

REPORT 2022

Lowestoft Steering Group, Heritage Open Days

Heritage Open Days is England's largest festival of history and culture, organised by the National Trust and the People's Postcode Lottery Fund. Every September, the events are organised by local people and organisations across the country who coordinate events in their local area to celebrate their own individual heritage. Every single event is free. Events are promoted on a national website which helps to increase awareness nationwide of what different areas have to offer.

Lowestoft's involvement in the national Heritage Open Days Festival was the brainchild of Paul King who put on a small series of events in 2017. He was attracted to the scheme as it gave local people the chance to celebrate and learn more about their own unique heritage. After a successful initial response from the town, a committee was put together in 2018 with Paul as Chair with a view to extending the town's participation. The number of events across the town has grown from an initial 17 to 118 in 2021, with 2022 looking to be even larger. Paul stepped down at the end of 2020, and Diana Moore stepped up from Vice-Chair to take over his role and continue his legacy.

The Steering Group is made up of a small committee of local people from all walks of life who give up their free time and energy to help promote the town and what makes it worth knowing about. Our role is to brainstorm and coordinate events across the town, market them to the public through social media and press campaigns and produce a What's On style brochure, listing and promoting the events. In 2019, the team were recognised and nominated for a Stars of Suffolk Award and in 2020, we received a prestigious national award for Tourism and Heritage for our Signalbox event in the 2019 festival.

In 2022, we're proud to announce that Lowestoft's Heritage Open Days festival has been recognised as a Major Event by Lowestoft Town Council with an accompanying Grant of £5000. This will allow us to promote this year's events more successfully and professionally.

Overview of 2021:

Despite the ongoing challenges and restrictions of Covid-19, 2021 saw our biggest event so far, running from 10-19 September, with 118 events registered with the National organisation, packed with an enormous diversity and range of content. These included live streaming, guided cultural walks, interviews, concerts and multi-media performances, exhibitions, two fairs, talks, screenings, open house events, plaque dedications and skill demonstrations. Lowestoft has embraced HODs and did itself proud. We managed the entire 10 day festival with a grant of £1000 from Lowestoft Town Council which was spent entirely upon publicity and marketing. We also received support from the Kirkley People's Forum and the Wherry Lines Community Rail Partnership in conjunction with the Lowestoft Central Project, which provided facilities for events and hosted the Information Hub

Anything we're proud of:

We're particularly proud of consistently managing to put on the highest number of events in the UK, both for a town of our size, but also, to be managed by a volunteer team, rather than a professional body. We think this speaks volumes about the sheer range and depth of the heritage within our town's community and its enthusiasm to see that recognised. Heritage Open Days exists purely upon the spirit of good will and the volunteer ethos. It generates a significantly increased awareness and value of what an area has to offer, both within the town and for visitors. We have estimated there were 18,000 visits last year to events across the town.

We also applied for a European Heritage Open Days Grant, with a report honouring the impact of Sir Samuel Morton Peto upon the town, with the assistance of historians Ivan Bunn and David Butcher. The paper produced is featured on the European Heritage Open Days site and is well worth a read!

Difficulties:

Covid 19 provided much uncertainty in the lead up to the event as to whether it might even be able to take place but we were able to maintain a presence during 2020 with a number of online events and activities. Because of this, we were able to bounce back in 2021 with a record number of events. Many lessons will be taken forward but the Major Event Grant will allow us to put some of the more technical matters of brochure production and publicity into professional hands and allow us more breathing space. The success nationally of the event now puts a great deal of pressure on the national team in August so we have taken steps to allow us counter that this year by introducing an earlier print deadline for the brochure, which should allow us to promote Lowestoft's efforts more thoroughly.

Exciting future plans:

Plans for 2022 are developing on a daily basis. This year's guide theme is 'Astounding Invention' which allows us to celebrate many of the industries past and present within the town and surrounding area, from shipbuilding, engineering, renewables, food production through to sports equipment, televisions, lifeboat technology and Concorde cabin seats! And not forgetting the first inventor of them all, Pakefield Man. We will also be adding events in Kessingland within the festival this year.

We have had an even bigger response from the town so far this year, particularly from local businesses and organisations, which is encouraging. We will also be featuring many more events aimed at younger people.