



Great Western Society Limited

Didcot Railway Centre

Project Brief – Business Plan Consultant

Didcot's Historic Engine Shed

January 2026



Project Brief – Business Plan Consultant

Didcot's Historic Engine Shed

1. Summary

The Great Western Society (GWS) has been successful in securing a Heritage Grant award (Development Phase) from The National Lottery Heritage Fund (Heritage Fund) to enable the development of a project which will reinvigorate the heart of the Didcot Railway Centre(DRC) site through conservation repairs to the Historic Engine Shed and associated programme of heritage activity and interpretation, thus making Didcot Railway Centre a more sustainable business. The project will enable DRC to make a step change in its offer to ensure its long-term sustainability as a living museum fit for the 21st century.

GWS wish to commission an experienced Business Plan Consultant to review and update the outline Business Plan included in the successful Development Phase submission to the Heritage Fund. This initial version, available by request, was produced in-house and needs to be updated to meet with the Heritage Fund's requirements for a Delivery Phase submission. The successful consultant will work closely with the project team, in particular Didcot Railway Centre's Chief Executive to produce the revised plan. DRC holds extensive information and data relating to audiences and visitors to support this work.

2. Background

Didcot Railway Centre is dedicated to preserving, restoring and operating Great Western steam locomotives, carriages, wagons and caring for its small object collection at its 21 acre site, set around the original Engine Shed. DRC is open on Wednesday, Saturday and Sunday, March to October and additionally on Thursdays and Fridays during most school holidays.

In 2024/25 the site welcomed 38,250 paying visitors, including 1,600 school visits. The Centre has 33 staff and over 250 volunteers and a turnover of £2 million per annum.

The focus of the Heritage Fund project is to:

- Restore and repair the Engine Shed roof, windows, doors, walls and floor
- Install solar panels and rainwater harvesting
- Provide light touch interpretation in the body of the Shed to retain its authenticity
- Create fuller interpretation in side rooms to explain the work of the maintenance and train crews, past and present
- Deliver a range of activities designed to engage core and priority audiences with the building, objects and stories
- Signpost people to explore the rest of the site
- Doubling our visitor and participant numbers to 80,000 per annum, improving our sustainability.

The overall project will cost circa £5.6 million inclusive of VAT with an anticipated opening in Summer 2028. The Development Phase of the project is expected to last from Summer 2025 until August 2026. The Business Plan needs to be fully complete by no later than mid July 2026 and should be sufficiently developed by the time of the Heritage Fund Mid-Term review in early April 2026. A copy of the in-house produced outline Business Plan can be requested by email from – jason.l@conservationplus.org.

3. Core and Priority audiences

The core audiences for DRC are:

- Families with children under 11 years
- Older adults
- Railway enthusiasts
- School children

These are the people who currently visit and underpin the business model. The Centre needs to nurture these visitors and increase their numbers. From a market assessment of the local catchment area, it has been agreed that the priority audiences that DRC wishes to attract through the project are:

- Didcot (and its hinterland) residents
 - families generally – the number in Didcot is way above the England average
 - lower income families and adults
- neurodivergent and autistic people
- people with learning difficulties
- people with dementia. From a wider geography
- women
- young people through formal learning.

The client holds extensive audience data and has good collection systems in place that can be used to support the commission.

4. The scope of the work

The appointed Consultant is required to produce a Business Plan that meets the Heritage Fund requirements for a Delivery Phase submission under the Heritage Grants scheme. The Business Plan Consultant should be available to start work on the commission from the end of January 2026 with the final complete by no later than mid July 2026. It is anticipated that the Delivery Phase of the project will last 3 years.

Note that there will also be a Mid-Term review with the Heritage Fund during the Development Phase (April 2026). The completion of the Development Phase appointment will be subject to successfully passing this review. If the project is unsuccessful in passing the Mid-Term review, then the employer reserves the right to terminate the appointment at

this point. It is likely that even if successful, there may be feedback from the Heritage Fund that needs to be incorporated into the documents at this point prior to proceeding into RIBA Stage 3. The consultant must factor this into their resource profile.

A copy of the Development Phase application and supporting documents are available on request.

5. Summary of outputs

The consultant will produce a Business Plan complying with Heritage Fund Good Practice Guidelines. The Plan will be the copyright of the client. Strict confidentiality should be maintained with regard to legal and financial information provided by or obtained for the project.

The consultant will clear the copyright for any illustrations or other material used.

Coordination will also include the following:

- Prepare for and attend some Project Team meeting(s) ensuring sufficient material is provided in at least one week in advance to the Project Manager.
- Proactive engagement with the Activity Planners to ensure the Business and Activity Plans are fully aligned.

6. Available documentation

Documents available that formed part of the Development Phase application are:

- The Heritage Fund Development Phase application form 2024
- Business Plan 2024 – 2029
- Outline Activity Plan

7. Requirements of the submission

Your proposal should include:

- Details and cvs for all personnel who will undertake the work, their relevant experience, qualifications and skills.
- Brief summary of your portfolio relating to developing Business Plans for successful Heritage Fund bids.
- Two case studies of recent commissions demonstrating your experience with Heritage Fund projects of a similar scale/nature including specific reference to lessons learnt.
- A detailed method statement, with a timetable for undertaking the work.

- The extent of public liability and professional indemnity cover.
- Two referees from recent projects.
- Your Fee Proposal should set out a full breakdown of costs, including:
 - daily rates for all personnel
 - any allowances for expenses
 - allocated resource days
 - all sums to be stated exclusive of VAT
 - confirm whether VAT is applicable.

Please limit your application to a sensible number of A4 sides, and do not send generic company information.

If you require any clarification or would like to request a copy of supporting documentation, then please email Jason.l@conservationplus.org by **Friday 23rd January 2026**. Responses will be shared with all companies/individuals who have indicated their interest in tendering.

8. Skills and experience required

GWS is looking to appoint a consultant or consultancy which can demonstrate the following:

- At least 3 years' experience of business planning for Heritage Fund projects (value of at least £2m).
- An in-depth understanding of business planning within the heritage and visitor attraction environment
- Strong report writing and presentation delivery skills.
- Previous experience of operating a visitor destination / experience
- Ability to be flexible and work collaboratively with DRC and the rest of consultant team.

9. Selection criteria

Tenders will be evaluated on a 40/60% cost/quality basis.

Qualitative	
Proposed methodology	15%
Relevant experience and skills demonstrated through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • track record in undertaking successful business planning for similar sized Heritage Fund projects • CVs of the key personnel that will work on the Project 	25%

<ul style="list-style-type: none"> previous experience of operating a visitor destination / experience 	
Case studies: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> two case studies of recent commissions examples of lessons learnt within previous Projects 	20%
Quantitative	
Price overall	40%

The scoring approach against Price will be as follows:

$$\text{Score} = 40\% \times \frac{\text{£lowest tender sum received}}{\text{£individual bidder's tender sum}}$$

A desktop assessment will be carried out of all tenders received against the criteria outlined above. Where questions are to be scored and weighted, each question and sub-question will be scored in accordance with the scoring matrix below. The score will then be awarded and the percentage weighting applied to give the weighted score for that question.

Capability	Response	Remark	Marks
Supplier is likely to be able to meet the needs of the Client.	Response exceeds the anticipated answer and is completely convincing and relevant to the Project with substantiation from independent sources and references.	Absolute Confidence	10
Supplier is likely to be able to meet the needs of the Client.	Response comprehensively answers the question and is convincing and relevant to the Project.	Confidence	8
Small risk that Supplier will not be able to meet the needs of the Client.	Response sufficiently answers the question without omission and is generally convincing and relevant to the Project.	Minor Concerns	6
Moderate risk that the Supplier will not be able to meet the needs of the Client.	Response has minor omissions and is in part(s) unconvincing or irrelevant to the Project.	Moderate Concerns	4
Significant risk that the Supplier will not be able to meet the needs of the Client.	Response has major omissions and is largely unconvincing or irrelevant to the Project.	Major Concerns	2

Supplier will not be able to meet the needs of the Client.	No response or misleading response provided.	Not Acceptable	0
--	--	----------------	---

10. Date of submission and timescale

Tenders must be submitted by no later than **30th January 2026** via email or file sharing system to Jason Lowe, jason.l@conservationplus.org and the email subject title to state “DRC: Business Planning”.