

Funding Advice – Papertrail

Objectives

The Paper Trail is a charity that runs a heritage industrial paper mill at the site where the world's first commercial, mechanical paper machine was invented – as well as a skills centre and business incubation base.

The project aims to preserve the sites of two historically significant paper mills on the outskirts of Hemel Hempstead for future generations and preserve centuries-old traditions of paper-making, through the operation of a working mill. The project was launched in 2000 and continues to this day.

Where

The Paper Trail project is spread over two sites – at the former John Dickinson Stationery Company site at Apsley Mills, on the outskirts of Hemel Hempstead – and the nearby Frogmore Mill site. Both sites are linked by the River Gade and the Grand Union Canal.

How was it Achieved?

The Paper Trail project was set up in 2000. Initially it aimed to create a multi-activity centre around the site of the former John Dickinson Stationery Company in Apsley.

When the company closed, a trust was formed to take over part of the Dickinson site as the core of a major regeneration project to be developed it as an education base for schools, colleges and local community. A business incubator facility was also set up in old buildings on the site, along with a conference and training centre.

In 2002, the nearby Frogmore Paper Mill became available. It was acquired by the Trust and used as a working paper mill and tourist attraction. It also acts as paper skills training centre and industrial incubation centre.

It was at Frogmore that the world's first machine for making a continuous roll of paper was built. Today specialist papers for clients such as Wimbledon and Wembley stadium are produced here, and a schools' paper recycling scheme has been set up.

The project aims to conserve, restore and maintain Frogmore as a working paper mill using a 'Fourdrinier' paper machine which dates back to 1895 (still driven by steam) and to make this unique industrial heritage site accessible to the public.

The Trust behind the project has worked with a range of public and private sector partners to attract the funding and in-kind backing to support the initiative. Their efforts are seen as a model for partnership working.

Who Was Involved?

The Paper Trail project has achieved enormous success with the support of sponsors, members, partners and volunteers.

At the core of the project are community groups and volunteers. There has also been strong support from the local authority - Dacorum Borough Council.

The project has also been backed by key public and private sector partners such as the Robert Horne Group, British Waterways, WestHertsCollege, EEDA (the East of England Development Agency), Royal Mail, and the Learning and Skills Councils in Herts.

As the project progressed more partners came on board, although the project admits it was initially difficult to convince the paper industry that the project was viable.

Within the project itself, key contacts are:

- Peter Ingram, chairman of the trustees
- Jacky Bennett, the chief executive of the project
- John Watson, director of operations, Frogmore Mill
- Peter Burford, director of estates, administration and communications
- Margaret Curle, managing editor of the Paper and Print Focus magazine, produced on the site
- Hugo Van Kempen, the senior education officer
- Jim Patterson, the mill manager.

You can contact all of them on 0870 950 9272 or email: postbox@thepapertrail.org.uk

Jacky Bennett says: "We have achieved a great deal in the last six years, from acquiring the sites to developing a balance between education and conservation. We now have a working paper mill, an enterprise centre and a visitor experience over two sites."

One of the key aspects of the project has been the formation of effective partnerships. The Paper Trail provides a neutral environment which encourages organisations to explore the benefits of working together."

Peter Ingram, Chairman of Trustees

"We aim to provide a customer focussed service, which is why our Enterprise Centre and the conference and education activities have gone from strength to strength."

Peter Burford, Director of Estates, Administration and Communications

"The 'wow' factor of seeing the 30 metre long heritage paper machine in operation can't be underestimated. Once people come here, they want to learn more and get involved with the project."

John Watson, Director of Operations

What did it achieve?

The initial aims and objectives to preserve one paper mill site grew to two sites. The growth of the project and its achievements has been rapid.

"I think the project has been very successful," says Jacky Bennett. "We have had our share of difficulties, but we're still here and achieving our goals.

The project attracts 3000 visitors a year currently, but hopes to eventually attract 50,000 people per annum.

Applications to the Heritage Lottery Fund have been submitted, to refurbish currently unusable space at Frogmore Mill, creating a larger visitor area.

A publicity campaign is planned via the 200 plus schools already involved in the paper recycling scheme, and through the charity's website. The Trust is also looking at radio, TV and newspaper publicity and a regular newsletter (hard copy and on-line). The project has attracted celebrity support, so a series of events with special guest speakers is also planned.

Visitors get the chance to visit the working paper mill, try their hand at making handmade paper and even make paper objects, with the help of the project's volunteers.

The operational paper mill currently manufactures 300 tonnes of paper a year – but needs to make 1000 tonnes annually to properly break even.

Comments from people involved

"We're very good at making partnerships," says Jacky. "I think that's been one of the secrets of our success."

Learning Points

Although a number of paper industry companies supported the project from the outset, the project team had hoped for wider support from the industry. The sector has been slow to come on board, which surprised the project team.

"Many of the people involved in the project had links with the paper and print industry, and didn't anticipate an industry reluctance to support the project. However, the UK paper industry is going through tough times, and spare cash is difficult to find," said Jacky Bennett.

"This was disappointing. But slowly they came on board. That said, could do with more financial support from the industry."

She added: "Local people were very supportive, as were the local council and public sector bodies. We've also received help from neighbouring property developers building around our sites."

To win support, Jacky has promoted an open door policy. "We bring people here and tell them what we're doing. Our openness seems to win people over."

Other learning points for the Paper Trail included:

- making time for planning. Prepare for contingencies at the start of your project.
- don't assume that people will support you. The project assumed that the paper industry would be the first to back the initiative. In fact, the sector was much harder to bring on board than the local community.
- spend time networking and nurturing partnerships.

Evaluation

With part of the project funded by public money – through groups like EEDA – the project is required to evaluate the success of particular initiatives on site. "We've normally improved on our targets," says Jacky Bennett.

"At the end of every financial year we also report on our progress and look at learning lessons that will help us in future years. We've had brilliant feedback from the schools

and groups from the local community who have visited the project. Once they've been, they're hooked!

"We have had several good write-ups in local and regional papers and magazines, and items on both local and BBC radio programmes. We've also had coverage via Teachers' TV and a documentary for Discovery Channel about our 'Ellie Poo Paper'!" She added: "We've had articles in Source, EEDA's regional magazine, Limited Edition for Hertfordshire, Paper and Print Focus, The Green Parent Magazine, and Primary Times in Hertfordshire."

Jackie added that the project had extensive media coverage when it was able to react quickly and provide office accommodation to support Colbree Engineering, displaced after its offices were devastated by the Buncefield oil depot explosions.

Further Information

Visit The Paper Trail website at www.thepapertrail.org.uk, or visit the Paper Trail yourself. The nearest train station is Apsley.

Contact details

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