



Association of
Independent
Museums

AIM Bulletin

August 2024

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Welcome to AIM Bulletin!

Ensuring independents are understood

By the time you read this, the new Westminster Government will have been in place for about a month. As I write, they have been in for just a few days and already the announcements and new policies are coming quickly, so I can only imagine what you will have already seen.

Over the last few months AIM has been talking to members about what a new Westminster Government means for your work and for ours. Our joint response, alongside other sector bodies, to the main parties' manifestos was one of our most popular news stories in June, and a hastily convened session at National Conference following the election announcement was equally well-received.

At the time of writing, we are waiting to hear about the arts and heritage ministerial portfolio. When a new minister is in place (or ministers if the briefs are split) we will write to them, alongside the new Secretary of State Lisa Nandy, to welcome them into their roles and tell them about the world of independent museums and we'll include emerging highlights from the economic impact study many of you kindly fed in to earlier this year.

We are keen to do this early. New ministers in the Department for Culture, Media and Sport get an early introduction to the national museums, since the department has a sponsorship responsibility for them. And this year many voices across the sector (including ours in support) will be asking them to urgently consider the funding crisis in local authority museums. It is AIM's job, on your behalf, to ensure independent museums are not forgotten or deprioritised.

Many independent museums are rightfully proud of being self-supporting and enjoy the freedom of not relying on public funding. But this does not mean you do not need support in other ways, nor that you do not want recognition for the important role you play in your communities and in caring for your collections.

We will ask new ministers to meet AIM so we can ensure independent museums, especially small museums which often get less political attention, are understood and appreciated.

We will share the three advocacy goals we put to members previously: for public bodies to 'fund the fundamentals' including core collections work and keeping buildings standing; for policy that works for all museums, from the smallest to the largest, from the sponsored to the independent; and for a supportive business environment for independent museums that are run as effective charitable businesses.

For our members in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland the new Government in London has less relevance to your museum and heritage work, given these are fully devolved matters. There have been positive signs of an improving relationship between the new administration and the existing governments of the home nations, and we can hope for more shared goals in the future when it comes to arts and culture, particularly in relation to England catching up to the objectives in Wales of making anti-racist museums and Scotland of addressing empire and museums.

AIM and sector colleagues will continue to communicate with all our governments on both the shared and national challenges.

While we work at a national level, we urge our members to advocate locally too – to invite your new or returning MP to your museum and show them what you're doing and why independent museums are a force in our sector and across the country. The summer is a wonderful time to do this, hopefully with lots of busy museums to bring them to. Communities that care about museums means MPs who care about museums which means a Government that cares about museums.

The new Government is talking about getting to work on a decade of national renewal – let's give them some work to do on museums.

Lisa Ollerhead, AIM Director

Front cover

Situated within the Cairngorms National Park, the Highland Folk Museum in Newtonmore is mainland Britain's first open-air museum, showcasing 300 years of Highland history across its 80-acre site. With over 30 historic buildings to explore, costumed interpreters, regular events and activities, visitors step back in time to learn about the life and work of Highlanders. History is brought to life with native Soay sheep, the aroma of peat fires and sounds of Gaelic waulking songs. See our profile on page 19.





Sell out success!

AIM Conference 2024 inspires and delights

Over 270 delegates gathered at Black Country Living Museum for this year's conference.

The unseasonal weather didn't dampen the enthusiasm of those coming together in Dudley for AIM's latest conference. Together 272 delegates explored how museums bring people together, in ever-more innovative ways, uncovering untold stories, bolstering their local economies and infusing their communities with strength and vibrancy.

According to the attendee survey circulated immediately after the event, 98% of attendees said conference met or exceeded expectations, and 97% saw it as good or excellent value for money. Feedback scored the keynotes, networking and Thursday social as the top three highlights. Conference also saw a number of new faces with 32% welcomed for the first time.

The survey highlighted the continued popularity of AIM's signature mix of practical and informative sessions and the distinct friendliness of the event. It also provided useful feedback for the future too, particularly on how scheduling can provide an even greater focus on key projects and key issues, and ideas on how to get more from panel sessions. As well as the effort of AIM staff, many attendees praised the BCLM venue team for their fantastic approach to hosting the conference, setting the bar high for those that follow!

Many took to social media channels to share their feedback during and after a busy few days.



Nicola Power highlighted

“... an important and very interesting panel discussion about political advocacy for culture and heritage in the year ahead – Hannah Fox’s (Bowes Museum) words about framing heritage with ‘a solutions-focused mindset’ was such a positive highlight of the day and steer for us all...”

AIM Trustee and freelance consultant Laura Crossley said

“... I’m reminded of the magic that happens when we get together to share, learn from each other and collaborate, and the importance of leaving space for learning, thinking, imagining and dreaming in our otherwise packed schedules. It can be too easy to feel inspired at a conference and then get bogged down in the to-do list as soon as you return to work. I’m making myself a promise to mark time in my calendar for learning, thinking, imagining and dreaming... Can’t wait until next year, AIM!”

Rhi Edwards said

“Some really thought-provoking discussions on the best ways to engage current communities and entice new audiences to our museums. Great to see a few familiar faces and make some new connections too!”

Bright Culture consultancy was one of many who highlighted the difference our Host Sponsors made

“... one of the stars of the show was definitely the host, the Black Country Living Museum. Running throughout the site is a focus on fun and enjoyment, alongside rich interpretation, brought to life by a fantastic team of costumed interpreters. The site welcomed the conference and put on a fantastic evening event – and yes, the Bright Culture consultants did enjoy the rides and stalls in Carter’s Funfair, particularly the Ghost Train!”

After the event Sarah Clarke tweeted

“I’ve had a really inspiring and helpful couple of days... Thank you so much for a fab line-up, and a massive thank you to every single person at Black Country Living Museum for making it happen so smoothly. Lovely venue, great staff, bostin food and beer!”



AIM Conference 2025 Speaker Callout

Have you got something great to share? We are looking for proposals for breakout sessions for next year’s AIM Conference at The Mary Rose Museum and Portsmouth Historic Dockyard on 18 and 19 June 2025.

Always a popular part of the conference schedule, breakout sessions run for 45 minutes and focus on pragmatic advice and ideas from people who have ‘been through it’. We have a number of slots reserved for programming by you, the AIM community reflecting on the following broad themes:

- **Taking care of people** (leadership, volunteer management, and staffing.)
- **Futureproofing your organisation** (effective governance, innovative operating models, driving income.)
- **Managing buildings on a budget** (maintenance; greening; displays; refurbishments; capital works.)
- **Stories of change** (sharing under-represented and under-heard histories; innovative use of outdoor space; industrial heritage and social change; decolonisation; supporting communities with programming.)
- **Museums and the climate crisis** (working more sustainably; nature recovery and biodiversity projects; environment action plans; providing education and research; telling climate stories; adapting to climate change-driven challenges.)

Find help on your submission and more at www.aim-museums.co.uk/aim-conference-2025-speaker-call-out



Our new Impact Report highlights a year marked by strategic thinking and unwavering support for members.

Highlighting Impact

AIM releases new Impact Report

Available alongside the Annual Report and Accounts, the Impact Report provides a comprehensive overview of the organisation's activities and achievements in 2023, and future directions.

2023 was a significant year, particularly with the commencement of the new Arts Council England National Portfolio with AIM as an Investment Principles Support Organisation in April. This core funding provides continued stability, allowing AIM to focus on strategic growth. Through productive away days with the team and board, AIM has set its future sights on further strengthening partnerships, enhancing community engagement, and amplifying its voice in the sector.

Grant Making: Supporting Museums Across the UK

A cornerstone of AIM's work in 2023 was its robust grant-making programme. The report details the launch of the Connected Communities scheme, supported by DCMS Know Your Neighbourhood Fund through Arts Council England. This

initiative aims to improve community connections through high-quality volunteering opportunities all focused on reducing loneliness.

Other significant grant programmes included:

New Stories, New Audiences: Now in its third and final year, this National Lottery Heritage Fund initiative continues to support museums in engaging with new audiences.

Re:collections: Funded by the Welsh Government Anti-Racist Wales Culture, Heritage and Sport Fund, this scheme provides bespoke consultancy, mentoring, workshops, grants, and opportunities for sharing experiences.

AIM Arts Scholars Brighter Day Grants: These grants were developed to help museums recover from the ongoing effects of the pandemic.

Research and Advocacy

Research remains a key focus for AIM, driving innovation and strategic thinking.

The Impact report highlights two major research projects disseminated in 2023

Emotional Engagement: a study on how museums can connect emotionally with their audiences, co-commissioned with Art Fund.

Admissions Pricing Policy: an update on AIM's 2016 admissions research, providing practical insights for museums on setting charging policies.

These research efforts not only inform AIM's advocacy work but also provide valuable resources for museums across the UK.

Events and Community Building

The AIM National Conference remains a highlight of the year, with the 2023 event in Edinburgh bringing together over 200 delegates and speakers. The conference themes included harnessing the passion of independent museums, valuing wellbeing, balancing advocacy with practical support, and the role of creativity in sustainability.

AIM's Hallmarks at Home online events continued to attract strong attendance, providing a valuable platform for members to share best practices and engage in sector-wide discussions. The new Heritage Trustees 101 series also launched in 2023, offering both in-person and online sessions to support new and aspiring trustees.

Governance and Leadership

The report underscores the importance of strong governance and leadership within AIM. In 2023, we welcomed four new trustees, bringing fresh perspectives and experiences to the AIM board which continues to drive AIM's mission with dedication and expertise.

Read the report at aim-museums.co.uk/about-aim/aim-annual-reports

AIM
awarded 114
grants worth
£730,573
in 2023.





17 projects were awarded funding in the recent spring round of the AIM Pilgrim Trust Collection Care and Conservation grants.

AIM Pilgrim Trust

Collection Care and Conservation Awards Spring 2024

Ongoing demand for funding for collection care and conservation projects is clear – this year AIM members submitted 54 grant applications, a 20% rise on last year. In response to demand, and to further streamline the grant award process, applications were considered at two meetings. At the first, application scores were combined and considered and the audit grants awarded. A shortlist

was also drawn up for the collection care and remedial conservation grants. 14 applicants were then invited to present to the panel a week later. This new approach was welcomed by all and allowed applicants to convey their enthusiasm for their respective sites and projects. It also enabled the panel to seek clarifications to ensure robust decisions were made.

Headline Stats

Audit Grants (£10,000)

17 applications received; 7 organisations awarded funding to conduct a collections care audit with an accredited conservator, a 41% success rate.

Collection Care Grants (£28,500)

16 applications received, seeking £84,000.35 of funding.

7 applications were funded using the full budget of £28,500, a 44% success rate.

Remedial Conservation Grants (£25,000)

21 applications were received requesting £99,514.40, four times the amount available to award.

3 applications were funded, with £16,870.00 committed, a 14% success rate. The underspend of £8,130 will be rolled into the autumn round.

Following the two panel meetings, £53,770 was awarded to 17 members, a 31.5% success rate.

Pilgrim Trust Audit Grants Awarded Spring 2024 (£8,400)

- 78 Dergate
- Kent Archaeology Society
- Woodchurch Village Life Museum
- Brickworks Museum
- Tetbury Police Museum & Courtroom
- Saddleworth Museum
- LUX

Pilgrim Trust Remedial Conservation Grants Awarded Spring 2024 (£16,870)

- The Highlanders Museum £6,000
Conserving 'Incident at Arras' by Faith Kathleen Sage.
- Corinium £6,000
Project Spatha: Conservation of two Roman swords and a copper-alloy bowl.
- Robert Burns Ellisland Farm £4,870
The Poet's Flute: Conservation of Robert Burn's Flute.

Pilgrim Trust Collection Care Grants Awarded Spring 2024 (£28,500)

- Dorset Museum & Art Gallery £4,420
Safeguarding archaeological metalwork collections at Dorset Museum & Art Gallery.
- Timespan £8,310
Re-fitting the Timespan storage facilities.
- The Gurkha Museum £5,125
Treatment of Gurkha Museum collections storage for moth infestation.
- Quaker Tapestry Museum £4,270
Quaker Tapestry Museum textile collection repack and relocation project.
- Kingston Museum £600
Refresh! A project to prepare a collections care cleaning loan box.
- Cumbria's Museum of Military Life £3,275
Back to Basics - Collections Care at CMOML.
- Coldharbour Mill £2,500
Taking Collections Care to the next level!

If you would like to apply for funding in the autumn round, please contact Fiona our Grants Administrator fiona.woolley@aim-museums.co.uk to book an informal 1-2-1 discussion.

News in brief

New Secretary of State announced

Lisa Nandy has been appointed as Secretary of State for Culture, Media, and Sport by Prime Minister Keir Starmer. Serving as the Member of Parliament for Wigan since 2010, Nandy was the Shadow Cabinet Minister for International Development and previously held roles in housing, foreign affairs, and energy and climate change.



Nandy succeeds former Conservative MP Lucy Frazer, who lost her seat in the July 4 general election. Thangham Debbonaire, the Shadow Culture Secretary, was also unseated.

Lisa Ollerhead, Director of the Association of Independent Museums said

“A new administration is an important opportunity for AIM to advocate on our members’ behalf; we will be writing to new ministers to introduce the world of independent museums and their impact on communities and places around the country.

We encourage all museums to welcome their newly or re-elected representatives and share their valuable contributions and needs for support.”

Open Ended Books publishes its first dementia-friendly title

Bewick Tales: Stories from the Life and Work of Thomas Bewick by Sarah Lawrance and designed by Wendy Lewis is the first

publication from Open Ended Books, a new publishing initiative from creative ageing charity Equal Arts.

Equal Arts brings creative opportunities to older people and those living with dementia. During the past six months, together with author and curator Sarah Lawrance, Equal Arts has consulted people living with dementia to develop the accessible layout, design and narrative for *Bewick Tales*.

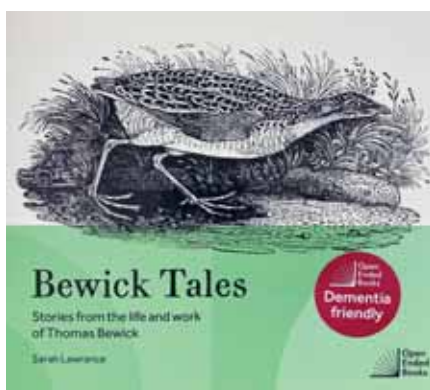
Gill Taylor, from East Durham, received a dementia diagnosis in 2012 and took part in the process. She said: “With dementia we lose our short-term memory, but you don’t lose your intelligence, that desire to learn and stretch yourself doesn’t go away.

“People living with dementia can do so much and books like *Bewick Tales* can support people to continue reading for pleasure and provide the opportunity to continue learning.”

The book draws on the life and work of world-famous artist and engraver Thomas Bewick (1753-1828) whose influence can be found across Newcastle in street names, buildings and businesses.

Inspired by visits to Bewick’s birthplace of Cherryburn, Northumberland and his detailed wood engraved illustrations, the book features a story on every spread.

[More information at information@equalarts.org.uk](mailto:information@equalarts.org.uk)



Jerwood Art Commissions

A new partnership between Art Fund and Jerwood Foundation, *Jerwood Art Fund Commissions* will support museums and galleries to commission artists to make work of exceptional innovation and quality – furthering the artist’s development at a pivotal stage in their careers, while enriching public collections through new contemporary art.

The grant offers two commissions of £70,000 – £100,000 per year over the coming three years, covering the full costs of delivering and presenting the commissions with each partner museum.

Applications close on Friday 1 November 2024.

www.artfund.org/professional/get-funding/programmes/jerwood-art-fund-commissions

IAASF 2024 Conference – free places available

‘Developing Resilience for the Protection of Cultural Venues’ 16th – 17th October 2024, Redworth Hall Hotel, County Durham

The International Arts and Antiquities Security Forum (IAASF) is an organisation dedicated to supporting and educating a global audience on protecting arts, antiquities, and cultural heritage.

This year’s conference explores the development of resilience in the cultural sector and how it impacts infrastructure, transportation, training, operational protection, protesters, and other activities.

Five free spaces exclusive to AIM members only are available using the exclusive discount code **AIMIAASF2024**

www.tridentmanor.com/iaasf/iaasf-2024-uk-conference



Museums and Galleries Scotland update

Jacob O’Sullivan, Museum Development Manager – Collections & Interpretation, reflects on how Intangible Cultural Heritage can be a route for museums to work with communities.

I was pleased to speak at the recent AIM Conference, running a workshop on how museums can use Intangible Cultural Heritage (ICH) to work closely with communities, including those which are systematically marginalised or excluded. The session emphasised the opportunity for museums to position themselves as spaces for community use and self-defined expression.

Attendees were invited to consider a community to which they identified as belonging, but which was not connected to their working lives. Examples were varied, encompassing folk who

Disability history revealed

A new disability history trail at Museum of Liverpool explores the fascinating stories of the city’s disability heritage, developed as part of the Curating for Change programme.

The community trail has been developed as part of Curating for Change, a workforce development programme placing D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent curators in museums across England, challenging their underrepresentation in the sector. The project has been delivered by Screen South’s Accentuate programme and funded by the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England and Art Fund.

With disabled people constituting around 17.8% of the population of England and Wales as of 2021, and

Liverpool having one of the highest proportions of people living with a disability in the region, this new trail has a crucial role in reflecting the lives and stories of the city.

Iris Sirendi, Curating for Change fellow, works with members of Liverpool’s disabled community to uncover fascinating stories that span decades of Liverpool lives. Alongside the trail is a new online hub full of collections, stories and what’s on information.

Iris said: “Museum of Liverpool explores the people and stories of our amazing city. The stories of the local

identified as being members of an LGBTQI+ community, communities of the global majority, communities of fans of Queen of the South FC, and communities of show Poultry Club fanciers, amongst many others. I then asked attendees to identify an ICH element practiced by their own self-identified community. The reasoning behind this was to demonstrate the ubiquitousness of ICH, the fact that almost every ‘community’ – however defined – practices ICH in some way. Through supporting and celebrating ICH, museums can engage, represent, and collaborate with any community they aim to reach.

UNESCO categorises ICH into the following ‘domains’: oral traditions and expressions, including language as a vehicle of the intangible cultural heritage; performing arts; social practices, rituals and festive events; knowledge and practices concerning nature and the universe; traditional craftsmanship.

Engaging with and supporting these domains is nothing new for museums. At the wonderful Black Country Living Museum (where the conference was hosted) on a walk around the museum, I witnessed traditional building skills, Black Country dialect use, tasted locally brewed scrumpy (more of this in museums please!) and learnt about methodism in the Black Country, each of which clearly aligns to an ICH domain.

This year, the UK Government has ratified the 2003 Convention for the Safeguarding of Intangible Cultural Heritage, becoming the 183rd country to do so. This provides an unparalleled opportunity for museums to be at the forefront of safeguarding and supporting the ICH which is practiced by the various communities they exist within.

Museums, as genuine public resources, are the ideal organisations to collect and safeguard ICH with their communities and remain relevant to and treasured by whichever communities they exist to serve. Ratification of the 2003 Convention has arguably put increased urgency on this.

Museums can engage with the convention to demonstrate to policy makers and funders their importance in safeguarding ICH as community resources.

In the workshop, I asked attendees to consider ICH practiced by their identified communities, and then asked as representatives for their community, what they would like to see from their local museum to support and safeguard their ICH. We often approach working with communities from the point of view of the museum. Yet through recognising that we’re all ICH practitioners to some degree, asking ourselves what support we would need to work with our local museums is a useful exercise in ensuring the work of our museums remains useful and relevant.

Feedback highlighted the need for museums to be experimental in their approaches to working with and supporting community-driven ICH, as well as thinking openly about the nature of the communities with whom they work. The ability for museums to genuinely and supportively endorse intercultural and intergenerational sharing and interaction was highlighted. As was the need for museums to share their knowledge with ICH practitioner communities, including access to supportive object collections.

Collecting, interpreting, exhibiting and researching ICH is nothing new for museums, however, ratification of the convention offers new opportunities. In Scotland, we have always referred to ‘ICH in Scotland’ rather than ‘Scottish ICH’. This helps to ensure that ICH support is inclusive, and that communities who may have been excluded due to historic collecting practices are able to be better represented through collecting and supporting their ICH.

Let’s support our communities to celebrate and safeguard their intangible cultural heritage through the unique cultural resources which museums embody.

Pictured: Govanhill Food Stories event as part of Year of Stories 2022.

D/deaf, disabled and neurodivergent people are an important part of this, and our new trail aims to highlight and celebrate them.

“During my time at Museum of Liverpool it has been fascinating to see how elements of Liverpool’s disability history can be found in all sorts of places. From disability history narratives that span archaeology, sport, industry, activism, empowerment and self-advocacy, these are the kind of stories we are proud to highlight with this new community trail.”

Iris has also worked alongside communities to highlight already existing sensory content across Museum of Liverpool, aimed at improving the experience for visitors

with sensory needs, to develop a tactile and sensory gallery trail. The gallery trail offers both an audio-described and a digital guide, adding a new layer of interpretation and enhancing the experience for visitors looking to explore the museum through touch.

Visitors can listen to or read the descriptions of many objects on display in the museum using a nearby QR code, and objects are marked with a distinct icon and label. British Sign Language interpretation is available for each object and a print copy of the trail is also available in the museum, as well as images, text and BSL interpretation for all exhibits.

www.liverpoolmuseums.org.uk/disability-history-hub



Image by Kevin Crowley

Director of The Cartoon Museum, Joe Sullivan, on their work to drive new visitors and widen access to the collection.

Democratising access to The Cartoon Museum

I joined The Cartoon Museum to democratise access to an artform that we see every single day and that is very simple to utilise for sharing stories and ideas – and yet is hugely underrated.

How often have you heard comics derided as ‘for kids’ despite the all-conquering success of the Marvel Cinematic Universe? Comics are undergoing a transformative groundswell of public interest and are proven to reach and encourage participation from marginalised communities better than other art forms.

Political cartoons, a native British artform due to our free press laws, hold up a satirical lens through which to view society and hold the powerful to account.

In short, cartoons and comics are serious business and, as the only museum in the UK dedicated to telling their stories, it’s up to us to make sure everyone has an opportunity to pick up a pencil and start drawing.

To do this we needed to ensure that people could see themselves represented in the museum. So we set targets that would diversify the staff, trustees and collection.

Recruitment was a key early change, removing barriers such as requiring a degree and advertising in non-arts spaces. This brought a wider array of candidates to interview, leading to candidates from the care and retail sectors joining the team.



We sought to make our volunteer team more representative of our community, so we prioritised local recruitment channels. This has transformed our team from predominantly retirees to a mixed cohort with various ages and backgrounds, and in the process involved them in a greater variety of activities, affording them more responsibility.

We actively sought out artists who were from communities that were under-represented in our collection – particularly young people, women and black and minority ethnic artists.

We invited them to collaborate with us via targeted asks and public open calls. Some of this had a visible and traceable effect. For example, commissioning Sarah Akinterinwa for an exhibition enabled us to make connections for her with previously unresponsive commissioners for The Guardian, where she had her first cartoon published in February 2023. Open calls for an



exhibition on Boris Johnson saw a local rapper and a Young Cartoonist Awards runner-up sharing gallery space with some of the most legendary names in British cartooning.

We also looked at audiences that would benefit the most from what we do best, and built an offer for neurodiverse people, as comic strips are used in classrooms to model real-life situations. We started an autistic artist residency programme, designed an SEN-specific workshop, and made gallery interventions such as sensory backpacks. Due to this work our visitor profile has noticeably changed, particularly in age, which has proved essential post-COVID.

The key to undertaking this work was gaining buy-in from our fantastic trustees and staff, who were open to difficult conversations and new ways of doing things. We were delighted to have this recognised when our autism work won Best Community Programme at the Museum & Heritage Awards 2023, demonstrating how a small team with limited resources can make simple changes that have a big impact.

www.cartoonmuseum.org

The Next Horizon?

The practicalities of turnaround and closure

Hilary Barnard and Ruth Lesirge explore the steps involved in delivering an effective turnaround or taking the difficult decision to close your organisation.

Several factors have combined to make this publication timely – the cost of living crisis, the slow recovery in visitor numbers after the pandemic, pressure on Local Authority funding and changes in staffing structures.

The possibility of closure is not a comfortable topic, but there is a need for realism and assessing whether recovery and turnaround can be grasped. Equally, realism requires that museum boards and their leaders understand the point at which closure must be considered.

We suspect that it will be a guide that you dip into rather than read cover to cover. It is designed to give museum leaders and museum Trustees practical insights to key concerns. The guide offers you charts and frameworks to use to assess your museum's position and dilemmas. As ever, there is no one solution that will fit every independent museum, so we also indicate the choices that your museum may have to make.

Throughout the guide, we have assumed that Trustees and museum leaders have a shared understanding that the museum is at risk and are committed to working in partnership in the best interests of those to whom the museum matters.

This publication has as much to say about implementing a turnaround as facing closure. Turnaround means changes that result in a promptly executed significant improvement in your museum's operations whilst continuing to deliver public benefit. It embraces short term survival but should be more than that. Turnaround is concerned to put your museum on a much more sustainable basis for the medium and long term. For that reason, turnaround must include consideration of merger or different forms of collaboration that offer a real possibility of a secure future.

In the guide we indicate how you can test the ground for turnaround, form an objective picture of the museum's assets (tangible and intangible), and consider merger and partnership development opportunities. We also help you to address and understand the pressures of making turnaround work and how to develop an effective plan for implementation.

In the guide, we follow the Museum Association definition of closure:

the ceasing of operations at an entire museum site. This is likely to include:

- *the closure of a museum site to the public, with no regular opening hours*
- *limited or no public access to the collections and museum building*
- *disposal, mothballing or transfer of the museum collection*
- *staff redundancies and the loss of volunteers.*

There is no avoiding the fact that some museums may have reached the end of

their natural life and may need to close. The guide therefore has sections on careful preparation and decision making for closure and a suggested organisational plan for implementing closure. There is a template to help you consider the finance, building and land issues which may dominate the thinking of some museums.

The guide addresses the very important issue of assuring the future of the collections as well as the need to attend to the staffing and volunteer involvement in planning to close. Though it is hard, the ambition in all cases should be to close well. The best closures manage to mark the achievement of the museum and the contribution it has made to visitors, local communities and the public benefit more generally. The last substantive section helps you think about the matter of insolvency and administration.

We recognise that consideration of closure or turnaround may be daunting. The guide therefore provides five detailed museum case studies illustrating different approaches to the challenges.

Finally, you will find a list of resources which may further support your thinking and decision making.

Hilary Barnard and Ruth Lesirge are also the co-authors of Successful Museum Governance (AIM 2020) and the founders of HBRL Consulting.

Sign up to the guide's launch webinar to find out more at aim-museums.co.uk/dates-for-your-diary

Read the guide at aim-museums.co.uk/helping-organisations/resources

AIM administers grants including AIM Arts Scholars Brighter Day Grant funded by the Worshipful Company of Arts Scholars Charitable Trust and AIM's Conservation and Collections Care and Collection Audit Schemes, funded by the Pilgrim Trust.

AIM grants case studies

AIM Pilgrim Trust Conservation Grant

Glencoe Folk Museum

£5,000

The museum is sincerely grateful for AIM and the Pilgrim Trust's support of the conservation of its 'Funeral Boat', once used by local Clans to transport bodies to the burial island, Eilean Munde, in Loch Leven.

Though a relatively small rowing boat, the museum lacked the financial resources for its conservation without external support. AIM's initial grant, following a straightforward and well-supported application process, has been invaluable in unlocking additional match-funding to begin work with one of the UK's leading historic vessel conservators – transforming an artefact which had significantly deteriorated in open storage into a centrepiece exhibit and giving the museum a wealth of new information about the boat's construction and likely operation.

AIM's support is allowing the museum to realise a long-term conservation goal – the protection and return to public display of a unique survivor of local burial practices, providing a tangible link with an important local custom and telling an evocative story of Clan traditions, social history, and local folklore.

The 'Funeral Boat' will be displayed in a new-build climate-controlled exhibition hall, constructed through its wider capital redevelopment project (opening Summer 2025). Here, for the first time, the boat will be properly appreciated by visitors and protected for future generations.

David Rounce, Project Director



Top: Conservation of the funeral boat at Glencoe Folk Museum.
Above: The team at Glencoe Folk Museum with the newly conserved funeral boat.

Museum in the Park £7,500

Our grant has enabled the cleaning, conservation, preparation, and packaging of 147 newly excavated fossilized marine vertebrate specimens from the Early Jurassic period, including several exceptionally well-preserved fish. Being able to engage a specialist conservator who had taken part in the excavation was beneficial as they had already accumulated a great deal of knowledge about the specimens, how they were excavated and the geological importance of the find spot.

This is a particularly significant collection as it is rare to find so many marine fossils at an inland location and the rock layer itself had not been exposed for over 100 years. There has been great interest in the discovery from the public and academics alike and stabilisation of the specimens now means that we can provide access for researchers and plan a public display.

The significance of the fossils

This collection of fossils extends our geological collection specifically from the Stroud District back some 17 million years – previously we have only collected mid-Jurassic material from our immediate locality, whereas this site – just three miles from the museum – offers fossils from the early Jurassic. This provides us with a unique opportunity to compare life in the area over an extended period of time.

The Court Farm site from which the fossils were recovered exposes a



Fish fossil, part of the newly excavated collection at Museum in the Park.

unique section representative of the dramatic paleoenvironmental and ecological changes that occurred in South-West England in the Whitby Mudstone Formation. It is also the only current in situ exposure in the UK of a geological horizon (the Strawberry Bank Lagerstätte) that was internationally famous for the fossils it produced in the 19th Century.

There is significant local and international interest in the finds from this site – the open day in October 2022 attracted some 800 visitors, and the museum has received many subsequent enquiries as to when the fossils will be available to view from both interested local amateurs, and also well-respected

palaeontologists wanting to study, and publish, the finds.

The press release issued by the University of Manchester after the dig attracted worldwide attention and generated interviews on BBC World Service, as well as local news channels and other media outlets. We have already had visitors from Australia asking to see finds from the site, and local schools asking about the possibility of creating activity on the topic of Rocks and Fossils – these new finds would form the core of any such package due to their excellent provenance and the quality of the specimens themselves.

Zoë Wilcox

Documentation & Collections Officer

AIM Pilgrim Trust Collections Care Audit

Clyne Heritage Society, Brora £1,584

We undertook an AIM Pilgrim Trust-funded conservation audit for our collection, stored in its various locations, all of which were confirmed as being unsuitable for its long-term sustainability. Since the audit was carried out, we have been awarded our final funding for a £5m

redevelopment of a former parish school as our new museum and heritage centre, which will incorporate all the recommendations made by the auditor. The condition of some of our items was highlighted by the auditor and this will lead to us creating a conservation plan, before applying to AIM for a collections care or remedial conservation grant.

Nick Lindsay, Chair



Glenn Foster

Sounds great!

Funded by The National Lottery Heritage Fund and the Mayor of London and part of a flagship project for Croydon's year as London Borough of Culture in 2023, the Museum of Croydon celebrated the borough's rich music heritage with a new trail, app, exhibition and events programme.

Croydon is a birthplace of pioneering musicians and musical genres. Samuel Coleridge-Taylor, the celebrated British composer of mixed-race heritage, lived and worked in the borough whilst folk singer Ralph McTell's famous song 'Streets

of London' mentions a market which McTell based on Surrey Street. More recently, dubstep was born from Croydon's record labels, whilst students at the BRIT School of Performing Arts, including multi-award-winning alumni Raye, develop their craft in the borough. Croydon's iconic and infamous venues have attracted world class talent to play there including Duke Ellington, Dave Brubeck, Jimi Hendrix, The Beatles, The Who, Roxy Music and David Bowie. Meanwhile Croydon School of Art alumni include Malcolm McClaren and Ray Davies.

The project included a Music Heritage Trail highlighting local artists, venues, and locations with historic or current musical significance. A new mural, "Croydon Symphony", was created at The Queen's Gardens, the starting point for a walking trail of pavement mounted celebratory bronze plaques, alongside a digital platform to enable people to discover the stories, sights and sounds of Croydon as they follow the trail.

The Croydon Music Heritage Trail app can automatically

Is your museum prepared for an emergency?

By definition, emergencies are unexpected, serious and require immediate action. That's why it's important to prepare for them, minimising the impact they have. New Associate Supplier Volta Compliance look at some of the most critical emergencies to be aware of and the best approach to prepare your museum.

Potential emergencies for businesses

While risks can vary depending on specific sectors, some threats are simply universal. Two of the most prominent in that respect are fire and power loss.

Fire

There are a wide range of issues that can cause a fire, from a discarded cigarette to a faulty electrical appliance. In short, no business is immune. That's why it's important to have the right equipment in place in case of a fire.

You need the right kind of smoke detectors to identify the fire in the first place. Ionisation smoke alarms are required for flaming fires, while photoelectric are a better fit for smouldering fires. You can also invest in heat alarms which detect changes in

display location specific information on users' smart phones, making links between outside attractions and exhibits inside the Museum of Croydon, encouraging further exploration. The triggers for the information displays are GPS (externally) or Bluetooth (internally), enabling users to access content without needing an internet connection after initially downloading the app.

The first phase of the app's development was built on community engagement and a public vote for the most important sites to represent with bronze plaques. Following the launch, a programme of guided tours and promotions was initiated to raise awareness and gather user-generated feedback.

Content on the app goes beyond what can be trawled generally from the internet and includes archive footage, websites, images and oral histories gathered through community engagement and contemporary collecting undertaken by the museum team. This engagement and development informed the exhibition **Rewind: This Is Croydon's music**, which opened in the Museum of Croydon in Feb 2024.

Community collecting of oral histories is ongoing and the museum's aim is to continue developing the content in the app through further research and engagement and to link to different heritage stories in Croydon.

Additional features could also include links to local events and businesses to promote Croydon's wider culture and leisure offer at relevant points on the trail and practical information such as transport services, parking, weather updates, traffic bulletins etc.

The project was supported by some of Croydon's famous musicians including Captain Sensible, bassist and guitarist with The Damned, the family of reggae legend Desmond Dekker and leading rapper and songwriter Nadia Rose, who's stories can be found in the oral histories on the app and in the Rewind exhibition.

Nadia said of the trail:

"I'm an incredibly proud Croydoner and a foodie so I decided to have my plaque located in front of a hometown favourite, Tasty Jerk, just

heat, for environments like kitchens where high heat and smoke are not always dangerous.

Museums also need an effective fire alarm system to alert staff to the danger of a fire. Crucially, all of this equipment needs to be fully functional whenever it's called upon.

Power loss

Another potential threat to museums comes from power loss. This could be down to a power cut affecting the local area, a leak which triggers a power outage or just a fault within your electrical system.

In this case, emergency lighting is the number one priority. Above all else, staff need to be able to find their way out of the potentially unsafe building. Emergency lighting achieves this, clearly signposting the exit routes and illuminating the way for a safe exit.

The importance of a proactive approach

Whether it's a fire or power cut, emergencies can strike at any time. That's why it's important to be proactive rather than reactive.

It's no use finding out your emergency lights don't work when the power has gone out. Or realising your fire alarms didn't sound after a fire has ripped through the building.

The solution is to have emergency equipment regularly tested. A fire risk assessment should be carried out on your museum annually, with fire alarms serviced to make sure everything is ready for action.

Similarly, emergency lighting should be tested at least once a year, including a three-hour duration test. Shorter monthly tests can also be

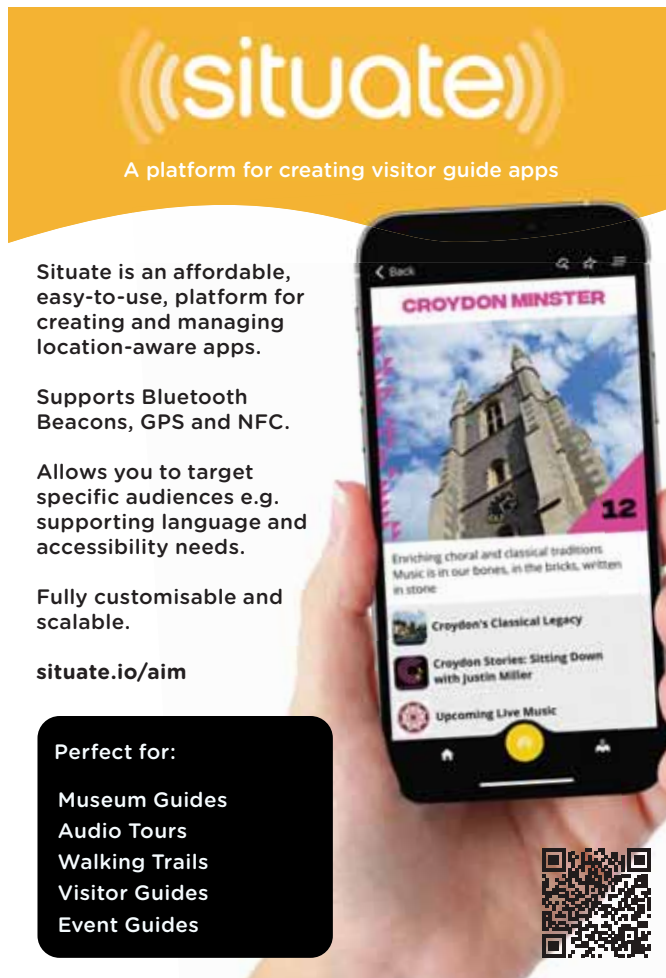
performed, where power is turned off to activate emergency lighting, enabling a visual check for any issues.

On top of these checks, you can minimise the risk of an emergency by having your electric system checked and appliances PAT tested, which will minimise the risk of fires or power cuts as a result of faulty electrics.

Stay prepared at all times

Volta Compliance offers a range of vital electrical services to keep you prepared for an emergency. Our fully certified electricians can provide regular fire alarm servicing and emergency lighting testing as well as EICR reports and PAT testing for compliance and peace of mind.

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down the street from Crystal Palace Football Club where my dad took me to watch my first match."

Further detail on the development of the project and the app can be found in this case study:

Pictured left: Multi-instrumentalist and composer Shri Sriram visiting the Rewind: This Is Croydon's Music exhibition.

Consultancy

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co-author of the definitive book: "Managing Change in Museums - a practical guide"

"The work we did with Hilary has genuinely been the foundation of everything we've done since; when things got really tough, the values we wrote and the Plan that came out of it, that's what we return to!"

Liz Power, then Director Water & Steam Museum now Director Historic Buildings & Places



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Understanding a Trustee's responsibilities and liabilities

Sarah Furness, Hay & Kilner highlights the practical and legal responsibilities of Trustees.

“The passion, skill and experience people bring to charity trusteeship determines not just the success of individual charities but contributes in great part to the health of our communities and the cohesion of society.” The words of Charity Commission chief executive Helen Stephenson reflect the key role that trustees play in ensuring that charities’ operations are always carried out as they should be.

Trustees have ultimate responsibility for the affairs of their charity, with the professional and leadership expertise they offer on a voluntary basis often being crucial to a charity’s success.

Anyone can become a charity trustee, subject to certain limited exclusions, and people do so for a wide variety of reasons, from personal interest in/experience of a particular issue through to helping with their personal/professional development or simply wanting to make a positive difference to their community.

It’s estimated there are around one million trustees in the UK, with a further 100,000 trustee vacancies available, so there’s plenty of opportunity to take on such a role if you want to.

However, it is not something to be taken on without proper consideration, as it comes with a range of practical and legal responsibilities of which you need to be fully aware in advance.

Trustees must ensure a charity is solvent, well run and delivers its charitable outcomes for the benefit of the public. They can incur personal liabilities from their role, particularly if they allow their charity to ‘mission drift,’ so that it is not being run to achieve its intended charitable purposes.

Trustees must also ensure they and their charities comply with their charities’ governing documents and their legal duties, and for anyone taking on such a role, familiarising themselves with the obligations of the Charity Commission is advisable.

Trustees must always act in a charity’s best interests, deciding what will best enable the organisation to carry out its

charitable purposes, and they must act responsibly, reasonably and honestly in managing the charity’s resources.

This is done by ensuring inappropriate risks aren’t taken with its assets or reputation, that it doesn’t overstretch itself financially and that particular care is taken when investing or borrowing. Avoiding conflicts of interest is absolutely essential!

An additional consideration comes with the recent publication of guidance by the Charity Commission on accepting donations, as there are circumstances in which they must be refused or returned.

These include where they are from illegal sources or come with illegal conditions, where a donor did not have the mental capacity to decide to donate, or where the donation cannot legally be given, such as when someone is gifting property that is not theirs to give.

At a time when many charities are struggling to fully fund their operations, turning down donations may be a difficult thing to do, but with the responsibility of complying with the charity’s legal duties and best interests, it’s a decision that trustees must be ready to make and stand by.

The personal commitment required to carry out the role also needs to be considered, in terms of preparing for, attending and actively participating in trustees’ meetings, as well as fulfilling whatever other responsibilities you’re asked to take on.

Trustees are regularly asked to sit on sub-committees, and it is important that they don’t consider their roles to be box-ticking exercises – hands on involvement is very much required.

Becoming a charity trustee can be an immensely rewarding experience, but there is a great deal of personal accountability that goes with it and it’s essential that anyone taking on this role does so with all of the required information and facts at hand.

Hay & Kilner offers a comprehensive training package which provides detailed guidance on charity trustees’ legal responsibilities and liabilities, as well as practical ideas and strategies to support them in their role. For further information, please contact Sarah Furness on 0191 232 8345 or visit www.hay-kilner.co.uk

AIM’s guide ‘Successful governance for museums’ is available at: www.aim-museums.co.uk/success-guides



Highland Folk Museum

Baile Gear, Township of Goodwill.

Highland Folk Museum, High Life Highland/Ewen Weatherpoon

Situated within the Cairngorms National Park, the Highland Folk Museum (HFM) in Newtonmore is mainland Britain's first open-air museum, showcasing 300 years of Highland history across its 80-acre site.

With over 30 historic buildings to explore, costumed interpreters, regular events and activities, visitors step back in time to learn about the life and work of Highlanders. History is brought to life with native Soay sheep, the aroma of peat fires and sounds of Gaelic waulking songs.

The museum also cares for a nationally recognised collection inside the purpose-built store, Am Fasgadh (in Gaelic, the shelter).

The Highland Folk Museum was founded in 1935 by the historian, ethnologist and pioneering collector Dr Isabel F. Grant (1887-1983). Inspired by folk museums in Scandinavia, Grant housed her first museum at a disused church on the island of Iona. Its remit was "... to shelter homely ancient Highland things from destruction". By 1939 the museum collection had outgrown its home and moved to another disused church, this time on the mainland, in Laggan, Badenoch, before relocating again to Kingussie in 1944.

At Pitmain Lodge, a Georgian house which came with three acres of land, Grant could finally realise her dream of constructing a small number of vernacular buildings – a cottage, a blackhouse and a 'but-and-ben'.

These buildings and the use of live demonstrations sealed HFM's popular reputation, forming the blueprint of the current, much expanded museum.

When Grant retired in 1954, ownership of the museum moved to a Trust formed by the four ancient Scottish universities. A new phase began in

1975, when HFM was transferred to the Highland Regional Council. An eighty-acre site was acquired, about three miles away at Newtonmore, and work began to lay out the four distinct areas of the museum: Aultlarie Croft – a 1930s working farm; Balameanach ('Middle Village') – a community of relocated buildings; the Pinewoods – a forest area; and Baile Gear – a reconstruction of an early 1700s Highland township. This site opened to the public in 1987 and operated in tandem with Am Fasgadh in Kingussie, until the closure of the latter in 2007.

In 2011 responsibility for managing HFM and its collections was handed over to High Life Highland (HLH), an arm's length charitable organisation owned by The Highland Council. In 2012, HFM gained Museum Accreditation.

The new Am Fasgadh building opened in 2014, and in 2015 the collections of HFM received official 'Recognition' status from Museums Galleries Scotland and the Scottish Government, as a 'Nationally Significant Collection'.

Future plans and aspirations for the museum include the development of publicly accessible galleries, with exhibition space for the display and interpretation of the collection.

The buildings themselves are the stars of the show, from the heather thatch and turf walled buildings of the recreated Baile Gean township, to the original “crinkly tin” Knockbain School building from the early 1900s.

The accessioned museum collection is housed in Am Fasgadh in an environmentally controlled store, accessible to the public on regular store tours, or by prior appointment.

The emphasis is on rural and domestic life, covering everything from teaspoons to tractors. Collections of particular note include vernacular chairs and dressers and a small but significant collection of items representing the Travelling community. Other Highland crafts and industries are represented, including an illicit whisky still. Agriculture and crofting life are represented, from subsistence farming through to developed mechanised farming, with a rare early wooden plough and large threshing mill from John o’Groats. The textiles and costume collection is complemented by objects such as early looms and spinning wheels which highlight the production processes behind the finished items.



Isabel Grant in Iona, 1936.

Fine 19th century dresses sit alongside more everyday items such as cotton mitches (bonnets), and handmade blankets.

HLH delivers public services on the Council’s behalf including libraries,

archives, museums and galleries, and is the largest charity and third sector provider in the Highlands of Scotland. In addition to the funding received from The Highland Council, the majority of the charity’s earned income comes from customer/member income.

There is no entry charge at the museum, but donations are welcomed: donations and spend in the café and shop make up a large proportion of its income. Group catering, store tours and meeting room hire in Am Fasgadh provide additional income streams. The museum employs twelve permanent staff (operational, curatorial, administration, craft workers and maintenance staff), and employs approximately 30 seasonal staff for the open season.

The site is open from the start of April until the end of October, and welcomes around 70,000 local, national and international visitors.

www.highlandfolk.com



Spinning at the Highland Cottage.

Who you gonna call?



Image by Aaron Barson on Unsplash

Well, Ghostbusters helped out the Museum of Art in Manhattan – but we think it’s unlikely you’ll be having issues with ghosts.

You might find it more helpful to know that there are people you can call for a friendly ear and expert advice on all things finance.

As a member of AIM, your organisation can also join Charity Finance Group at no extra cost. CFG membership brings a whole range of benefits, including several helplines on different topics.

CFG’s Holly Lown looks after the relationship with AIM and works on member engagement.

“Making sure AIM members know about all the support they can have from CFG is one of the best things about my role. My background in arts and heritage management, and my experience working in fundraising for a museum, means I know firsthand what some of the challenges can be.”

Over the last year, AIM members have been able to make use of CFG’s expert helplines. These are provided by CFG’s corporate partners and are free to use. You can benefit from advice on accounting, tax and VAT, and managing financial difficulties. There is also help with HR and employment law, pensions, property, and general legal advice.

As one museum director said, “I felt overwhelmed about the financial situation of my museum, and the options I had going forward. The support from the CFG helpline was just what was needed! ... Asking for help was easy, I felt supported and understood. For me and my museum, one phone call made all the difference.”

CFG’s Holly says, “Having expert advice on hand is just one of the ways we support our members. We also know that finance professionals – whatever the stage of their career – value our technical information, thought leadership and CPD opportunities.

“At the heart of our support for AIM members who join CFG is our lively and welcoming Arts Special Interest Group. Open to all CFG members with the unique challenge of being in the arts space, the group supports ongoing policy work and shares learnings and updates. We hold two free webinars with specialist speakers per year which are always highly rated by attendees.

“And to keep those conversations going all year round, we host a live, secure, discussion group platform where you can connect with peers, build relationships across the sector, and share best practice and advice.”

So, if your problem is eerie and supernatural, you might want to call Ghostbusters – but for most other things, try CFG.

www.cfg.org.uk/aim

AIM Bulletin

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