

Parish Rooms Refurbishment Working Party (PRWP) Visit to Caistor Arts & Heritage Centre

Notes

Tuesday 28th November 2023

Present

Councillors Lynette Corten-Miller Chair, Philip Madison, Christine Parker and Jenny Caitlin

<https://www.caistorahc.org.uk/>

About Us.

Caistor Arts and Heritage Centre is a beautiful conversion of a former Methodist chapel; delicious cakes, afternoon tea, snacks and lunches are served in the cafe and on our sunny terrace. Upstairs you will discover local history displays, exhibitions in our gallery and a well stocked public library.

What we learned

It's an attractive, nicely situated building, beautifully renovated with plenty of light. It has a welcoming vibe and there are plenty of things to look at, starting with a nice little cafe. They have a heritage timeline of the town, displays above bookshelves of artefacts, accessibly priced local artworks, an exhibition space and nice toilets.

We met Claire who is most enthusiastic and knowledgeable with a passion for people and place. They have 50 volunteers and 3.5 FTEs full time equivalent posts. They have built the project up over many years. Population of Caistor is 2,284 and people travel in from the surrounding villages. It is a Lincs County library run by volunteers. It started with a vision and a plan.

Last users of the building were a youth club and the imaginative conversion has transformed the space. Storage has been created by building a false wall and it being back to back large cupboards. Though community groups do not store their kit in the building except for the community choir's keyboard!

It is full of people in all parts of the building. It is a community hub. Different groups meet there including the heritage group, a community choir, a wool group and sixth formers. They have a charity shop in town as well. The cafe was losing money 2 and a half years ago. Now it is income generating also 30% commission on sold artworks.

There's a puzzle library and a green library, books bought with a ring fenced green donation. They have applied for different grants over the years and apply to the Heritage group for all maintenance projects on the building. It is a building that is all about people and designing activities and ideas to attract different people in and keep them identifying with and using the centre.

Young people are the ones who will take things over for the future. They are working with the school groups to digitise the heritage archives. They are interested in the social history of the area, e.g. there were 109 trades in evidence in 1902. They reach out to many different people with different skill sets and areas of expertise. They have video/audio interviews with older residents telling their stories.

They are working from a value base. Their values encompass the commitment to green issues and focusing on building links and developing ideas to bring young people in for the future. They focus on interest groups to work across the demographics.

It is all very considered. A book may be in the library to borrow or in the exhibition space to buy. They check the value of charity shop book donations online, sell high value ones online and sell cheap easy reads in the centre.

This is a building that is all about the people who come in and use it.

'Unlocking the past, preserving our heritage, bringing history to life.' This is written on one of their displays.

It is not a 9 - 5 life. You may end up in a different place from where you started or expected. It will and needs to evolve and develop. If it is not right for the community it is not going to work. Claire passed on advice to us that she's found very helpful.

'Keep your balance, come on time, take your time, leave on time.'

We are becoming more and more aware of the need to draw other people in for help. Also that groups using the building are what gives it life. It seems Claire is thinking long term about how to get young people involved.

It was an inspirational visit.