	3 rd July
Work experience students – learning about the project and	2	18 th July
HEadway disabled group @ Courtenay Centre. Outreach session with handling objects -	17	25 th July
Young Curators		30 th July
High Street 100 exhibition A month-long exhibition in the community rooms about 100 years of the high street. A dedicated section to the What's in Store? Project including information panel, question cards and book for collecting feedback from visitors.	1268	From 30 th July – 31 st August
Ipplepen and Kingskerswell Memory cafe. Visit to the museum and 100 years exhibition.	11	12 th August
Ashburton Memory Cafe	32	3 rd sept
Coombeshead College Volunteers Fayre	37	10 th sept
Decoy School Young Curators Club	14	24 th sept – 26 th Nov
Wolborough School Young Curators Club	12	25 th Sept – 23 rd oct
3 rd Newton Abbot Scouts	16	2 nd October

4.2 Collection cards

To help with community consultation we have been working on a series of collections cards and a folder to showcase a selection of 50 objects that are in the stores. These have been photographed by members of the Newton Abbot Photography Club. This booklet is now nearly ready to start using.

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Example of the collection cards:

**NEWTON
ABBOT**
TOWN & GWR
MUSEUM

**THE ARCHIVED
COLLECTION**

ARCHAEOLOGY

COSTUME

CURRENCY,
TOKENS & MEDALS

NATURAL HISTORY

PRINT & MANUSCRIPTS

RAILWAY

SOCIAL HISTORY

TOYS & GAMES

WARTIME

1


CAMEL DUNG BAG

NEWTON ABBOT MUSEUM
WHAT'S IN STORE? 1

CAMEL DUNG BAG

This unusual bag is made from beads strung together in an open work design. The larger black beads are made from pellets of camel dung which were imprinted with a floral motif before being dried and hardened.

It was acquired by Dr Henry Mapleton who was the medical officer of health for Newton Abbot Urban and District Council from 1890 to 1932. Mapleton was an avid collector and amassed a wide range of objects from all over the world, some of which were donated to Newton Abbot Museum, including two cabinets containing 50 drawers of entomology featuring butterflies and moths, as well as fossils, axe heads and naval swords.





FASCINATING FACTS!

Camel dung was used by the Allies in World War Two to disguise land mines in the North African desert because German tank drivers believed that running their tracks over camel dung would bring them good luck!

During the same conflict, British Forces also mixed camel dung into paint to create the perfect colour and texture to camouflage their own equipment.

OBJECT INFORMATION

MUSEUM REFERENCE No.....1988.375

TIME PERIOD Late 19th / early 20th century

DIMENSIONS.....120mm x 185mm

5. What's next?

- Meeting with the Conservation Officer to discuss the new plans for the store and get some advice
- Continuing consultation with the community
- Starting consultation sessions with volunteers
- Visiting other museum stores for ideas and advice
- Delivering comms timetable
- Submit revised planning application and listed building consent
- Finish designing project information leaflets for visitors for fundraising as we will have additional costs to cover in the delivery phase – the ramp for example and change museum donations to be earmarked for the project
- Work with MEP to look at what we could do to stabilise the environment in the current store and to look at the new store designs