



Strategic Plan

2026 - 2036

Prepared by
Museum Director and Trustees.

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Welcome

This document provides an overview of the vision, mission, and strategic goals for the Rural Life Living Museum in Tilford Surrey. It explains who we are, what we do and importantly how we would like to grow.

Thanks to our founders Madge and Henry Jackson the museum currently houses over 40, 000 objects, is home to over 30 buildings, runs rural craft and skills courses, hosts an impressive programme of events and has a strong community of volunteers. The museum celebrates that with Founders Day every year.

Today there is lots to see and do at the museum. From tractor rallies to summer fairs, from fire engine days to our premier Village at War event, with vehicle rallies, Steam Fairs, Old Kiln Light Railway, rural craft and activities, a full learning and discovery programme and much more.

It's our plan to sustain this museum for many years to come. Our intention is that this document explains how.

As we say to our visitors. Welcome, come in, explore!

Ed Fagan, Museum Director, Jan 2026



40,000 people visit the museum each year for events, for tours, for learning and for developing skills (Jan 2026)



Over 50 schools take part in learning workshops and school visits at the museum every year (Jan 2026).



Goals

Reach

10K

more followers on our social media channels.

Establish partnerships with

25 SMEs

by 2030

Build a new visitor hub by

2035



Charity Overview



Organisation Name

Rural Life Living Museum

 The Reeds Road, Tilford,
Farnham, Surrey, GU10 2DL

 www.rural-life.org.uk

 info@rural-life.org.uk

Key Detail Information

Legal Structure

Old Kiln Museum CIO

Charity Number

1200370*

Year Founded

1973

Number of Employees

10 (as of January 2026)

Number of Volunteers

101 (as of January 2026)

Trustees

6 (as of January 2026)

*The original charity Old Kiln Museum Trust, registered charity 289150 was transferred to the current charity Old Kiln Museum CIO, registered charity 1200370 on 22nd September 2022.



Who we are

The Old Kiln Museum CIO is dedicated to the continuation of our Founder's legacy; Madge and Henry Jackson, who built a museum in their garden in rural Surrey.

The Museum is set in 15 acres within the Surrey National Landscape, surrounded by heathland, woodland and farmland.

The Museum's relocated historic buildings are scattered amongst Mr Jackson's beloved arboretum, housing one of the finest collections of everyday objects to engage and inspire visitors with the crafts, trades, occupations, professions, machinery and tools that made life in Southern England.

We continue to collect to diversify our collection and ensure its ongoing relevance to people.

We rarely seek to acquire objects, preferring as our founders did to continue to collect by opportunity.

We care for over 40,000 objects from agricultural and domestic, to industrial, transport and military, our collection preserves for the benefit of all the intangible spirit of village life and community, sharing and celebrating local stories that might otherwise be lost. The Jackson Collection is a cabinet of curiosity writ large.





Our journey



First opened to the public in 1973 as the Old Kiln Museum the collection soon began to grow and with the help of an army of friends and volunteers the site was cleared, buildings relocated, and exhibitions built.



Over the next 50 years a hidden gem was born, loved by locals for regular events such as Rustic Sunday and Donkey Day Out and with a collection fit to enthral specialists and enthusiasts alike.



In 1984 Henry and Madge created the Old Kiln Museum Trust to operate the Museum and continue their work. The Museum's first paid member of staff, Chris Shephard took on the role of Museum Manager in 2000. Chris had first been introduced to the Museum at its opening in 1973, his leadership over 3 decades built the foundations on which we exist. Without Chris and the loyal band of volunteers that followed him, we would not be here today.



Chris was succeeded as Director by Emma Midgley, during whose tenure, long held aims to improve basic visitor facilities were achieved.



The Museum appointed a new Director, Ed Fagan, in April 2021, following temporary closure of the museum as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ed Fagan and his team now manage the Collection and the Estate for the Old Kiln Museum CIO registered charity.



Today the Museum receives around 40,000 visitors a year, has over 10,000 followers across social media platforms and runs a programme of much loved annual events. The Collection continues to grow and develop in line with the ethos of its Founders.



Our vision

We want our museum to stay meaningful and useful to people now and in the years ahead. Our goal is to become a recognised hub for local learning, history, heritage and rural craft - a place where visitors can discover and connect with the museum itself, as well as the surrounding landscape. We will make sure that this place continues to serve this purpose - sharing our cabinet of curiosity with all.

Our values

Our museum, our heritage and our landscapes are for everyone to enjoy. We will promote inclusivity and diversity, encouraging and facilitating everyone to experience, learn about and contribute to our heritage, and the natural environment, whilst promoting responsibility for both through the spirit of thriving community.





Our mission

We want to connect communities and support local growth through people, passion, objects and sharing stories of the past to build a better future. This includes for our volunteers, our staff, our local and online communities.

We will continue to collect and share stories with the public, in the spirit of our founders. Our museum will engage and inspire generations to come, through the discarded possessions of past generations, to tell the stories of the tools, trades, crafts and professions that made us who we are today.

Our site is unique, with an ancient heritage that has brought people together through travel, agriculture and trade for over a thousand years, we want to use its story as the anchor around which the industries of our local area have grown and developed.

Our collection is large, broad and special because of its everyday relatability to people in the past, present and future. We want to display and interpret our collection to ensure its relevance and interest to the lives of people living now, ensuring that future generations will hand down those stories and continue to collect, in line with the ethos of our founders, but in their own image.

We want to use our location to work with other local charities, businesses and small-scale producers. We want to work together to provide facilities for visitors to the area, to grow our visitor numbers and bring viability and sustainability to our surrounding area.





Analysis

A detailed analysis of our strengths and weaknesses, opportunities and threats.

Strengths

Our story is deeply compelling and accessible to all.

Visitors often connect with the story of the museum and are often excited to find out about it.

Our Collection is interactive.

We encourage visitors to explore at their own pace and interest, we encourage object handling whenever possible. Our working objects are well maintained and are regularly demonstrated by passionate specialists. Our site easily allows for the presentation of multiple time periods.

Visitors enjoy their time with us and commit to return.

Our visitors have a great time with us, their feedback is outstanding. Uptake in annual passes is excellent. Once visitors have been once, they often visit again.

We have a varied and interesting public event and schools programme.

There is lots to see and do at the museum. From tractor rallies to summer fairs, from fire engine days to our premier Village at War event, with vehicle rallies, Steam Fairs, Old Kiln Light Railway, rural craft and activities and much more. Events and learning are themed to showcase the very best of the museum, its objects and facilities.

Weaknesses

Our location has challenging public transport links.

Our rural location can be difficult to get to without a car, the nearest railway station (Farnham) is 3.5 miles away. The nearest bus stop is a 20-minute walk along narrow roads with no pavement.

Our visitor facilities need improving.

Our current main entrance is built inside a converted temporary classroom, toilets are in a separate building. Whilst all work, they could be improved to enhance visitor experience.

Our identity and brand are developing.

Despite now being called The Rural Life Museum, many visitors still refer to it as 'The Rural Life Centre' - a previous name. We can be confused with other rural / countryside museums by individuals making enquiries to visit. The use of the word 'Living' in our title is often felt by visitors on quieter days to be misleading.

Our Volunteer Community is aging. Rural skills and crafts are changing.

It has been difficult to recruit volunteers in recent years and many of our current volunteers are aging. It's important for the museum to document and preserve the diverse craft skills of volunteers, or many of the skilled crafts once demonstrated are at risk of being lost.



Opportunities

Corporate sponsorship

There are a number of organisations that already support the museum in an informal manner. From the arborists who help care for the arboretum, often for lower than the normal rate or for payment in kind, to Alexander Dennis who have invested significant funds in the development of the Dennis collection at the Museum. We are surrounded by businesses that are relevant to the museum and more must be done to introduce the opportunity of working together with other businesses.

Our land

There are opportunities from the land on which the museum is located. There is an opportunity to work with our nearest neighbours, the RSPB, CRT, National Trust and others to provide facilities for a group of organisations / attractions, to work together to promote tourism in our area using the museum site and land as a visitor hub.

Surrey and transport links.

Our museum sits in an area rich in cultural and leisure facilities with good transport links. Proximity to London, trunk roads, airports and the South Coast, as well as other heritage sites provides a wide range of choice for visitors and local people, including international visitors.

Partnership opportunities

The site is shared with other organisations - Old Kiln Light Railway, Farnham Beekeepers, RSPB Farnham, resident Blacksmiths and Rural Chefs. There is a real opportunity to market this jointly - perhaps sharing volunteers, resources and business development plans.

Threats

Governance and Board Capability

Some of our Trustees have reached the end of their term, so new Trustees are needed who have the skills, knowledge and connections to drive the museum forward. Recruitment and retention plans will help manage this threat.

Our buildings need repair

Some of our non-historic buildings are life expired - with buildings in need of repair. The costs of operating and maintaining the structures, and infrastructure within the museum is an ongoing challenge, with build costs and energy prices rising each year.

Staff resources

The museum's staffing capacity is constrained by budget limitations, which keeps the team small and salary ranges low. This can make recruiting and retaining experienced people challenging.

We are not so well known

We have the opportunity to tell our story, to engage with a wider audience and to continue to bring new people to the museum and to this part of Surrey. We know that visitors come from as far north as St Albans, as far west as Exeter and all along the south coast, our catchment area is vast so we need to be better known.

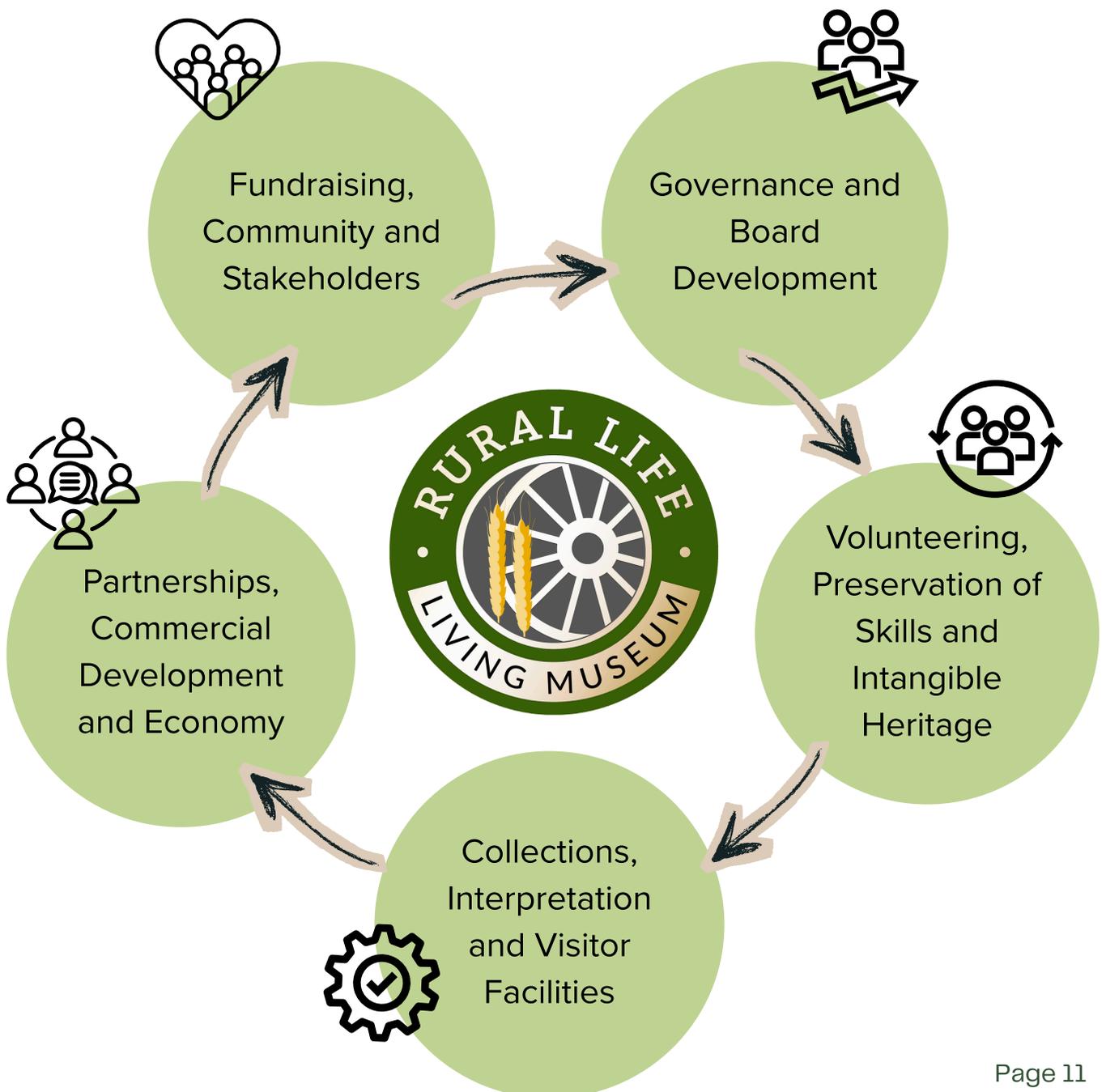
Shared facilities

The site is shared with other organisations - Old Kiln Light Railway, Farnham Beekeepers, RSPB Farnham, and Rural Chefs. How they use and manage their buildings/facilities can have an impact on visitor experience which is something the museum needs to manage.



5 Strategic Objectives

Setting our priorities for achieving our vision and mission.



Delivery

Strategic Objectives

5 strategic objectives delivered over a 10 year programme

1. GOVERNANCE AND DEVELOPING THE BOARD



Year 1

- Recruit and on-board a new Chair of Trustees.
- Understand and agree our future aims, needs and wants.
- Produce and adopt a scheme of work to develop the Board membership and bring in new people, knowledge and skills.
- Board to be effective in supporting museum operation.

By Year 3

- The Board of Trustees will be effective in supporting the basic operation and the development and delivery of future aims, including major projects.
- New Trustees will be on-board and working effectively.
- Detailed planning and development of major projects will be complete and ready to move to funding and delivery phases.

By Year 5

- The Board will be fit.
- Seeking, recruiting and turnover of Trustees will be normal and healthy.
- The Board will be relevant, fit for purpose, and working for our museum in the present and the future.
- Delivery of major projects will be underway.

In 10 Years

- The Board will be diverse in age, background, experience, knowledge and learning style.
- Capital elements of major projects will be complete and activity plan delivery well underway.
- Our Museum, people and place, will be confident of itself, and its value locally and nationally.
- Our Museum will be sustainable, vibrant and effective.
- More people will want to take part at all levels of the organisation.
- Preservation will be borne along by pride in this place and the achievements of the Museum community.

2. FUNDRAISING COMMUNITY AND STAKEHOLDERS



Year 1

- Develop and Launch patrons scheme delivering an initial 25-35 patrons providing £30k in funding annually.
- Determine who our community stakeholders are.
- Conduct community survey to discover how the Museum is used, and how it might be used by communities in the future.
- Look for fundraising opportunities.

By Year 3

- Develop and adopt a community engagement plan based on research and feedback gathered in year 1.
- Be recognised as a valued community asset.
- Foster and support regular community use of the Museum site and facilities.
- Develop and adopt endowment policy providing funds through investment.
- The Patrons scheme will have 50+ members and provide £50k in funding annually.
- We will develop capability and capacity to realise grant funding opportunities.
- Funding for major projects will be secured.

By Year 5

- The Museum is used for learning and community activities most days.
- Endowment scheme will make first successful pay out.
- Patrons Scheme will have 100 members and provide £100k funding annually.
- Seeking grant funding opportunities will be business as usual.

In 10 Years

- The Museum is a significant organisation, a local leader.
- Communities are passionate about and proud of this place and its stories, it will be valued and effective working for people in the wider community.
- We will be asked to apply for funding opportunities and be a trusted partner delivering outstanding outcomes for people, heritage and the environment.
- Endowment will provide for significant capital expenditure supporting high standards of preservation and public programme delivery.
- Our patrons will be our rock, not only our funding, but our guiding light for the future.
- Our Museum will be nationally significant, for positive reasons, its achievements will be hailed as best practice examples within our sector.



3. PARTNERSHIPS, COMMERCIAL DEVELOPMENT AND ECONOMY



Year 1

- Develop, discuss and agree in principle opportunities for working with key partners in delivery of co-operative aims. Understand what we currently have.
- Develop and adopt programme to diversify and grow commercial income streams.
- Agree year 1 Commercial KPI's.

By Year 3

Develop co-operative agreements with key stakeholders to include:

- Businesses and organisations sharing our site e.g. RSPB, OKLR, Resident Blacksmiths and Farnham Beekeepers.
- Neighbours such as The Countryside Regeneration Trust (CRT)
- Local enterprise groups such as Surrey Hills National Landscape and Surrey Hills Enterprises.
- Local businesses such as Squires Garden Centres, tourist attractions, leisure providers and hospitality venues.

We will have a broad list of potential partners and be carrying out engagement activities. We will have effective working partnerships in place focussed on delivery of our long term aims and a long term plan for commercial diversification and growth being delivered.

By Year 5

- Commercial income streams will be equal to gate revenues.
- We will have a partnership programme that delivers value for our organisation and our partners.
- Delivery of partnership outcomes will be underway.
- We will have positive control of our commercial reputation and its outcomes.
- We will be a valuable outlet for locally made products.

In 10 Years

- Commercial revenues will exceed gate revenue.
- Other organisations will ask to partner with us as part of their own strategic plans.
- We will contribute significantly to the local economy.



4. COLLECTIONS, INTERPRETATIONS AND VISITOR FACILITIES



Year 1

- Develop and adopt Museum-wide interpretation policy.
- Develop and adopt a whole Museum exhibition plan, designed to redevelop areas of the Museum ensuring our collections remain relevant to people and meet the charitable aims of the museum.
- Focus Collections Management on rationalisation, disposal and storage of collection items not required in exhibition plan.
- Continue to deliver the Learning and Discovery Schools programme.

By Year 3

- Major projects to renew visitor, exhibition and administration facilities will be fully developed. Funding for major projects will be secured.
- Collections rationalisation will be underway with a significant amount of duplicated or irrelevant material having left the Museum site.
- Key interpretation will be in place.
- Half of existing Museum exhibitions will have been renewed. Half of existing interpretation will be renewed in-line with interpretation policy.
- The Learning and Discovery schools and youth group engagement programme will continue to grow.

By Year 5

- All our historic buildings will be safe, wind and weather tight.
- All historic buildings will have active conservation management plans.
- Most of the Museum will be re-displayed with new interpretation.
- Major projects for renewal of facilities, including replacement of life expired buildings will have started. Some may be complete.

In 10 Years

- Our Exhibition and interpretation plans will be delivered and complete.
- Collections rationalisation will be complete.
- All our historic buildings will be safe.
- Our collection will be well cared for.
- The whole Museum will be relevant to people.
- Non historic buildings will have been renewed, major projects will be complete.
- All buildings and major objects will have conservation management plans, with resources in place to deliver active conservation management.
- The Museum will be well known for its Learning and Discovery programme.



5. VOLUNTEERING, PRESERVATION OF SKILLS AND INTANGIBLE HERITAGE



Year 1

- Carry out volunteer audit to fully understand the current state of volunteering in the Museum so as to offer the appropriate support and training.
- Through written and photographic evidence, and by talking to current volunteers, complete an audit of skills and knowledge that have been lost to the Museum.
- Produce a wish list of volunteering skills for the future, based on the collection, current and desired public programme, activities and the preservation of bygone knowledge and skills.

By Year 3

- Develop and adopt a renewed volunteering policy so that volunteers can actively support, understand and better engage with the Museum.
- Through positive promotion and successful recruitment, we will have grown our volunteer team and lowered the age demographic.
- We will have introduced new / lost skills for public demonstration, engaging people with our collections and the stories they tell.
- We will develop a project to consolidate and preserve, as a reliable record, the history of our Museum, its people, their skills and knowledge.

By Year 5

- We will design and implement internal systems for knowledge capture amongst our staff and volunteers, reducing the risk that skills and knowledge will be lost in the future.
- We will develop and deliver a volunteer training programme suited to our needs, supporting improved visitor and learning experience.
- Develop volunteering opportunities for all, including for corporate days.
- We will have trained and up-skilled younger working age volunteers, enabling them to be the Museums custodians of the future.

In 10 Years

- Our knowledge capture project will be complete; its continuation will be embedded in the Museum's volunteering culture.
- Our volunteers will be highly skilled, able to impart their knowledge through organised training and development, encouraged to pass on skills to a new generation.
- Our volunteering programme will be over-subscribed.
- Volunteers will contribute to the history of the Museum, enabling us through them to preserve the 'un-touchable' knowledge and skill of people, past and present for people in the future.
- Volunteers will be supporting delivery of the museums objectives including core purpose learning and discovery programmes.





Conclusion

The Rural Life Living Museum Director, Trustees and staff want to develop and deliver a sustainable operating model for the charity that provides a financially secure future for the museum for many years to come so that it is protected, cared for and shared with the community to deliver it's core purpose. We endeavour to:

- Be less reliant on ticket sales and seasonal weather effects.
- Develop and deliver financial stability through sponsorship programmes, through commercial partners, and through our patrons scheme.
- Be open to, look for and welcome other funding opportunities and partnerships.
- Grow reputation and brand.
- Become an absolutely essential community asset, both in economic value and through community use, sharing our collection and our site.

If you can help us on this journey, have any questions, can financially support us or would like to volunteer with us please contact us at the museum. Thank you.

Rural Life Living Museum



Any questions? Contact us.

 The Reeds Road, Tilford,
Farnham, Surrey, GU10 2DL

 www.rural-life.org.uk

 info@rural-life.org.uk





 The Reeds Road, Tilford,
Farnham, Surrey, GU10 2DL

 www.rural-life.org.uk

 info@rural-life.org.uk

 Facebook: rurallifelm

 Instagram: rurallifelm

 Linked In: rurallifelm