



Final Report to the Ninevah Trust – October 2021

Cogges: Next Steps

Overall, Cogges aims to:

- be a place whose past is understood, valued and enjoyed by all who visit
- help people learn about local heritage skills, crafts and practices
- make a positive contribution to all its communities
- protect and enhance our natural environment
- be a place where people of all ages can relax, participate, learn new things and have fun

Cogges: Next Steps is a programme of capital works and activities which seeks to bring Cogges to life and create new levels of active engagement with target and core audiences. Elements of the project began in 2018. However, the bulk of works were undertaken between April 2020 and the public launch in July 2021.

Alongside a programme of community activity and development of the offer for schools and adult learning, the following works have been completed:

- A new ground level volunteer room to support growth and diversity in volunteering
- Manor House works to include new lighting, new heating to improve the condition of the building and to allow the house to be used year round
- Site wide interpretation to improve the understanding of 1,000 years of history, to engage new audiences and to deepen the experience for existing audiences
- Access improvements including a new culvert and path from the main car park; improved surfacing in the disabled car park and farmyard, new disabled access into the stables and Manor House
- Renovation of the Wheat Barn roof
- New toilets outside the pay barrier to support visitors on entry, groups, schools and café visitors

Capital elements

All works have been completed to a high standard, within revised budgets (to account for inflation as a result of delays in acquiring the freehold) and within the revised timescale.



The volunteer room was completed in March 2021, including significant amounts of volunteer labour. The previous volunteer room was located on the first floor of the Manor House and facilities were limited (no running water). This restricted access for many of our older or less mobile volunteers. New facilities are generously spaced, at ground level, central to the site, with outside space (essential during Covid) and with vastly improved facilities. They have been well used and well received by volunteers.



Manor House works have been extensive. The Manor house was last refurbished in the 1970s and has suffered many decades of neglect. Until the Trust acquired the freehold in 2020, management of the buildings was the responsibility of the County Council and subject to funding restrictions. The house had ceased to be a welcoming place many years ago – lighting and heating were inadequate for comfort and conservation, decorative state was poor and the building has a problem with damp. In 2021, the Trust replastered the hallway, removing layers of bitumen and wallpaper that were retaining moisture and damaging the stonework beneath. Further lime plaster repairs, a full redecoration, new heating and lighting have had a transformative effect.

Until 2021, the Manor House was inaccessible to wheelchairs. In the run up to launch, volunteers created a platform to allow level access and new ramps were installed. A special narrow wheelchair has been purchased to allow access through the doorways and for the first time, all Ground Floor rooms are accessible. Improvements through the farmyard now allows Cogges to welcome many more visitors with limited mobility.



Interpretation of the site was dated, mostly from the 1980s, and focussed mainly on the National Curriculum of the time and its emphasis on the Victorians. As a result, the perception of Cogges for many is that of a Victorian farm. Volunteer researchers have been collating research and exploring new areas of Cogges' 1000 years of history. This work continues, but the material unearthed to date has fed into a 14 point outdoor trail; graphics, set dressing, and Audio Visual interpretation in the Manor, Dairy and stables; an introductory film and a revised guide book





A new path across the field shortens the route from the main car park, but importantly creates an earlier sense of arrival with the Manor House visible much earlier in the visitor route and an approach through Cotswold sheep that highlights the site's long agricultural heritage. New toilets on arrival ensure there are facilities where they are needed and presents a thought through arrival to visitors.

The works to the Wheat Barn roof are essential to the sustainability of the Trust. As the Trust has come out of Covid, revenues from weddings has been essential in returning us to financial stability. The barn was completely reroofed between October 2020 and April 2021 and now provides a stunning space for activities, events and school groups. Further works to the lighting and new Audio Visual will take place this winter and greatly improve the experience for all



Visitor responses

"Loved this beautiful old Manor House Farm standing for 1000 years. Maintained but heritage lottery funding, it is a credit to the Cotswolds and does Witney proud. I consider it an extra precious find and well worth a visit from London, although, I was staying in the area and dropped in for a visit on the way home. Absolutely worth it."

"Fascinating place to visit. Lots for children and adults to do. Lovely walled garden and an amazing house to explore"

"Lovely little place and manor was a joy to visit"

"Visiting Cogges Manor Farm was a real pleasure ... lots of very well looked after animals, friendly staff and a good cafe added to the experience of seeing a beautiful place steeped in history.

Well worth a visit!"

Learning and Traineeships

The development of the Learning programme was hit heavily by Covid. However, the appetite for learning onsite has been pent up and we are seeing strong demand for schools to return. School visit numbers in 2021 are already ahead of pre-pandemic levels, despite not being able to recommence until May and a tentative start. The commencement of the Saxon House build in January 2022, will give a further spur to these visits and the signs are very promising for the future.

From September 2021, Cogges has been trialling a number of adult learning opportunities with courses in traditional skills such as dry stone walling and hedgelaying alongside a wellbeing programme of gardening, yoga, and art courses. Take up has been strong and we anticipate around 200 participants per year.

The Cogges traineeships programme has now been running for 9 months, with the first cohort of trainees having now 'graduated'. The trainees were recruited through partnership with the Family Services Centre and worked with 16-18 year olds who were outside employment, education or training. Of the initial group of 4 trainees, 3 are now in employment and the other has moved into full-time education. The latest group of 3 trainees have started their 6 month programme, learning a wide range of land management skills.



Thank you

The Trust is extremely grateful for the support of the Ninevah Trust, without which this project would not have been possible. Donor acknowledgement of the Foundation's support is available on the Trust website, a 'donor tree' and on graphics onsite.

Thank you!