

## Community Services

### Cogges Manor Farm Museum

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#### **Don't Miss these events:**

- 24 July – 29 August Kids Out school holiday activities programme
- 26 & 27 July Traditional Toys weekend
- 9 & 10 August Horse and Tractor Power
- 23,24 & 25 August Festival of Rural Crafts
- 6 & 7 September Harvest Weekend
- 27 & 28 September: Country Fair & Poultry Show

#### **Thank you**

John Wilson – for continuing to give talks to local societies and groups: funds raised are donated to the Cogges Trust

Henry Stuart from Spherical Images Ltd - for amazing new 360 images of the Manor Farm House ground floor rooms on the website - [www.cogges.org](http://www.cogges.org)

#### **News items**

- **614 season tickets sold! Visitor numbers 30% up on last year.**
- Eco & Healthy Schools event on 7 July – 345 school children and 157 teachers and adults – a great success!
- Pig Pampering attracted 200 people per day! - 14 and 15 June
- Conservation Statement: the full version of this report, including maps and illustrations is available on the Cogges website [www.cogges.org](http://www.cogges.org)

- Oxfordshire Buildings Record are running three courses at Cogges in the autumn featuring the historic buildings on site.
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## **Oxfordshire County Council's Social and Community Services Scrutiny Committee 2 July**

The committee received the following report:

### **Background**

1. The fundamental review of Cultural Services concluded that, given the resources available, it was not possible to justify maintaining Cogges Manor Farm as a visitor attraction and educational facility at a net cost to the County Council. The Council decided to maintain funding for Cogges for 2008/9 at the current level (£240,000), but to reduce funding over the following two years to £160,000 and £80,000 and to zero in year three. This report describes the process to date devised to implement that financial plan and at the same time to investigate ways of retaining public access to Cogges and the interpretation of the site for educational purposes.

### **Progress to Date**

2. A Project Board was established in February 2008 and this has met monthly, chaired by the Director for Social and Community Services. Membership has included two members of the Cabinet, Cogges Trust representatives, Oxford Preservation Trust and West Oxfordshire District Council. It identified clear objectives for its work:
  - (a) To seek a long term sustainable future for Cogges Manor Farm Museum, retaining public access to much of the site and a level of heritage education/interpretation (to be defined) in such a way to meet the financial plan set out by the County Council.
  - (b) To work with the Cogges Trust to seek external funding, grant aid, sponsorship and to maximise income potential.
  - (c) To identify possible commercial partners/providers to achieve necessary investment and increased income from compatible commercial uses.
3. Initiated by the Cogges Trust, a public meeting was held in Cogges Church in February. The meeting was attended by 180 people. Subsequently a database of people interested in the future of Cogges has

been created and a monthly Bulletin has been distributed to them (and members of the Council) in order to inform them about the work of the Board.

## **Conservation**

4. On the advice and recommendation of English Heritage, the Board commissioned a Conservation Statement; drafts of the Statement have been used for consultation with stakeholders, and copies been available for public reference. A copy has been placed in the Members' Resource Room. The final Statement was completed in May. The Statement provides a very useful overview of the historic significance of Cogges; it reinforces its status as a monument of national importance, and the duty of care on the Council to continue to maintain it to the highest standards. Compliance with the Statement has been stated explicitly as an objective for any future use of the site. In their response to the Statement, English Heritage has indicated its proposal to raise the listing status of the Cogges Manor House from Grade II\* to Grade I. This represents a reorganization of the listing criteria, rather than implying any further constraints on the use of the building.

## **Proposals**

5. Publicity surrounding the Council's decision making process prompted a number of external organizations and individuals to come forward with ideas for operating Cogges in future. The national Network of Rural Museums and other specialist individuals have provided advice and consultancy. All of these ideas have been welcomed and considered by the Board. Officers have worked with and advised individuals about their ideas and this work has led to a joint proposal by the Cogges Community Enterprise Group. Letters inviting proposals from other 'heritage' operators were sent out in order to seek the widest possible exposure.
6. In May the Cogges Community Enterprise Group and a commercial 'heritage' operator made presentations of their proposals to a panel (of Board members plus an external adviser); another heritage operator and a private individual have expressed interest in submitting a formal proposal. Meetings and negotiations with these possible operators are continuing into June/July and therefore there is likely to be some delay in finalising the report to Cabinet.

## The Next Stages

### *Report to Cabinet*

7. Following the presentation of these proposals in May/June and the further negotiations in June/July the Board will prepare a report for Cabinet (16 September) recommending a way forward. The Cabinet is likely to be recommended to agree a preferred operator. Detailed legal negotiations will then begin with the preferred operator to agree a lease or other appropriate arrangement for the transfer of responsibilities from 1 April 2009.

### *Staffing Matters*

8. Staff have been kept informed throughout this process and are to be commended for maintaining very high levels of public service (visitor numbers are up 50% on last year) despite the uncertainty over their future employment. If TUPE regulations apply to the agreed proposals then staff will be expected to transfer to the new operator. If this is not applicable then every effort will be made to redeploy them elsewhere in the Council. Unison will continue to be involved in staffing issues.

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### **Cogges Project Board 18 July:**

A panel of members received another 'proposal' for the future operation of Cogges – the panel reported their views on this proposal to the Board. With three formal 'proposals' now on the table the Board decided to commission an external evaluation of the options in order to inform the Cabinet. This will delay the decision making process – probably until October.

Meetings have been held with the leaders of the two other 'proposals' in order to clarify the details of each and to question them further about their business plans.

The next meeting of the Board will be on 29<sup>th</sup> August.

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