

North East case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Region:	North East
Theme demonstrated by case study:	Community driven social enterprise and heritage centre (Old Low Light, a grade II listed building)
Name of project/group:	Old Low Light
Lead contact:	Pearl Saddington
Location:	North Tyneside

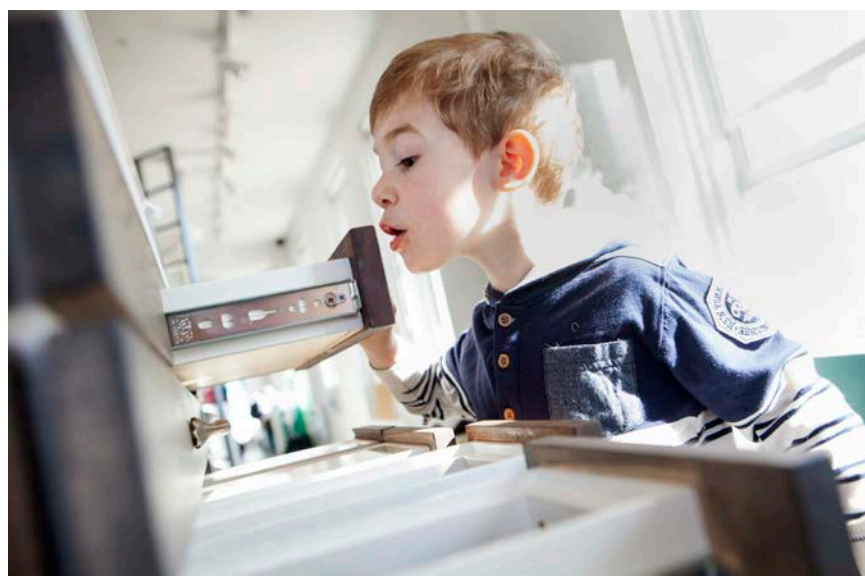
Short description of project:

The Old Low Light is community driven social enterprise and heritage centre based on the Fish Quay in North Shields. This grade II listed building provides a café, exhibition space and learning venue and aims to tell the story of Fish Quay's past, present and future through events and educational activities.

The project began five years ago with two teachers wanting to put together some resources for school children to learn about their local heritage. The project grew over time and a permanent home was found for this collection in the in the form of the Old Low Light building.

The building was restored with support from a range of partners, including North Tyneside Council, the Heritage Lottery Fund, the Coastal Communities Fund, plus local building preservation trusts, architects and designers. A charity was set up to oversee the project, with a Board of Trustees drawn from the local community.

The centre could not operate without a huge body of talented and passionate volunteers who give their time to assist with everything from governance, graphic design and marketing to setting out chairs for events and serving refreshments. Generous local businesses in the Fish Quay area have also provided staff time and expertise to support this venture.



A young visitor to the Old Low Light. © The Old Low Light

Why did you get involved with this project or activity?

I was appointed as Centre Manager in 2014 to support the work of the volunteers and Trustees. The building opened in autumn 2014 and has since welcomed over 6500 visitors. It celebrates the vibrant cultural and natural heritage of the Fish Quay area.

Seeing people enjoying and sharing the heritage of the Fish Quay in and around such a wonderful historic building is fantastic and will protect the Old Low light building for years to come.

How did you resource your project or activity?

Financial support for the project came from a number of sources. The initial funding for the restoration of the grade II listed Old Low Light was funded by the Tyne and Wear Building Preservation Trust, the Heritage Lottery Fund, North Tyneside Council and the Coastal Communities Fund.

The latter two funders also provided resource to help establish the Old Low Light as a social enterprise, with support from the North of England Civic Trust, Ainsworth Spark, Muckles, Tait Walker, GBDM Ltd and Sumo Design.

However, the project could not survive without the huge body of talented and passionate volunteers who give their time to support this venture.

What would have happened without your project or activity?

Previously there were few opportunities for local people or visitors to learn about the history of this area or share their experiences of Fish Quay's heritage. Before the project, the grade II listed Old Low Light building also lay empty and unused and was falling into a state of disrepair.

What difference been made by your project or activity?

This project has helped to save the Old Low Light and open it up for all to explore and enjoy the oldest building on the Fish Quay. The project has also helped to save the story of Fish Quay's past for all to explore and enjoy.

The Old Low Light is now fully restored, bustling with activity and accessible for all to visit and explore. Visitors now have the opportunity to learn about the natural and cultural heritage of the area as well as enjoying the beauty of this historic building and its surroundings.

The Old Low Light provides a much needed resource, revealing Fish Quay's maritime history and riverside communities as told by the authentic voices of those communities. The Old Low Light has brought local people with an interest in heritage together through volunteering opportunities, events, classes and community research. All have made new friends, learnt new things about Fish Quay's heritage and felt a greater sense of pride in their local areas as a result.

What have you learnt from this experience?

Partnership working has been essential to the success of this community-led and community-driven project, with many individuals and organisations playing a part. Establishing a successful community heritage project takes time, effort and commitment and can prove challenging at times. Good communication has been vital and consultation has informed all aspects of the project but this does mean that decisions can take a long time.

What does the future hold for your project or activity?

The Old Low Light will continue to grow in terms of visitor numbers, sharing the story of the Fish Quay to a wider audience. The schools and education programme will also expand over the coming months and years to engage a new generation in their local heritage.

However, the Old Low Light needs to become financially sustainable over the next two years in order to maintain and build upon the fantastic work done so far. The centre relies upon volunteers and it is vital, therefore, that existing volunteers are retained and new volunteers are recruited to ensure the project has a sustainable future.

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