



**Great Western Society Limited
Didcot Railway Centre**



Project Brief – Evaluation Consultant

Didcot's Historic Engine Shed

January 2026

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1. Summary

The Great Western Society (GWS) has been successful in securing a Heritage Grant (Development Phase award) 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 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 Evaluation Consultant to design an Evaluation Framework and implementation plan for the Development and Delivery phases of the project. The successful consultant will work closely with the project team, in particular the Activity Planners (Julia Holberry Associates) and Interpretation Designers (Simon Leach Design). The consultant is also expected to work with the Project Manager to prepare an Evaluation report on the Development Phase to be submitted with the final drawdown.

This document sets out details of the brief, the appointment process, assessment criteria and timetable. The appointment is expected to cover both the Development and Delivery Phases of the project, with an appropriate break clause between both phases.

2. Background

Didcot Railway Centre (DRC) 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.

3. Core and Priority audiences

The core audiences for Didcot Railway Centre 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 Railway 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 Didcot Railway Centre 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 reviewed and built on to support the commission.

The Outline Activity Plan submitted with the Heritage Fund application identified three core themes based on consultation:

- **Bringing the Engine Shed alive**, with an annual celebration event and regular tours and trails as well as collecting memories and family history research.
- **Engaging our communities**, a community panel, an annual event targeted at Didcot residents, outreach programmes and storytelling. Targeted programming with women only events, an access panel, quiet times, tailored activities and reminiscence.
- **Learning outside the classroom**, focusing on developing online and onsite resources for schools with local teachers and offering work experience.

4. The scope of the work

The appointed Consultant is required to provide Evaluation services for the full project, reviewing across both capital and activity works. The Evaluation Consultant should be available to start work on the commission from the end of January 2026. It is anticipated that the Delivery Phase project will last 3 years. There will be a break clause between the Heritage Fund Development Phase and Delivery Phase applications with reappointment subject to a successful application.

It will be important that the evaluation captures capital works, project management and governance processes, interpretation, activities as well as final visitor experience and wider organisational impacts.

Note that there will also be a Mid-Term review with the Heritage Fund during the Development Phase. 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 outline Activity Plan are available on request. A list of Approved Purposes for the Development Phase can be found in Appendix I.

Pilot Projects: During the project's Development Phase, the Activity Plan consultant and client will run a number of small Pilot Projects to test audience test themes and activities to inform the Activity Plan and Interpretation Plan. It is expected that the Evaluation Consultant will consult with the Activity Planners as to the extent/role of evaluation with regards to the Pilot Projects although it is intended that evaluation of these elements should be relatively light touch.

5. Summary of outputs

Development Phase:

The consultant will produce an Evaluation 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.

- Developing a robust evaluation framework to accompany the Delivery Phase application.
- Contributing relevant information regarding evaluation into the Delivery Phase application.
- Evaluating the development phase and submitting a report that meets Heritage Fund requirements that can be submitted with the completion report.

- We anticipate one draft report and one final report during the Development Phase.

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

Delivery Phase:

- Developing, piloting and refining evaluation tools that any staff or volunteers can use to evaluate any activities, events and the volunteering experience to learn lessons and feed back into future activities.
- Evaluate programmes with partners, as required.
- Work with and advise DRC staff and volunteers to facilitate data collations on visit patterns, volumes, demographic etc.
- Set up and implement a framework to evaluate digital engagement.
- A series of qualitative interviews with members of the Project Board, and Project Team including Design team, consultant and staff involved in the capital restoration to feed into interim report.
- Managing a training workshop with DRC staff and volunteers on using evaluation tools effectively and managing data.
- Prepare a final Evaluation Report at the end of the project in accordance with National Lottery Heritage Fund guidelines. As a guide we would expect this to cover project management, delivery of the capital project, interpretation, delivery of the activity plan including volunteering and fundraising. The report should fully consider the extent to which the project met its intended outcomes, provide a narrative of the story of change, what went well, what went less well and lessons learnt for the future of DRC, other similar projects and the Heritage Fund itself. As part of this we would like a case study of key lessons learnt from the project.
- We anticipate annual interim reports during the Delivery Phase with final report to be prepared at the end of the Delivery Phase.

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.

6. Key relationships

The successful consultant will work closely with the project team, in particular DRC's Lead Volunteer (who has experience of undertaking evaluation work), the Activity Planners (Julia Holberry Associates) and Interpretation Designers (Simon Leach Design). The consultant is also expected to work with the Project Manager to prepare the Evaluation report for the Development Phase to be submitted with the final drawdown (August 2026).

7. Available documentation

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

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

8. 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 delivering evaluation work.
- Two case studies of recent commissions demonstrating your experience of evaluating Heritage Fund projects. It is essential that the case studies demonstrate experience of evaluation across both development and delivery phases.
- A detailed method statement, with a timetable for the development phase. This should explain how you will evaluate both the capital and activity elements of the project; how you will approach training of volunteers in evaluation methods and who you will involve in the evaluation process and how. We would also like you to estimate the number of days you have allocated to each task and to identify outputs.
- The extent of public liability and professional indemnity cover.
- Two referees from recent projects.
- Your Fee Proposal should cover both Development and Delivery phases and 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.

9. Skills and experience required

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

- At least 3 years' experience of evaluating Heritage Fund projects (value of at least £1m) through to completion.
- Experience of evaluating a range of programmes using different methodologies
- Practical experience of, and access to, tools such as Survey Monkey.
- Strong report writing and presentation delivery skills.
- Ability to be flexible and work collaboratively with DRC and the rest of consultant team.
- Experience of staff/volunteer training relating to evaluation.

10. Selection criteria

Tenders will be evaluated on a 30/70% cost/quality basis.

Proposed methodology	30%
Relevant experience and skills demonstrated through: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • track record in undertaking Evaluation work for similar sized Heritage Fund projects • Evaluation Planning for heritage organisations with a large volunteer base • CVs of key personnel 	40%
Price	30%

The scoring approach against Price will be as follows:

$$\text{Score} = 30\% \times \frac{\text{£lowest tender sum received}}{\text{£individual bidder's tender sum}}$$

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	Absolute Confidence	10

	independent sources and references.		
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

11. 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: Evaluation”.

12. Fee

The budget for the Development Phase is circa £5,000 excluding VAT but including all expenses. We do not anticipate the Development Phase fee exceeding £20,000 exclusive of VAT.

APPENDIX 1 – Approved Purposes of the Delivery Phase grant award

The Heritage Grant award FROM THE Heritage Fund covers a range of project development tasks known as Approved Purposes which are set out below. The Heritage Fund will use these Approved Purposes to monitor the project and track progress.

Approved Purposes: Appoint project staff and procure consultants to develop and submit your Delivery Phase application, with all required supporting documents, including:

- Activity plan (including evaluation proposals)
- Project timetable
- Cash flow for the project
- Income and spending forecasts for 5 years following completion
- Project management structure (and procurement strategy)
- Detailed cost breakdown spreadsheet
- Risks document for the delivery phase
- Risks document for after the project is completed
- Briefs for internally or externally commissioned work
- Job descriptions for Delivery Phase posts
- Business plan
- Management and maintenance plan
- Design specification to RIBA Stage 3
- Interpretation plan
- Fully developed conservation plan
- Ownership documents
- Subsidy control statement