

Background information for applicants

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**THE ROALD DAHL
MUSEUM AND
STORY CENTRE**

About the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre

The Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre is an independent charity, founded in 2001 by Roald Dahl's widow, Liccy.

Our founding objective as a charity is to **further the education of the public in the art of literature and creativity, by running a museum and literature centre based on the works of Roald Dahl.**

Since the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre opened our doors in 2005, we have used the example of Roald Dahl's creative craft to show that what he did, YOU can do too. More than a million people have visited the Museum to date, including an average of 10,000 schoolchildren every year.

We think that making stories is part of what makes us human, and *everyone* is a storymaker. We use our collection and location – Roald Dahl's archive, in the village where he found inspiration in the everyday – to help our visitors unlock the stories we all have inside.

We do this through our school programme, our public offer of activities at the Museum, and through online learning sessions that can be experienced in classrooms anywhere.

The Roald Dahl Museum in 2024

Our recovery from the COVID pandemic is still ongoing, but year on year there has been solid progress. In 2022-23 we welcomed 50,000 visitors, 38% more than the previous year, and in 2023-24 we welcomed 60,000, a further increase of around 25%. This is great... but it is still around 10,000 people fewer than pre-COVID norms.

During the pandemic, thanks to public grants and the generosity of the Dahl family, we were able to keep investing in our staff through training and wellbeing initiatives, in our site to support recovery, and in our IT infrastructure. Some of our buildings may be over 400 years old; we are a future-focused organisation.

Throughout 2022 and 2023 we have been working on plans and designs for a long-brewing project to deliver a complete regeneration of our site: the 'Unlocking Stories Project' (USP). We have a major anchor donation from the Dahl family, but to achieve the project in full we need to build more support. The potential is incredibly exciting and given time we aim to convince enough donors and funders to back the project. However, at present, we estimate it will be at least a year, and probably more, until we might close for construction works.

The origins of the Roald Dahl Museum

In a purpose-built, climate-controlled room above our biggest gallery, there are over a hundred boxes of old papers. Many are written on the same yellow lined paper in the same handwriting, in the same weight of pencil. This is Roald Dahl's own personal archive, full of draft manuscripts, photographs, letters and working notes.

Roald Dahl's writing career lasted nearly fifty years. He decided early on to keep enough of his working papers to show how his stories developed and changed, sometimes from the very first idea all the way to the final book. He once said: "Good writing is essentially rewriting". Keeping his rough drafts allowed him to go back to his work and make it better and better until he was satisfied.

Roald's widow, Felicity Dahl (known as Licky – pronounced 'Lissy'), was determined to find a lasting home for this unique collection. In 1996, a rather tumble-down group of buildings went up for sale in Great Missenden High Street. Licky could see how this could be a place to delight, amaze and inspire children about reading and writing - something about which Roald Dahl himself had been passionate.

For nine years, Licky and her team made plans and gathered support... and the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre opened to the public on 10 June 2005. In 2011, the interior of Roald Dahl's famous Writing Hut was finally moved from the garden of his nearby home into the Museum to preserve it as a magical, messy shrine to imagination. It is the heart of the Museum today... but the genius of Dahl as a storyteller is found in our archives.

Roald Dahl's creative legacy at the Roald Dahl Museum

Millions of people read Roald Dahl's books every year and find something joyous in the words he wrote; we see this enthusiasm in our visitors. At the Museum, in Roald Dahl's archive, we care for all the versions of the stories, from the earliest drafts to finished books. We believe Roald Dahl's creative legacy is an important part of the heritage of English literature, but important does not mean flawless.

In our Museum, we shine a light on the elements of Dahl's life that strongly link to his creative craft, because exploring and encouraging creativity is our purpose as a charity. We do not seek to celebrate Roald Dahl as a flawless person.

In his life, Roald Dahl was a contradictory person. He could be kind; he often helped people, donated to charity, and contributed to medical science. However, there are also recorded incidents of him being very unkind and worse, including writing and saying antisemitic things about Jewish people.

We fully support the apology made by the Dahl family and Roald Dahl Story Company for his racist views about Jewish people: [Roald Dahl Story Company Apology](#)

The Roald Dahl Museum condemns all racism, including antisemitism, directed at any group or individual. We are committed to being more welcoming, inclusive, diverse, and equitable in all aspects of our work.

We do not repeat what Dahl said and wrote about Jewish people publicly, but we do keep a record of it in the Museum's collection, so it is not forgotten. Our anti-racism statement can be found in full online: <https://roalddahlmuseum.org/aboutthemuseum/antiracismstatement/>

How we are funded, and the wider world of Roald Dahl

The Museum is an independent charity. This means we receive no regular public funding. We earn most of what we need to operate through selling tickets and gifts in our shop, and we have always been very generously supported by donations from the Dahl family. No member of the Dahl family is involved in running the Museum today.

We have a sister charity, **Roald Dahl's Marvellous Children's Charity** (often known simply as 'Marvellous'), which works to provide specialist nurses and support for seriously ill children living with complex, lifelong conditions.

The **Roald Dahl Story Company (RDSC)** is the media company which owns and manages the copyrights of Roald Dahl's works. RDSC was bought by Netflix in 2021. When the company was owned by the Dahl family, we received generous donations every year; these donations ceased with Netflix ownership. We currently receive no financial support from RDSC, although we have a good, cooperative relationship.

Following the sale to Netflix, the Dahl family established a new charitable foundation which has made a remarkable one-off donation to the Museum. This has been set as the anchor donation for our planned capital regeneration, the Unlocking Stories Project. We expect to add to this by fundraising from other sources to achieve the best possible version of that project, and to support our future charitable activity.

Roald Dahl Museum Staff and Board

The staff team is led by Director Steve Gardam, who joined in February 2015. Museum staff teams include **Learning, Collections, Marketing & Design, Finance & Office, Projects & Facilities, Visitor Experience & Retail.**

There are 23 individuals on our main staff (most are part-time, so this is 16 FTE), plus frontline Museum Assistants who work weekends and in school holidays when we welcome most of our general visitors.

The Museum Board of Trustees appoints and oversees the work of the Director and their staff. Our Chair of Trustees is Isobel Hunter MBE, CEO of Libraries Connected, and the Vice Chair is Paul Griffiths, Director of Painshill Park Trust. Our trustees are all volunteers in their role at the Museum; they bring a raft of professional experience from different fields including other museums, cultural organisations and visitor attractions, fundraising and finance, marketing and education.

Roald Dahl Museum Forward Plan 2023-28

The Unlocking Stories Project (USP) – a major regeneration and expansion of our site – is the heart of the current Forward Plan. We have a unique opportunity to make our site bigger and better, and we have enough funding to have made a solid start. As our designs continue to develop, we aim to build the additional support we need.

However, whilst the radical physical change of USP does matter, it is important to recognise that this will be the embodiment of a greater organisational evolution, accelerating a journey that has been underway since 2016. We are working to be a more welcoming, inclusive, diverse, and equitable organisation (WIDE), deepening our engagement with audiences close by and – digitally – around the world.

Our clear-minded commitment to creativity and its connection to wellbeing will be revealed through our collections both in new displays and programmes, before, during and after the delivery of any capital project. All we do is rooted in our collection and location and the positive legacy of Roald Dahl's creative work. The Museum of the future is about what we can do for and with our audiences, helping to unlock stories with, by and for everyone.

All our work stems from our founding charitable objective, **to further the education of the public in the art of literature and creativity, by running a museum and literature centre based on the works of Roald Dahl.**

We translate this into our everyday statement of purpose, which is **that everyone who experiences the Roald Dahl Museum and Story Centre understands how the work of Roald Dahl can be a key to unlock the stories we all have inside us.**

Our vision is simply: **Everyone is a Storymaker.** We believe making stories makes us more human, and the enabling example of Roald Dahl's creative craft can help more people better understand how to make and shape stories of their own.

Our strategic aims and objectives for 2023-28 are:

<p>Aim 1: Show how the creativity of Roald Dahl can be a key to unlock the stories we all have inside</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Designing and delivering major capital regeneration of the Museum site to showcase Dahl’s creative process and the creativity of our audiences (the Unlocking Stories Project). b) Designing and improving our Museum site with playful, social, and inclusive experiences that seek to do the most, for the most people (before, during, and after USP). c) Using the Museum’s collection and location to show through all our work how creativity can be an everyday practice that also supports wellbeing (Notice, Connect, Be Active, Keep Learning, Give).
<p>Aim 2: Spark shared storymaking to reach a wider range of audiences</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Designing and delivering social, playful, intergenerational experiences in our public offer activity at the Museum, that seek to do the most, for the most people. b) Designing and delivering targeted participation projects for schools in areas of limited cultural opportunity that include the wider school community (local area and students’ families). c) Understanding and tackling the barriers to being a more WIDE Museum by working with experts who reflect protected characteristics in our audience. d) Building our own reputation as a WIDE Museum through cultivating partnerships and sharing our own story within and beyond our sector. e) Using digital to reach more people within and beyond the Museum site.
<p>Aim 3: Increase our own resilience and sustainability to better serve our public</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> a) Developing a robust public position acknowledging and constructively responding to Roald Dahl’s antisemitism. b) Ensuring that we have reduced our contribution to climate change and mitigated the environmental risks facing our Museum (flood, energy use). c) Supporting the personal wellbeing of our staff alongside their ongoing professional development. d) Planning and investing for the long term, making the most of the opportunity from Fantastic Peach Foundation funding.