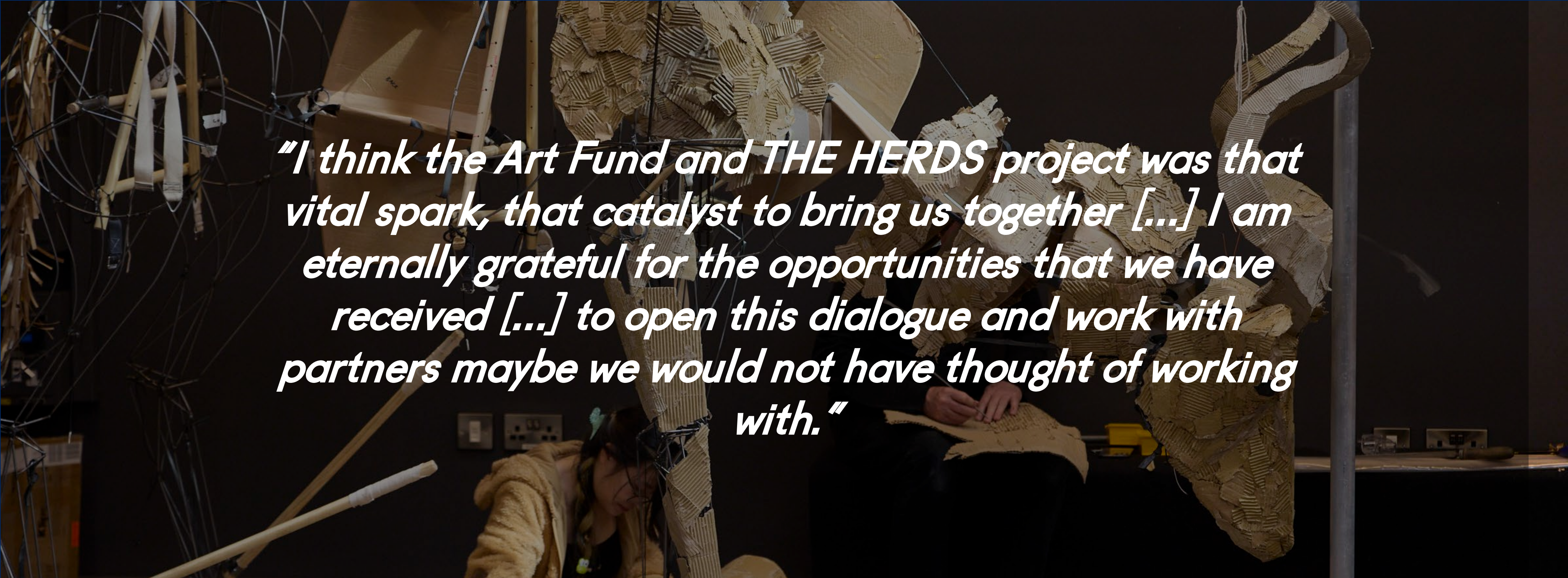


THE HERDS Art Fund Grants Evaluation Case Studies

October 2025



“I think the Art Fund and THE HERDS project was that vital spark, that catalyst to bring us together [...] I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that we have received [...] to open this dialogue and work with partners maybe we would not have thought of working with.”

Case studies

The following case studies showcase the diverse impacts enabled by THE HERDS Art Fund Grants; these are summarised and analysed in the accompanying evaluation report

- Art Exchange Gallery: Tiger sculpture fosters internal connections and engages new audiences
- Museum of Oxford: Engaging in first environmental science workshops inspired by local heritage
- The Natural History Museum: Squid, Scrap, and Sustainability: The Natural History Museum at First Light Festival
- Moths, otters and owls: Puppets engage new audiences at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust
- Stanwick Lakes: Inspiring staff and young audiences through kestrel puppetry
- Inspired and powered by collaboration, Storiell Museum's THE HERDS project unlocks new possibilities
- Linking collections to climate action: Watt Institution's first plastic litter-made puppet



Frog, fox, bat © Beach Creative CIC

Art Exchange Gallery: Tiger sculpture fosters internal connections and engages new audiences

Art Exchange, the University of Essex's Gallery, Library & Cultural Services, delivered THE HERDS-inspired workshops alongside their exhibition *Tyger, Tyger!*. The exhibition looked at William Blake and the work of Francis Alÿs, and took Blake's poem 'The Tyger' as a starting point for discussion of climate topics and collective creativity.

Over two days, students, staff and local families engaged with two artist-facilitators in building a large tiger sculpture from recycled campus materials. The project culminated in a parade across the campus, bringing the sculpture to the gallery and emulating THE HERDS' vision.

Taking part in THE HERDS initiative strengthened the gallery's programming focus on current environmental challenges, a topic already explored across the gallery, library and theatre programming.



HERDS activities at Art Exchange
© Marina Cusi Sanchez, Art Exchange

These activities opened new internal connections by collaborating with staff who the gallery had not typically engaged. Academics from Law and Sustainability departments contributed expertise on environmental and wildlife protection, enriching the educational content of the workshops. Additionally, interviews with academics were produced and shared via social media, creating conversational content that extended learning beyond the workshop.

The project successfully engaged children of university staff and local families, which was an underrepresented audience for the gallery.

“It was definitely worthwhile in terms of engagement; the fact that it was mostly young people and the hopeful legacy of it as well.”

The two artists who facilitated the sculpture-making were already known to the gallery and were highly enthusiastic about the project. They proactively researched tiger conservation to better inform participants and guide creative decisions.

“The two artists really took it to heart. They read up quite a lot on tiger conservation and tiger populations so that they could facilitate conversations. They did a lot more than we felt that they needed to, which was great. And they got very excited by the design of the sculpture.”

The project connected directly to the university’s special collections, referencing William Blake’s poem 'The Tyger'. Original facsimiles were displayed alongside a student-curated exhibition, creating a dialogue between the collection and contemporary environmental themes. The tiger sculpture remained exhibited in the gallery, providing a visible and lasting legacy for the project.

Participation in THE HERDS provided a clear timeline, structured guidance and supportive communication, making project delivery smoother.

“The directive we had for the project was very clear and well laid out. I did feel quite well supported.”

Insights on sustainable practice from the Art Fund webinars fed into wider university sustainability discussions, with shared resources helping to strengthen collaboration across internal teams.

“We fed some of those findings back to [the sustainability teams] giving them some recommended reading as a result. And I know that there has been some recognition of that from those teams for what we've been trying to do as well, which has been good to see.”

The gallery plans to build on the project for social media engagement.

“In terms of the legacy, we were planning on doing some reflective pieces on our social channels [...]. So, we're hoping that there will be some continuation of the conversation as well on those channels”

Videos, interviews and exhibition materials created for the project will continue to be available for programming and educational use in the future.

“I think it's something we can call back on because we have a lot of content, quite a lot of things were produced as a result of it. One of the exhibitions is still continuing, one of the Blake exhibitions, so it will feature in part of our collections going forward.”



Museum of Oxford: Engaging in first environmental science workshops inspired by local heritage

Inspired by the work of architect Henry Hare, who designed the Town Hall where the museum is housed, and famously concealed carvings of hares within its creations, the Museum of Oxford hosted a series of hare puppet-making workshops.

Using this animal as a creative starting point, the workshops integrated environmental awareness and climate-conscious themes into the museum's local social history context.

The same workshop format was adapted for three distinct audiences: older people, family groups and school groups. An external facilitator and artist led the sessions, bringing together expertise in art, museum engagement and environmental science to support interactive learning experiences.



Poster image for HERDS activities at the Museum of Oxford © Museum of Oxford

Exploring environmental themes was a first for the Museum of Oxford, where the focus is usually on local social history.

“We're not a natural history collection, we are a local social history collection and the link to environmental science is quite a tricky one for us because, in Oxford, we have lots of places that do that stuff really, really well.”

This debut programme has given the team confidence to continue integrating environmental perspectives into their work in the future.

“It's given us more confidence in being able to talk about those kinds of topics in a local social history context.”

Using the Town Hall's animal carvings rather than conventional collection objects offered another particularly novel approach, strengthening the opportunity to make interdisciplinary links.

“A new way of looking at our building and using the collections as inspiration.”

While target audience numbers were achieved, and engagement levels were high, what was particularly positive was how the older people's group responded to the environmental theme.

“The topic being environmental science was something that they had not had a lot of experience of with us before and they were really engaged with it and there was a lot of comments around things like, oh this is something I can talk about with my grandchildren.”

The artist leading the workshop had previously worked with the museum – this time she brought her background in environmental science, allowing her to combine her expertise in art, science and museum engagement.

“Our artist has a background in natural sciences and museums. So, she was really excited about this project because it combined all her specialisms together.”

THE HERDS supplied resource packs with adaptable content, enabling facilitators to tailor materials to the needs of different audiences.

“It was really good to have those resources that [the facilitators] could draw on to create. They took bits from each of the packs and created something new [...] when you're a non-specialist facilitator, those resources are invaluable.”

The workshops produced reusable materials, including adaptable puppet templates and presentation resources, ensuring the project's methods can be replicated in future programmes.

“It definitely means that we can do that again in the future.”

The small marketing budget and national campaign visibility were particularly valuable for this small museum, enabling promotion that would have otherwise been challenging.

“Having that ability to tap into an additional budget for some marketing material was really helpful.”

The Museum of Oxford's participation in THE HERDS programme highlights the value of small museums contributing to national initiatives, including increased visibility.

“It's also good to be part of that bigger campaign. And we're always really keen to be part of those bigger kind of national campaigns or regional conversations. We're a really small museum in a big city with a lot of big names.”

Squid, Scrap, and Sustainability: The Natural History Museum at First Light Festival

The Natural History Museum is a long-standing programme partner of First Light Festival in Lowestoft. This year they used THE HERDS Art Fund grant to deliver a giant squid puppet-making workshop led by a local artist, over the solstice weekend, using upcycled materials sourced from a nearby scrap bank.

Taking part in the festival's Planet Positive tent gave the Natural History Museum (NHM) a valuable opportunity to connect with local audiences at Lowestoft for the fifth year. The collaboration aligns perfectly with NHM's current advocacy programme Fixing Our Broken Planet, which focuses on nature-based solutions to the climate crisis and its impacts on biodiversity. Crucially, the Art Fund provided the delivery team with an opportunity and the flexibility to experiment with a new approach that they might not have otherwise prioritised.

"This grant gave us the space and the budget to be able to do something that we wouldn't have otherwise necessarily considered as a priority"



Giant Squid in Lowestoft © Natural History Museum

The giant squid theme created a strong local connection. It linked to NHM's famous specimen *Architeuthis dux*, nicknamed 'Archie', on display in South Kensington, and to the giant squid model recently gifted by the Museum to Lowestoft's new cultural hub, the Battery of Ideas.

"We were highlighting something that people in the local area would notice as they are walking down the street"

The theme also resonated with First Light Festival's beach location, and enabled participants to explore marine ecosystems, the impacts of climate change, and unexpected ecological effects such as how the squid population may be benefiting from warming seas.

The project introduced several new elements for the NHM's delivery team, for example it marked the first time they collaborated with a locally based artist to work with museum staff and scientists to lead activities.

"We really appreciated the opportunity to allocate part of our budget towards hiring someone in the locality to deliver with us. I would count that as probably the most important aspect that came out of working with the Art Fund [...] It was so valuable for us to make that local connection and work with an artist from Lowestoft"

The project introduced a craft-based approach to the team's typically science-based and specimen-led activities, blending creativity with

environmental themes. By integrating hands-on workshops, the museums' off-site offer broadened accessibility for families and young children, creating inclusive, intergenerational opportunities for shared learning and creativity. This is something they want to replicate across their festivals programme.

"We are actually going to include more crafting elements in our next festivals [...] we are definitely taking that forward as something that we trialled through this project and bringing it into our future programming"

The team also enjoyed embracing the HERDS Art Fund programme's encouragement for grantees to use recycled materials in their activities.

"We were prompted to use upcycled materials for the workshop and it was just really nice to be able to connect with that scrap store in Lowestoft. We will build this into our best practice, ways of working going forward, a good practice that we like to take forward"

Both the museum and festival team noted how the workshops were highly successful in engaging a diverse mix of participants.

“It was a massive success, families stayed for the full duration of squid making [...] the festival organisers really appreciated that and noted it”

Internally, the team strengthened their connections with museum scientists as they were involved to inform content, contextualise ecological messages and shape accurate engaging storytelling about ecosystems, habitats, and our natural world in crisis.

Externally, this experience reinforced relationships with local cultural partners. Following the event, the team shared THE HERDS resources with Lowestoft’s newest cultural hub, The Battery of Ideas, who will use the workshop plan and leftover resources to engage local audiences with the model of the Giant Squid in their space, giving a legacy to THE HERDS.

“It helped to strengthen our relationship with the cultural hub that's being set up at the moment in the area of Lowestoft”

Being part of a consortium provided additional value beyond the festival activity itself. The NHM team was very pleased with the webinars and peers’ collaborative opportunities facilitated by the Art Fund.

“The regular workshops were fantastic. Really, really lovely. I really appreciated how well-run they were”

The webinar on climate change and carbon footprint was particularly valuable. It reinforced internal sustainable practices as the team gained practical guidance on environmentally responsible planning for public events, including sustainable use of materials and resource management.



HERDS activities at First Light Festival © Natural History Museum

Moths, otters and owls: Puppets engage new audiences at the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

The Shakespeare Birthplace Trust delivered a series of nature-focused and creative activities as part of THE HERDS project, integrating them into their annual Great Big Green Month. Activities included a Dawn Chorus Walk, a Moth Breakfast, and puppet-making workshops led by a professional artist.

The grant enabled the Dawn Chorus and Moth Breakfast to be offered for free. This removed financial barriers and attracted participants who might not otherwise have engaged with the Trust's programming, including younger participants and teenagers. Frances Hall, Audience Engagement Manager was pleased.

"Our nature walks, proved very popular and quickly sold out."

The grant enabled the Trust to pilot some new programming ideas:

"The Dawn Chorus was a new activity. THE HERDS funding gave us a really good opportunity to test this new idea and see if it worked with our audiences."



Creative activities at the Sustainable Shakespeare Community Day © Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

The puppet-making workshop took place at the Sustainable Shakespeare Community Day, an event focused around community environmental groups, who came together to launch Great Big Green Week in the town. The puppets the community created were focused on local biodiversity, with a large moth and otter being created by the end of the day. Visitors were also invited to make an owl puppet, referencing Shakespeare's *Macbeth*. The Trust enriched this activity by commissioning a specialist puppet artist to lead the workshop:

“[THE HERDS grant] allowed us to work with an expert, an actual artist who makes absolutely gorgeous puppets. She was really enthusiastic about THE HERDS [...] and her energy made the activity really connect with our audiences.”

All the activities were well attended and received positive feedback, both in terms of their content and the free-access format. Frances notes that some participants attended multiple activities, demonstrating sustained engagement.

“We had people coming back to multiple events. And most of them were local as well.”

Participation in the wider THE HERDS consortium provided valuable networking and professional support alongside inspiration.

“It was really nice to have that additional support when creating our event. Hearing what everybody else was doing got us really excited about the project.”

The project also led to new valuable partnerships for the Trust, including collaborations with an RSPB local expert and a professional artist from the Coventry “Mothers Who Make” group, who led the puppet workshop. These partnerships expanded the Trust’s network, bringing new expertise and perspectives into its programming.

The funding available for digital marketing enhanced the Trust's capability to promote the activities online. The wider programme of social media promotion increased awareness in associating the Trust with a broader national initiative:

The Trust felt that THE HERDS was a positive way to engage people around a challenging message.

"This was great way of raising awareness about subject that is not always easy to talk about [...] THE HERDS activities demonstrated our audience's interest in sustainability and nature-focused activities, validating the integration of environmental themes into the Trust's programming."



Moth Breakfast event
© Shakespeare Birthplace Trust

Stanwick Lakes: Inspiring staff and young audiences through kestrel puppetry

Stanwick Lakes, managed by the Rockingham Forest Trust, delivered nature-focused kestrel puppet-making workshops for young people during the May half-term.

Central to the project was a six-metre by three-metre kestrel puppet, generously donated by the professional puppet maker leading the workshops, who was enthused by the project. It was refurbished with cardboard feathers to align with THE HERDS' theme and prominently suspended in the visitor centre.

Alongside the puppetry activities, Stanwick Lakes created a trail around the lakes exploring migratory animals and an interactive exhibition drawing on the Heritage Museum's collection, highlighting migratory journeys of species whose fossils and bones had been found locally.

Although the organisation has a strong ambition to deliver this kind of activity, financial constraints have been a major barrier. The Art Fund grant was essential in making these activities possible.



Children pointing at the kestrel puppet in Stanwick Lakes © Stanwick Lakes / Rockingham Forest Trust

“Certainly, if I can get funding, I want to do more art-based activities with the young people we're working with related to nature”

The project engaged multiple young audiences, including a Year 6 school group, the Junior Ranger youth team (ages 12-19), and a hospital outreach group of young people not currently attending school due to health or mental health challenges. The hands-on puppet and craft activities proved highly effective, particularly for the hospital outreach group, who exhibited unprecedented levels of interaction and engagement during the sessions.

“Their teachers said that's the chattiest they'd ever been as a group. [...] They said that was the most they'd seen them interact and chat with each other. So certainly, they took something from that”

This demonstrates to Stanwick Lakes the value of arts-based engagement for marginalised or vulnerable youth.

Participation in THE HERDS encouraged the organisation to become a member of Art Fund for the first time, driven by the desire to integrate into a national network and raise its profile, and influenced the staff's environmental consciousness.

“This was a really good opportunity to remind everybody as an environmental organisation that it's much bigger than just our site. It made us all want to do more.”

Staff are motivated to explore how Art Fund resources could support future similar small projects, building on the success of this creative, collaborative approach, which demonstrated how small-scale funding can catalyse lasting educational and community outcomes.

Enthusiasm for the project brought the team together; internal collaboration between the Heritage Museum, rangers and front-of-house staff strengthened teamwork and cross-department engagement.

“Everybody bought into it. And the evening that we put it up, it took loads of us and we had to build a scaffolding to reach the ceiling. It was brilliant. And so many of the team were involved with it.”

The organisation highlighted the value of participation in a national funding programme.

“It was really valuable”

Access to webinars, peer events and national gatherings provided professional development, inspiration and networking opportunities – particularly significant for such a small team.

“With things like THE HERDS, so much else came with it, that it was more than worth it, absolutely. And that sort of professional development was great, and connecting to other organisations was brilliant”

The project effectively encouraged the museum to make existing collections items more visible.

“So, in that process, lots of things like woolly mammoth teeth, an auroch horn, and a red deer antler had been found. And so they're the things that we picked out from the exhibition upstairs and we brought them downstairs [...] that's how we connected with what we already had in our exhibition.”

The puppet continues to engage visitors, with interpretive panels prompting reflection on wildlife migration and conservation.

“I would imagine since it went up in May till now, God knows how many people have seen it. Over a hundred thousand, I should imagine, because it's summer holidays, it's our busiest time”

Young person working on the kestrel puppet
© Stanwick Lakes / Rockingham Forest Trust



Inspired and powered by collaboration, Storiel Museum's THE HERDS project unlocks new possibilities

Storiel Museum and Gallery, in Gwynedd, North Wales, in partnership with M Sparc, Y Pethau Bychain, EECO, and North Wales Wildlife Trust worked together to deliver a two-part project: a museum-based ant puppet-making workshop using recycled and sustainable materials including sugarcane-based alternatives to plastics, to teach young people about ecosystems, and an outreach project at the National Eisteddfod where Y Pethau Bychain educators engaged young attendees in climate-focused activities and linked the programme to the Graddiad Gwyl (Wild Roots) project.

The programme successfully reached a wider audience than anticipated, including non-locals and cross-generational participants.



Hedgehog Pinecone Puppet © Y Pethau Bychain 2025

“The catchment was extremely big when we envisioned it originally to be something that just people of Bangor and the surrounding areas would participate in. We found that holidaymakers had taken part in it, people from counties over as well.”

The project introduced several innovative and creative practices for the museum. Puppet-making workshops inventively integrated STEAM learning, combining art, science and technology to teach environmental responsibility. Materials were carefully chosen for sustainability, encouraging repairability and reuse over single-use creations.

“In regards to the material, the designers thought, what options do we have? So they used an alternative with the base material – sugar cane.”

The greatest benefit for the museum came from the new and strengthened partnerships formed through participation in THE HERDS. For instance, collaborations with North Wales Wildlife Trust will inform future exhibitions on ecosystem fragility and invasive species.

“I think the Art Fund and THE HERDS project was that vital spark, that catalyst to bring us together [...] I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that we have received from THE HERDS there, to open this dialogue and work with partners maybe we would not have thought of working with.”

The museum saw high value in the “star power” of THE HERDS project and its visual spectacle to enhance engagement and valued being part of an international project whose scope fostered a sense of shared experience, helping young participants understand their role in broader environmental efforts.

“Having an ambitious event like THE HERDS that was something that was going through throughout Europe really caught the imagination of the young participants.”

Being part of a consortium was very valuable; it was stimulating.

“It's been great working with other partners and hearing their great ideas. I think that was infectious as well. Seeing different ways of working and having that chance to talk with partners throughout Britain.”

The project created lasting legacies internally and externally. Internally, staff and partners strengthened skills in collaborative programming, sustainable design and audience engagement.

The initiative also embedded sustainability as a core principle, encouraging reflection on reuse, repair and mindful consumption. By linking environmental themes to Welsh heritage, language and local ecosystems, Storiol developed a model for culturally rooted, conservation-focused programming.

This project's approach created a replicable model for community engagement for the museum, with scalable workshops, transferable to homes, libraries and other local venues. Workshops and puppet-making activities are now positioned for delivery across Gwynedd's library network and other community venues, ensuring long-term continuity.

"I think we can utilise it in the county library system. We have loads of different venues around the county, almost like satellites; our workshop worked really well. I think we can scale it down and we can take it around so we can continue with THE HERDS ethos"

Workshop details
© Elin Allaw

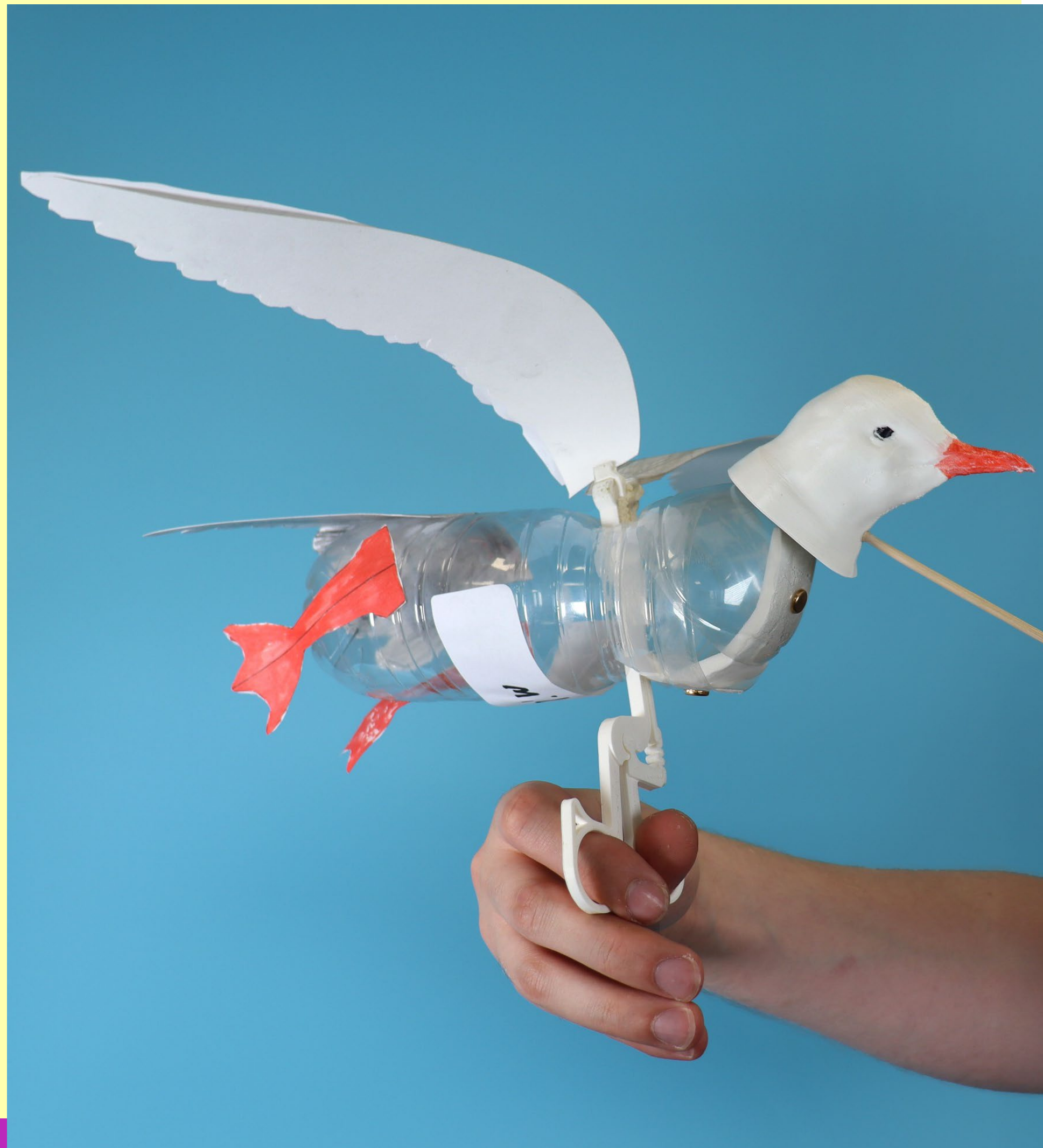


Linking collections to climate action: Watt Institution's first plastic litter-made puppet

The Watt Institution in Inverclyde ran a climate-focused project with around 100 pupils from three local primary schools, who created puppets from recycled materials inspired by the museum's collections. These were showcased at the 'Message in a Bottle' event, attended by 400 visitors. The event featured storytelling, music inspired by the River Clyde and was delivered in partnership with The Inverclyde STEM Festival; an annual hands-on science and technology event at the museum.

The project explored the impact of plastic pollution on the River Clyde and its local species, focusing on the black-headed gull, bottlenose dolphin and Norway lobster, three animals that ingest plastic.

Receiving THE HERDS grant from Art Fund was impactful and pushed the Watt Institution to experiment with programming.



Small Gull Bottle Puppet © The Watt Institution

Central to the project was the transformation of locally collected plastic waste, processed into 3D-printing material – via a machine built especially for the project – into sculptures and large puppets.

“Using the recycled plastic using local waste and turning that into a material which we could create sculptures from was the most innovative thing that we've done”

The project strengthened and expanded local partnerships. Collaboration with the local litter-picking group highlighted the value of community contributions in sustainability initiatives.

“The plastic bottles were collected by a local litter picking group. They didn't necessarily realise what we could do with the work that they do. They spend a lot of time cleaning up the whole coast in our area and it was quite nice for them to see what can become of the plastic that they collect and the message they can show as part of it.”

New relationships were forged with schools that had not previously participated in museum programmes, while existing connections with the Inverclyde education department and the local STEM festival were deepened.

“We were able to work directly with the education department, to identify schools and classes that would really benefit from that”

Participation in THE HERDS consortium enabled museum staff to exchange ideas and gain practical insights from peers across Scotland, Wales and the wider UK. The webinars and guidance from other participating museums offered additional inspiration and validation for the project's approach, whilst also fostering cross-country collaborations.

“Another positive element we had as part of the sessions, one of the local authorities in Wales had reached out to us and said, would you be interested in having a Zoom call with a school in Wales and with a school in Scotland? And that's just something we never really thought would be possible. So, I think that was a positive as well, that the pupils were able to kind of share their learning with peers in a different area, a different country.”

Support from THE HERDS programme also allowed the museum to innovate within a small-scale budget without compromising educational or creative quality. As one staff member noted:

“Although it's a small amount of money, it is really meaningful for our museum, which is very small”

The project left a lasting legacy in multiple areas, including enhancing the museum's ability to link collections with contemporary environmental issues. While the environmental theme is central to their programming, they engaged with it in a different way.

"We were able to look into our collection and tie that in with the project; it made us look at things in new ways. It is something we looked to champion in the museum, looking at different creative ways that we can explore the collection and working with different partners in co-curation."

The resulting exhibition and film not only provided lasting educational resources but also created a meaningful way to showcase the project alongside the museum's collections.

"As part of a legacy of the funding, we've been able to have an exhibition in the museum with the puppets and also create a film that shows the project, which has been a really nice kind of way to tie it together and that's shown alongside our Natural Sciences collection"



School workshop
© The Watt Institution

Thank you

With thanks to THE HERDS Art Fund Grant recipients, and the huge number of local partners and communities who collaborated to create activities, workshops and displays.

Octopus puppet in Mazey Day procession
© PK Porthcurno



Interviews took place with the following grant recipients to inform these case studies: Fareeda Atwan, the Natural History Museum; Noel Griffin, Watt Institution; Frances Hall, the Shakespeare Birthplace Trust; Rebecca Hilton, the Natural History Museum; Hannah Jones, Art Exchange; Rhys Lloyd Jones, Storiell; Kate Toomey, Museum of Oxford; Liz Williams, Rockingham Forest Trust

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