

‘Our Big Building, Our Big Map’, will:

1. Engage the community in identifying, researching and collating existing research and records of social and physical heritage of the building and its users and the wider conservation area setting and its community;
2. Involve the community in exploring, recording, interpreting and celebrating the area’s heritage through an activity and events programme and generate and use an interactive map and trail app;
3. Develop opportunities for learning and skills for the community, visitors, volunteers and an apprentice;
4. Build deeper local, and wider, audiences to engage with and appreciate the living heritage of St David’s within the city; and
5. Bring the Community Centre's top floor (330m²) into community use, improving long term financial viability of the heritage asset.

‘Our Big Map’ will engage the community and wider audiences to explore and learn about the story of this significant Big Building and the St David’s conservation area’s rich social, physical and natural heritage. Drawing on the community Vision 2020 plan for the area, we will consult on and work with the community to develop these emerging themes:

Plant Hunters (horticulture heritage);

Death & Disease (health, especially linking to cholera epidemiology); and

Wealth, Charity and Culture (industrial, philanthropic and cultural heritage).

These or other identified themes will be drawn together, co-creating a living and virtual heritage app and map to reveal and celebrate the connections between residents, the building and this area of Exeter. New and existing volunteers will be recruited and trained to research the area’s social and physical heritage to develop the themes. A programme of events, talks, workshops and an exhibition will be run as part of the co-creation process.

The research will identify heritage points in the community which we will curate into a heritage trail for each theme, for example:

Plant Hunters draws on the area’s connection with the Veitch family and other Victorian nurserymen who pioneered plant hunting, to celebrate the horticulture heritage of the area. This includes the amazing specimen trees, the ‘Veitch’ lampposts, the community planting of Veitch plants in public spaces, the Centre’s historic Mulberry tree;

Death & Disease: will explore a health theme. How Cholera epidemiology evolved from the area; the Cemetery, which saw clandestine autopsies, explore the local graveyards, and link for example to the Devon Exeter Medical Society collection and modern-day health approaches such as community acupuncture;

Wealth, Charity and Culture: will explore the area’s industrial, philanthropic and cultural heritage. Industrial features including the iron bridge, paper mill and other significant local buildings, including

St Nicholas Priory and St David's Church, and the people behind them, such as 'Iron Sam' buried in St David's Church and will be able to tie into Tuckers Hall anniversary celebrations of the Cloth Workers.

It will especially focus on the centre's role over the centuries in the community, including connecting the researched story of the school for children who were blind and partially sighted to the modern day contributions of tenant organisations, which offer a range of community services from refugee support to posture & mobility information for people with disabilities. This theme will also explore the changing nature of the community and the lives and interests of people past and present that make St David's a great place to be.

The themes are designed to enable us to undertake new activity and draw together existing work and projects (by this partnership and others) to interpret and present the area's heritage in a clear and holistic way to residents and visitors.

The volunteers' process of research will engage the community at events and through talks and workshops. These volunteer teams will interpret the findings into an exhibition and trails - telling the stories and interpreting heritage features in engaging and meaningful ways. Trails will be developed and plotted using the simple to use Tici App (<https://tici.me/museumstreet>) and connected to a website, and presented as a physical map. Volunteers will physically mark each heritage point on the trail (subject to relevant permissions being obtained) and pin point its GPS position which is recorded into the App. This will generate an online trail, accessible visually and through audio, and a physical map that can be used by residents and visitors alike to engage with the area's heritage. We will adapt the app and website to ensure it is usable for people who are visually impaired.

We are keen to restore a further 19 Victorian lampposts made by local foundries to become 'Veitch lamp-posts' (see appendix 8). This will involve extending the agreement with Devon County Council to plan the work, research Veitch specimens, work with a botanical artist to commission the decoration and put together a trail.

We will explore the re-purposing of the Grade II Listed Red phone boxes, sited outside the Community Centre and currently un-used because of vandalism to the telephones. Residents don't want them removed so we have been in discussion with BT and residents about creative ways to re-claim them as heritage hot-spots to tie into the map, perhaps a terrarium or the smallest theatre in Exeter (with the support of the Head of Drama at Exeter University).

As well as the informal opportunities to explore provided through the App, Map and website we will work with the Exeter Red Coat team to formalise our learning into a more formal guided tour(s) for visitors through the area.

The project will enable us to better understand our current and potential audience, engage more deeply with the local community, and develop a broader audience among visitors from within the city and further afield. Engagement will include online and digital means and well as face to face activity.

'Our Big Building' is the capital strand, focusing on the repair works to the structure and fabric of the top floor of Exeter Community Centre. Then the floor can be refurbished and fitted out for community use, improve its long-term financial viability and celebrate its important past and future role now it has moved into community ownership.

The capital works will:

1. Ensure the structural stability of the top floor and improve the external fabric, ensuring the long-term protection of the whole structure.
2. Conserve, renovate and make repairs to the top floor and make some alterations to enable this floor to be brought into community use.

These works include: finalising plans for the layout – including enabling full access as far as it practicable, obtaining listed building consent (planning permission already in place), undertake investigatory surveys (mechanical and electrical, building & demolition survey and dye test); preparation of detailed design and specifications for structural, M&E and building works, preparation of contract and tendering documents, undertaking the tendering process, ready to appoint a contractor. The works include strengthening/restoration of joists, beams and trusses identified by surveys; roof tile replacement, repointing of lime mortar & chimney repair; addressing the varying floor heights to enable inclusive access; replacing rotten studwork, conserving sash windows, installing insulation to ceiling, walls and partitions and installing services to the top floor. These enabling works will make the top floor ready to be decorated, fitted out and furnished for community uses.