

Future of Heritage 'Focus on funding' Workshop May 2026 Report

The MKHA 'Focus on funding' workshop was held at the City Discovery Centre Bradwell Abbey on Saturday 25th April 2026. This report summarises the workshop and discussions at the meeting. The presentation material (minus icon images) can be found [here](#).



In attendance were David Muston (MKHA and Calverton), Anna McEvoy (MKHA and Stowe), Vicky Thorpe (MKHA and Deanshanger), Sara Jenkins and David Hargrave (Turvey), Alan Cooper (MKHA and New Bradwell), Eve Bacon (CLASP), Barbara Hale (Hanslope), Terry Smith (North Crawley), Pam Matthews and Christine Fossey (Stoke Goldington), Tim Skelton (MKHA and MKForum), Lauren Baker (MKCF) and Neil Loudon (MKHA and Milton Keynes Museum).

Funded by  Milton Keynes
City Council

David Muston opened the workshop by setting out the background, and that finance had been identified as a key issue for MKHA members at an earlier 'Future of Heritage' workshop held in 2024. In the circumstances he was disappointed that so few of the MKHA membership were in attendance but hoped that those who were there would find the presented material helpful, and provide an opportunity to exchange ideas. A report would be produced (this document) which would be promoted at quarterly meetings and via the MKHA website. Further background to the workshop is available in the presentation, which is self-explanatory.

Neil Loudon explained the challenges of securing funds for group administration, and also to support specific projects. This should be seen as linked to other issues facing some MKHA members such as diminishing numbers, ageing demographics, and the need to attract new members, particularly amongst younger people and the engagement with wider communities. He also mentioned the benefits of securing funds from organisations such as Heritage Lottery, and charities, although he highlighted there were restrictions on securing financial support. This required research by an applicant to maximise the chances of success.

The special guest speaker at the workshop was Lauren Baker from Milton Keynes Community Foundation. She talked through the work of MKCF and explained the process for obtaining grants, in a range of categories and values. One of the priorities of the MKCF work was to support the arts heritage sector. The work of MKCF is restricted to the Milton Keynes council area (see map below), but Lauren mentioned that other Community Foundation organisations covered neighbouring areas, via the links.

Bedfordshire [Bedfordshire and Luton Community Foundation](#)

Northamptonshire <https://www.ncf.uk.com/>

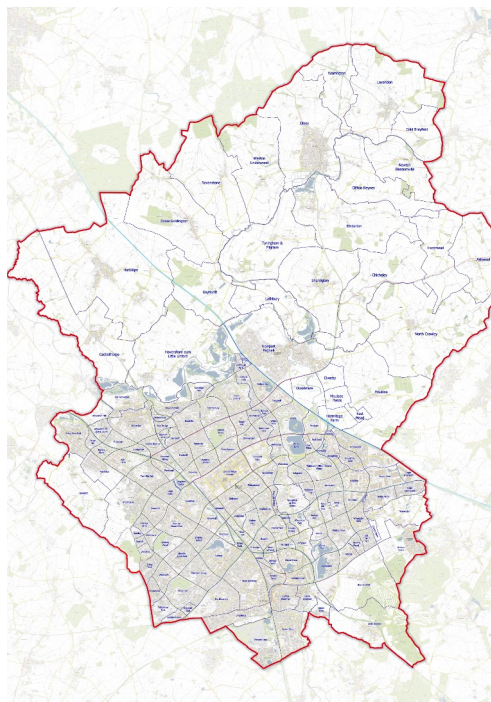


Fig1 MKCF covers the MK Council area

Lauren mentioned the MKCF 'Vital Signs' annual report which reviewed and identified evidence based priority issues for the Milton Keynes area. A link to the latest report is below.

[Vital Signs MK 13th Edition - Report - Page 1](#)

There was some discussion about the balance of funding between arts and heritage, and that many in the latter sector were small and voluntary based and posed additional issues in terms of the skills and time available in applying for grants.

Lauren strongly encouraged any group interested in applying for a grant to engage in a preliminary conversation with the Community Foundation, who would be able to discuss the application, and what documentation would be needed. In discussion an 'Equality, Diversity and Inclusion' policy would be important to support any grant application.

Lauren mentioned that Community Action MK is an organisation which may be able to assist with policy document development and grant applications. She also suggested that groups seeking larger grants should consider registration as a charity, and also to consider the outcome of any grant in terms of its longer term 'legacy' impact – from a sustainability perspective.

Match funding alongside the MKCF grant money was not necessary, but grant applications from a group working in partnership, and with part funding from other sources was acceptable.

In discussion it was mentioned that there could also be benefits in the recovery of VAT and the use of gift aid in respect of maximising the use of funds, but there would be legal, business and other financial restrictions to be considered.

Lauren's contribution to the discussion was welcomed, and thanks given.

David mentioned that he had undertaken a survey via face-to-face, and on-line information about how MKHA members were funded, and presented interesting findings, in that a larger number of groups were not subscription funded as might be anticipated.

There followed three presentations from Turvey History Society, North Crawley Historical Society and Deanshanger Village and Heritage Society. These covered using a different approach to funding a group, working in partnership with a Parish Council on a specific project and the use of legacy funds.

This encouraged much discussion, particularly questioning Turvey about whether they could secure additional funds from membership fees, particularly to cover ongoing administrative work. The idea of working in partnership and developing relationships with parish councils and other local organisations was considered important, not only in providing an opportunity to access other funds, but also to promote local heritage work to a wider community.

Turvey used a 'Donate' button on their website as a means to obtain additional funds – it was linked to a PayPal account. There was some concern over commission costs taken by the company, but the idea was still felt to be viable and could be adopted using completely free payment providers like Zeffy for registered charities.

In the second half of the workshop Neil presented other opportunities to secure funds, through MKHA grants and activities. He highlighted the work of charities and said that reference to the Charities Aid Foundation documents on charity investment, would be helpful. Also, the Localgiving organisation is another potential source of assistance. He emphasised the need to research the aims of particular charities to ensure reasonable opportunities for success.

Charities Aid Foundation – ‘Charities guide to investments’

[Download our charity guide to investments](#)

Neil also identified some of the challenges around changes to bank practices in supporting smaller community groups, and around financial investments, and the need to research any accounts and policies, to assess restrictions and to ensure the security of funds.

In discussion it was agreed that there was a challenge of supporting ongoing administrative costs such as website hosting subscriptions, rather than funding one-off heritage projects. The presentation provided lots of self-help ideas, and the benefits of forming partnerships. The use of a ‘100 club’ was mentioned as an opportunity to secure ongoing funds.

One challenge mentioned was around funding to support the on-going cost of premises to house archives and artefacts (rents and leases).

Post the meeting MKHA learnt that one of its members had taken on a trading company, which raises other questions about whether a more commercial approach could be adopted by some MKHA members, to raise funds.

Conclusions

- MKHA was there to support its members who were facing financial challenges and viability
- MKHA did not have the resources to take on management of groups, but could assist in directing groups to funding sources and partnership opportunities
- MKHA have a range of grants available to support heritage projects
- MK Community Foundation offered an excellent opportunity to secure funding for appropriate heritage activities, within their geographical footprint (see Fig 1.)
- MKHA members should consider how and where their funds are invested and accessed
- MKHA members should consider the options available for funding ongoing administrative costs, including ‘self-help’ activities
- MKHA members should consider the opportunities and advantages of undertaking heritage projects to ‘grow’ their groups, and increase financial income, and heritage interest
- MKHA members should consider the opportunities of developing partnerships with Parish Councils and local community groups
- There were many sources of funding available via national lotteries, and charities, but all need realism in applications and knowledge of any restrictions that might apply

- MKHA and its membership should consider using 'Donate' buttons on their websites linked to PayPal (GoFundMe was another option), but costs should be investigated

It was agreed that the workshop findings and issues would be promoted to the wider MKHA membership.

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