

Museums for changing lives

Studies in Partnership: Growing Communities



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In the East of England, Renaissance is managed by the Renaissance East of England Office, and delivered by the four large museum services which together make up the East of England Museum Hub:

- Colchester and Ipswich Museum Service
- The Fitzwilliam Museum, University of Cambridge
- Luton Culture
- Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service

You can read more about the impact of the Renaissance programme in the East of England by visiting our website: www.mla.gov.uk/renaissanceeastofengland



The
Fitzwilliam
Museum



Cover Image: Making cob, Eco Building day, Rackheath Primary School

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Growing Communities: In a nutshell

5,815

visitors to exhibitions at Ancient House Museum, Thetford, exploring the town's growth in the 60s and consulting on plans for the future

Comments from visitors on proposals for Thetford's development, part of the *Our Thetford* exhibition at Ancient House Museum:

"I agree with most of the proposals but Thetford needs to be made more attractive like Bury St Edmunds. We definitely need a new high school and more for teenagers to do and go to. They seem to be forgotten."

"As a retired nurse from the Thetford cottage hospital, I would like to see a rehab/convalescent home on the site."

600

Over 600 school children attended sessions on local history inspired by the *Moving Stories* exhibition at Ancient House Museum, Thetford

"Towns evolve and change constantly and often we forget what things used to be like... By sharing our memories of the past we can see the benefits that growth has brought to the town as well as learn lessons for managing development and expansion into the future." Cllr Jason Law, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council

What I liked best...

"Designing the community centre and showing the parents our models and working together."

Pupil evaluation, Shape East planning workshop

"That was the best day at school ever." Pupil from Rackheath Primary School, Norwich, following an eco building workshop

10,000

"I learnt that the oldest mud house still standing is 10,000 years old." Pupil from Rackheath Primary School, Norwich, following a planning workshop with Shape East

"Just an amazing exhibition... great job" Portuguese visitor following a visit to the *Our Thetford* exhibition at Ancient House Museum

Foreword

In the current economic climate there is a greater emphasis than ever on working in partnership to deliver services more efficiently and more responsively to local needs.

This booklet is one in a series of six highlighting ongoing projects led by East of England museums which have partnership working at their heart. Taken together they demonstrate that museums have a valuable contribution to make in:

- Engaging local people in decision-making
- Promoting community cohesion through exploration and celebration of the past
- Providing economic benefits through employment and tourism.

Communities benefit when museums share resources and expertise with each other:

- **The Greater Fens Museums Partnership and Maritime Heritage East** are networks which bring together museums with similar collections to celebrate and promote unique aspects of the region's past. Economies of scale are combined with a richer offering to the public and more effective promotion of heritage to visitors.
- **Something Borrowed** is a partnership with the British Museum which is enabling smaller museums in the East of England to borrow items from the BM's collections, creating new opportunities for tourism and learning.

Museums are also working increasingly with partners beyond the cultural sector:

- **Growing Communities** provides a forum for museums, local communities and planning departments in Growth Point areas in the region to explore how the past can help shape future development
- **Stepping Stones** has brought together 24 museums in a partnership with the Department for Work and Pensions to create 32 jobs and apprenticeships for long-term unemployed young people
- **The Sustainability Project** is unlocking the potential of rural life museums to engage the public in debate around environmental and social issues, as well as joining forces with other organisations to find ways of reducing the sector's carbon footprint.

This work is supported by Renaissance, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council's ground-breaking programme that is transforming England's non-national museums. The staff leading these projects are funded by Renaissance East of England which has also developed the strategic vision and infrastructure to help the sector become more outward-looking and innovative.

The projects showcased in this series show museums have a part to play in making the Big Society a reality – by providing a unique space for communities to learn about their past and get involved in shaping their future.

Vanessa Trevelyan
Head of Norfolk Museums &
Archaeology Service
President, Museums Association
October 2010

Museums and place shaping: The case for partnership

“Communities should be given the greatest possible opportunity to have their say ... If we get this right, the planning system can play a major role in ... strengthening society – bringing communities together, as they formulate a shared vision of sustainable development.”¹

The government has identified housing provision as a major concern, stating “The lack of available and affordable housing in the places where people want to live is one of the most significant social and economic issues of our time.”² In the East of England where plans for housing growth are ambitious and far-reaching, this issue presents big challenges and opportunities for local communities.

Renaissance East of England³ developed the Growing Communities project in response to this important issue. Planning policy is in a transition period. The coalition government have replaced the centralised ‘top down’ Regional Spatial Strategies and planning targets with a localised approach “where communities take the lead in shaping their own surroundings.”⁴

Museums and heritage have an even bigger part to play in this process. They are uniquely positioned within communities to engage local people in place shaping, that is in the creation of ‘attractive, prosperous, vibrant, safe and strong communities’⁵. As trusted organisations with in-depth knowledge

of local history, they can be powerful partners in consulting communities in the process of change, enabling ‘local people to shape their surroundings in a way that ... is sensitive to the history and character of a given location’⁶.

For the past two and a half years the Growing Communities project has successfully explored the ways in which museums can help achieve this ambition. Led by Ancient House Museum, Thetford, part of Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service [NMAS], a partnership of museums located within Growth Areas and Points in the region has been formed. Partners include Peterborough, Bedford, Southend and Bury St Edmunds.

The case studies in this report take a closer look at how NMAS has been working in partnership with local authority planning departments in the three Norfolk Growth Points: Thetford, Norwich and King’s Lynn. They demonstrate why museums should be seen as natural partners in engaging local communities in planning for housing growth.

This work is even more relevant to the new decentralised housing policy. We believe constructive partnerships between local government and museums in the East of England can help provide “intelligent ways to encourage, support and enable people to make better choices for themselves.”⁷

Above, Right: The opening of the *Our Thetford* exhibition.



Photo: Archant

Growing Communities takes inspiration from the *Living Places*⁸ programme, an agreement between five of the leading cultural agencies which aims to embed culture in the development of our villages, towns and cities. Museums contribute in a number of ways:

- **Museums bring people together:** They provide a safe, stimulating space to meet and participate in activities
- **Museums help develop identity and a sense of place:** Buildings and collections reflecting the history of the local community help existing and new residents understand and value the heritage of the place in which they live
- **Museums and heritage make places more attractive:** Historic assets give places a distinct identity
- **Museums contribute to our health and happiness:** They validate people's life experiences, provide opportunities for sharing and encourage an active social life, particularly among older people
- **Museums enhance people's skills and help generate prosperity:** They offer learning and volunteering opportunities to people of all ages, while heritage-led regeneration can increase the economic prospects of an area
- **Museums can provide positive activities for young people:** They contribute to the extended schools programme and can work with pupils at risk of exclusion and youth offenders by engaging them with their heritage.

¹ *Open Source Planning, Policy Paper No. 14*, Conservative Party, Feb 2010, p. 1.
² *Control Shift - Returning Power to Local Communities, Responsibility Agenda, Policy Green Paper No. 9*, Conservative Party, 2009, p. 9.
³ Renaissance is the government's programme of investment to transform regional museums, making them world-class and fit for the 21st century.
⁴ *Open Source Planning, Policy Paper No. 14*, Conservative Party, Feb 2010, p. 2.
⁵ IDEA website, <http://www.idea.gov.uk/idk/core/page.do?pageld=7890750>
⁶ See 4 above, p.1.
⁷ *The Coalition: our programme for government*, David Cameron and Nick Clegg, May 2010.
⁸ Arts Council England, the Commission for Architecture and the Built Environment (CABE), English Heritage, the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council (MLA) and Sport England; their sponsoring department the Department for Culture, Media and Sport (DCMS) and the Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) and the Academy for Sustainable Communities (ASC).

Our Thetford: How museums and heritage can help shape the future of a growing historic Norfolk town

What are the challenges?

Thetford's population quadrupled in the 1960s through the Town Expansion Scheme. This experience has given residents a unique perspective on housing growth.

As a Growth Point, planners for the future of Thetford were keen to learn lessons from this past development.

How could we help?

Initially the museum helped to involve communities in place shaping by presenting a temporary exhibition and events programme to support the public consultation for the Preferred Options stage of the Area Action Plan. A second exhibition explored the historical growth of the town with the aim of fostering community cohesion.

What did we do?

Museum officers developed a constructive relationship with the planning team for Moving Thetford Forward⁹ [MTF]. This led to partnership¹⁰ work involving museums and heritage in the development of Thetford's Area Action Plan, titled *Thetford: Historic Past, Healthy Future*.

The project received funding from Norfolk County Council to develop a temporary exhibition with partners from MTF at the museum called *Our Thetford: Yesterday and Tomorrow*.



“The Ancient House Museum in Thetford has been a key element of the consultation process ... The interactive displays showing how Thetford has grown in the past have been an excellent way to raise awareness of how Thetford might grow in the future ... This means we are reaching audiences on our plans for Thetford that we would normally never have been able to.” Richard Kay, former Chief Planning Officer, Moving Thetford Forward

Far left and below; *Moving Stories* family event. The wedding of Mr & Mrs Mead, one of the stories told in the *Moving Stories* exhibition

The displays illustrated the period of rapid expansion and change in Thetford during the 1960s and aimed to gauge public opinion about the Growth Point plans. The council highlighted the importance of this historical perspective to the debate about the town's future by launching the second round of public consultation at the museum.

3,025 people visited the *Our Thetford* exhibition and 230 adults and children participated in the associated events. Feedback from the comments board was passed on to the MTF board as part of the consultation process.



Photo: Mr & Mrs Mead

“The exhibition is so evocative and a great talking point for visitors. Well done!” Comment from a visitor to the *Our Thetford* exhibition.

A second exhibition in 2010 called *Moving Stories* presented the fascinating experiences of some of the people who have moved to Thetford and made it their home, from pre-historic times to the present day. It explored how each generation has contributed to the town's growth and prosperity, making Thetford the unique community it is today.

2,790 people visited the exhibition and 564 adults and children participated in the events programme. Over 600 Children from 15 Thetford schools visited the museum to take part in *Moving Stories* sessions on local history.

What was achieved?

The joint working between museum and local authority colleagues has given both sides a deeper insight into each other's work and the ways in which common agendas can be met.

What next?

The museum is a key partner in the culture, heritage and tourism delivery group which is using funds from the Growth Point to develop the heritage assets in Thetford and encourage tourism as part of the development plans.

⁹ The Local Delivery Vehicle for Thetford.

¹⁰ Including: officers and councillors from Breckland Council, Thetford Town Council and Norfolk County Council and officers from Norfolk Archaeology Service and Norfolk Archaeology Unit.

Remembering Lynn: Listening to the community to inform the future

What are the challenges?

King's Lynn is a second round Growth Point, receiving funds from the Government to support sustainable development in the town. It underwent huge changes during the 1960s as part of London County Council's Town Expansion Scheme.

How could we help?

After seeing the effectiveness of the Growing Communities Project in Thetford, King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council commissioned Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service to engage the local community in a history project to explore the effect of growth in the town. The idea was to use an historical starting point to promote more positive thinking about future growth.

What did we do?

Memories of Lynn Exhibition

The museum invited residents to share their memories and photographs of King's Lynn showing how it has changed from the 1960s to the present

day. 45 people attended reminiscence sessions at local libraries and community centres and oral history interviews were recorded with eight individuals. These were used to create *Memories of Lynn*, a touring exhibition for community venues.

The exhibition focuses on five key areas of the town: the Fairstead Estate, Hillington Square, South Lynn, North Lynn industrial estate and the Town Centre and also looks forward to the future of King's Lynn.

It opened at the King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council Offices in October 2010 and is touring local venues throughout the autumn, culminating in a larger exhibition at the Lynn Museum in January 2011.

Hillington Square Project

The museum developed a partnership with Freebridge Community Housing who are working on a project to regenerate Hillington Square, a complex of flats built in King's Lynn during the 1960s Town Expansion Scheme.

Freebridge have commissioned designer Wayne Hemmingway, a specialist in urban design, who will be working with residents to develop new proposals for the redevelopment of the square.

They are interested in the square's social and architectural history and asked the museum to research and gather people's memories of living



'Grip Tuth' hair grips



Photo: Lynn News

Adventure playground, Fairstead Estate, King's Lynn, 1978

there to help engage residents in planning for the future.

What was achieved?

Excellent coverage in the local press encouraged a lot of interest from residents who were keen to share their stories of life in the town. This in turn helped the Borough Council to achieve their goal of more positive engagement with the public in the planning process.

What next?

The touring exhibition and associated reminiscence events will provide an opportunity for further involvement from local residents which can be integrated into the larger exhibition at the museum. Growing Communities is part funding a NEET [young people not in employment, education or training] project with the museum's Outreach

Officer to create a film exploring how the town has changed since the 1960s and how they view their life in King's Lynn today.

Work is continuing to support the Hillington Square Project and engage the local primary school in exploring the history of the area.

"Towns evolve and change constantly and often we forget what things used to be like...By sharing our memories of the past we can see the benefits that growth has brought to the town as well as learn lessons for managing development and expansion into the future." Cllr Jason Law, Cabinet Member for Regeneration, King's Lynn & West Norfolk Borough Council.

An eco future: Involving school children in the planning process

What are the challenges?

Rackheath is a village on the outskirts of Norwich. It is one of only a few sites in the country currently identified for the location of a new eco community on the site of a disused World War Two airfield. The local council are seeking to work with the community on the plans for the development.

How could we help?

Norfolk Museums & Archaeology Service are engaging with Broadland Council and the local community of Rackheath through the primary school to examine the contribution the museum service can make to building a sustainable community.

Below: Working in groups to make a model eco building, eco building day, Rackheath Primary School

What did we do?

Local History Project

We worked with the school to devise a programme of work for 90 year 3, 4, 5 and 6 pupils, exploring the local history and development of the village in the past.

Through partnership work with the Norfolk Record Office and the use of freelance re-enactors and objects from the museum collections, the children learnt about different phases in the history of the village from Anglo-Saxon times to the present day.

Activities included document sessions, meeting historic characters, object handling, a film show and intergenerational oral history interviews with local residents.



“That was the best day at school ever.” Comment from a child about the eco building days

Eco Building Workshops

As well as learning about Rackheath’s past the pupils also learnt about its possible future during two days of eco building workshops at the school. The museum commissioned Shape East and Edwards Eco Buildings to deliver a carousel of sessions to teach the pupils about sustainable building.

They met architects who explained how buildings and outside spaces can be made more sustainable, learnt about the historic method of building sustainably with cob and worked in groups to design and make models of their own sustainable buildings using recycled materials.

At the end of the day all the students came together for a sharing assembly where each group presented their models to the rest of the school and invited parents.

“For us the biggest difference from how we would have tackled this subject in previous years was the range of artefacts, expertise and living history opportunities that the museums service was able to provide to really bring the past in Rackheath to life...The children were enthused by the activities provided and were also able to make strong links and comparisons between the different periods in history as the project progressed.” Jacqui Sinkins, Headteacher, Rackheath Primary School



Community event, Rackheath

What was achieved?

Staff and pupil feedback from the project has been very positive. The pupils have reacted enthusiastically to each history session and particularly enjoyed the activities during the eco building days. Working with the school has been an effective way of reaching out to the wider community.

What next?

The museum is continuing to work with Broadland Council and the school to research and design a history wall for a new Eco Education Centre being built at Rackheath. The centre will provide facilities for local schools and community groups to learn about environmental sustainability.

The Greater Norwich Development Partnership recognise the value of this work and have commissioned the museum service to work with other communities within the Norwich Growth Point.

Future plans

The work of the Growing Communities project is extremely relevant to the localism agenda. As councils move away from centralised planning targets and work with communities to devise new Local Plans the museum sector can provide the expertise to engage local people in a dialogue about housing growth in their area.

Museums can use their knowledge and collections to work with communities and supply them with an historic background to past development so that they can make more informed

decisions about the future of their communities.

With this in mind we will continue to develop the current partnership work with local authorities working in the Growth Points in Norfolk in Thetford, Norwich and King's Lynn.

We will also continue to share our experiences with our museum partners in growth point areas around the region to ensure that, when it comes to housing, heritage is key.

Pupils meeting an architect, eco building day, Rackheath Primary school



Growing Communities Partnership

The following museums have all been involved in the Growing Communities agenda. Case studies about this work have been published in *Growing Communities: Museums and place shaping* available to download from the publications section of:

www.mla.gov.uk/renaissanceeastengland

or you can contact the following:

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For further information on Growing Communities contact:
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Useful websites providing further information on the growth agenda in Norfolk.

Norfolk Growth Points

Norwich

Rackheath Eco Community
<http://www.rackheatheco-community.com/index.php>

Broadland District Council
<http://www.broadland.gov.uk/rackheathecocommunities/>

Greater Norwich Development Partnership
<http://www.gndp.org.uk/>

Thetford

Moving Thetford Forward
<http://www.movingthetfordforward.com/>

King's Lynn

King's Lynn and West Norfolk Borough Council
<http://www.west-norfolk.gov.uk/default.aspx?page=23701>

Hillington Square Project
<http://www.hillingtonsquare.co.uk/>

Freebridge Community Housing
<http://www.freebridge.org.uk/>

Museums

Living Places, Stronger communities through culture
www.living-places.org.uk

Department for Culture Media and sport
www.culture.gov.uk/

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