

## **Evesham Abbey Trust**

### ***Chairman's Report 2020/21***

May I welcome you to our annual report and AGM. The year ending December 2019 was a pivotal year in the work of the Trust, made all the more demanding by the emergence of the Covid pandemic. As a result of the shutdowns and restrictions the normal schedule of the Annual General Meeting was disrupted and delayed until October 2021 rather than the normal date of February 2021. Therefore my report covers a time scale that includes the whole of 2020 as well as part of 2021.

I am delighted to report that the past eighteen months has seen highly significant progress in the work of the Evesham Abbey Trust. Despite the complications caused by the Covid 19 epidemic the Trust has managed to maintain an acceptable momentum in delivering the Evesham Abbey project.

The most important factor in the year was the confirmed funding from both The Heritage Lottery Fund and Historic England. Both these grants have allowed the Trust to move to the next stage of the project and inject renewed pace into the work on the ground. The contractors have worked very hard with the Trust to ensure that the Covid situation effect was minimised as much as was humanly possible. As a result we can now report that works have at long last commenced on the restoration of the walls.

The Trust has received sufficient funding from the HLF to undertake the conservation and restoration stages of the works and permission to start was received from the Lotter Fund in November 2020 subject to the appointment of the project managers and the community engagement worker. Over the following months the trust appointed Greenwood Projects Ltd as the project managers and Ms Natalie Hanson as the Community Engagement Worker for the Trust.

The Trustees have worked with Historic England and as a result of building this relationship the Trust has been awarded an increased grant of over £130,000 towards the cost of restoring the north wall and north east corner of the Nave area of the site. This was an important recognition by Historic England of the importance of the Abbey site and the help they are prepared to offer in preserving this scheduled ancient monument site. The Trust also recognises the care and support Historic England has offered in advising and supporting us on the large number of issues relating to scheduled ancient monument consent and planning. Their expertise has been invaluable.

Fund raising remains a central feature and continues to be a priority in the work of the Trust in order to build sufficient reserves and to meet the matched funding requirements of the awarded grants. Thanks to the increase in funding from Historic England and additional input from other sources the Trustees remain confident that they will be able to meet its matched funding obligations in respect of the construction and conservation aspects. We continue

to seek the funding for the gardens phase of the scheme which has been estimated to require an additional £85,000 to complete. Discussions have been initiated with a number of local funding sources to meet this requirement and the Trustees will be working towards securing the required resources over the next two years.

Over the past twelve months the Trust has continued to work with a number of expert contractors who are working with the Trustees. The retention of Greenwood Projects Ltd. as Project Managers has ensured continuity of service as has the continuing service of Hook Mason Ltd. as Conservation Architects. Avon Archaeology Ltd. were appointed as the Trust's archaeology contractors. Over the period of 2021 we have also engaged the services of DA Cook Ltd as our building contractor and Hulls Ltd. for groundworks. We thank them for their expert contribution to the work of the Trust and look forward to our continuing relationship with them. We have also worked with numerous other organisations and businesses over the past twelve months who have contributed their expertise, facilities and resources for the benefit of the Trust and we thank them all.

The Trust has now established a Gardens Sub Committee to develop a gardens design and planting scheme which aims to finalise the design of the four garden areas and fully cost this part of the project. The Trust is aiming to begin the gardens work in the Spring of 2022.

The involvement of the local community has always been central to the way the Trust functions and the Trustees have worked hard to engage with the people of the town and to find ways in which they can be involved in the work and activities of the Trust. Our volunteer and supporters register now numbers over 100 local residents many of whom have been involved with work on the ground. The Trust has also been active in promoting opportunities for a better understanding of the significance of Evesham Abbey and promoted the work of the Trust through involvement in local festivals and events, providing organised talks and lectures to local societies and social groups as well as organising opportunities for active volunteer activity. We thank all our volunteers and supporters for their unstinting support. The Trust intends to continue to develop and improve the opportunities for community engagement, particularly in the participation of young people. The development of a comprehensive schools involvement programme that is compatible with the National Curriculum has been a big task which Vice Chair, Elizabeth Spencer CEW Natalie Hanson have devoted considerable time to developing. The Schools Lead Teacher Panel has met regularly over the past months and our involvement with schools has seen many sessions of direct involvement both in schools and on the abbey site. This work will continue to be a high priority in the activities of our community engagement worker.

The Trustees are also pleased to report that, thanks to Trustee Chris Bloomfield, the relationship with our allotment tenants have developed into a very constructive partnership which has seen an increase the number of plots available. We will continue to work cooperatively with the tenants towards

developing these growing areas into a sustainable and more attractive feature of the overall scheme for the Abbey site.

The Trustee board has seen some changes over the past year. We have been joined by Mick Hurst as a new Trustee and Trust meetings now include representatives from the Vale of Evesham Historical Society and Trust volunteers. The Trust will continue to review the composition of the board of Trustees in accordance with its terms of reference and constitution. My thanks to all the Trustees and organisations and volunteers both past and present, for their commitment, support and hard work over what has been a demanding eighteen months. My thanks also go to our Treasurer, Gill Pawson, who has kept our books in order and maintained our grip on financial discipline. Her contribution has been invaluable in what is a large and sometimes complex exercise.

Also thank you Brenda Morton for acting as the trust scribe when recording thrust minutes as minute secretary. My final appreciation must go to Elizabeth Spencer, my Vice Chair whose support and unflagging commitment has done so much to keep spirits high and resolve unbowed!

Finally a big thank you to all the volunteers and supporters who have given of their time to the project. Often quietly and unasked they have maintained their faith and commitment to the project, taken on roles and tasks that required stoic resolve, been buoyed up and sometimes disappointed. Thank each and everyone of you from all the Trust committee members.

The next twelve months will be both exciting and challenging. Once the Delivery phase is completed by late 2022 the challenge of gardens development will be well underway and the final chapter in delivering the abbey site as an Evesham community resource will be written.

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Barrie Baldelli

Chairman, Evesham Abbey Trust