

Case Study:

'Our Landscape', Chippenham
Museum Case Study
Green Grants Programme 2022-23



Background

Chippenham Museum is a Town Council run museum with four paid staff and 40 volunteers. They applied for a grant of £2,400 for a project to give teenagers a voice in the climate change debate.

The project involved teenagers on work experience, young people participating in an already established museum photo club and students from the town's three secondary schools. The work experience students would write object labels and help to design the exhibition which would be displayed in the secondary schools. Photo club members would make a photographic and audio record of contemporary activity in and around the town related to climate change. An exhibition at the museum and related holiday activities aimed to engage a wider audience of families and young people.

The project was designed and led by the museum's Engagement Officer, Elaine Davis and Museum Services Officer, Esme Booker.



Top Green Tip

Asking people to make a pledge can help to change awareness into action. Find out more about why pledging works here <https://www.globalclimatepledge.com/why-a-pledge/>

Do teens really care about climate change?

One of the key aims of the project was to give a voice to young people and to work with them to co-curate an exhibition using objects from the collection to inform about climate change, mitigation and the local environment.

Working with a group of young people through the work experience programme for years 10 and 12 (15- and 17-year-olds), allowed the project to make a quick start with young people from the target age range already recruited. Using a project approach to work experience allowed the museum to support a larger number of 10 work experience students. However, expectations from museum staff about the level of knowledge and interest in climate change amongst the group were not met. This surprised staff who thought that the young people would come with both knowledge of and an interest in this subject matter.

In reality, they found that climate change was not a priority for most of the group. Museum staff had to pivot their plans at the beginning of the week to include informing the students about climate change and supporting their research skills.

The ambition to truly co-curate the exhibition with students proved unattainable, however students gained hugely in knowledge and skills in research and communications and were surprised at the independence they were given and the amount they achieved. They enjoyed using cameras to photograph the objects, a piece of equipment most students had never used.

Museum staff felt that working with students who hadn't self-selected for their interest in climate change gave them a much better understanding of their target audience and demonstrated clearly the potential power of their collections. As a result, they felt this made for a better project.



The exhibition toured all three secondary schools in Chippenham where the data collected confirmed the initial findings with the work experience students. In answer to the question "How concerned are you about Climate Change?" the number of students who responded, 'not at all', was much higher than expected.

Each secondary school used the exhibition in a different way, placing it in open areas in two schools and in a classroom for use by teacher led lessons in the third. Overall, the responses to the exhibition were fewer than expected and therefore weren't used for the exhibition at the museum as planned. The exhibitions did provide information on levels of interest in the subject and some useful suggestions for people to interview for the ongoing contemporary collecting project. "We will be interviewing a beekeeper soon after that was suggested by a school student".

Using the collections differently, seeing the museum differently

Previous museum activity in relation to climate change had focused on reducing the building's carbon footprint. This funding encouraged the museum to turn outward and engage the local community with issues around climate change and biodiversity loss, using the museum collections. A pair of Victorian ice skates were used to ask the question of whether our environment is getting warmer. Burton's clothing was used to investigate the damages of fast fashion on our environment and examples of packaging within the collection were used to explore single use plastics and reusable alternatives.

The project has caused staff and volunteers to value a different way to use the collection and understand the power it has to inform, question and promote changes in behaviour. As a Chippenham Town Council facility, the project has enabled the museum to contribute to the wider efforts of the Town Council to reach its environmental goals. It has shown how the museum can reach and work with the wider community providing a more informal yet relatable way to engage people with climate issues.

Case Study:

What was learnt

- A small and very vocal minority of young people are passionate about the subject of climate change, but for the majority it is a low priority compared to finding work, the cost-of-living crisis and studying for exams.
- Museum objects have the power to engage young people and others, especially when they are used to connect to current issues and people see the relevance they have to life today.
- Running a project is a good way to embed practice in the museum with other staff picking up sustainability principles and embedding them through the modelling of colleagues.
- Looking outwards to help your community understand climate change is a key role for museums today, supported by Arts Council England, South West Museum Development and funding bodies.
- You learn the most about yourself, your collections and your target audiences when things don't go completely as planned and some of the best outcomes can be unexpected.

Related Chippenham Museum blogs:

<https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/museum-collections-the-climate-crisis>

<https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/collections-the-climate-crisis-single-use-plastic/>

<https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/collections-the-climate-crisis-art-the-environment/>

<https://www.chippenham.gov.uk/collections-the-climate-crisis-fast-fashion/>

South West Museum Development
Bristol Museum & Art Gallery
Queens Road, Bristol BS8 1RL

0117 922 4653

www.southwestmuseums.org.uk

[@swmuseums](https://twitter.com/swmuseums)



This has been produced under
an Attribution Non-Commercial
Share-Alike Creative Commons
License (CC BY-NC-SA 4.0)



Supported using public funding by
**ARTS COUNCIL
ENGLAND**

