

# Acton Scott Historic Working Farm

## Public Engagement Report

June 2022



# Background

Acton Scott Historic Working Farm was the vision of Thomas Acton who established the museum to demonstrate historic farming techniques. It has been operated by Shropshire Council, as tenants of the Acton Scott Estate since the 1970's.

Acton Scott Historic Working Farm attracts approximately 20,000 visits a year but visitor income has not been sufficient to cover costs, and it has been operating with a deficit of £168,000 per annum.

Recognising the budgetary challenges faced by Shropshire Council and the need for a financially sustainable approach, Shropshire Council launched a public engagement exercise in February 2022. The engagement sought to understand:

- the views of different stakeholders;
- options for viable alternative uses of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm;
- options for alternative organisations who are interested in operating the site;
- visitors' perceptions of the Farm and the services it offers.

The engagement feedback is presented within this report and the findings of the public engagement will inform decision making and the future operation of the site.

The engagement included a series of meetings held both online and face to face to seek the views of key stakeholders, survey feedback and feedback by email or letter. This report brings together feedback from:

- Three discussion group meetings with staff (7th February) Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and the local community (9th February), and a discussion with the education and heritage skills sector (17th February).
- Emails and letters provided as part of the public engagement exercise.
- Survey responses gathered between 27th January 2022 (with a promoted start of the 31st January) and 14th March 2022.

Supporting materials provided to support the engagement included the museum leaflet, engagement plan and an information pack. The information provided within the information pack included details of visitor numbers, budgets and frequently asked questions. It was designed to ensure stakeholders and all members of the public could respond to the engagement exercise from a well-informed perspective and reduce any misunderstanding about how the Historic Working Farm is operated and financed.

Understanding the need to offer non-digital engagement options, Shropshire libraries supported the engagement and offered printed copies of the information pack and surveys for anyone who did not feel able to use the digital versions. A postal address was also provided as an alternative method of contact.

The engagement, led by Shropshire Council, took a partnership approach with close working with the Acton Scott Estate. The engagement sought to welcome ideas and suggestions for an alternative operating model able to generate a more sustainable future for the farm whilst working to align with the values, approach and ambitions of the Acton Scott Estate.

The online survey covered core themes which have been used as the main sections within the report (bringing in feedback from the emails and letters received). Themes include:

- Visitor patterns
- Visitor experience
- Value
- Unique Selling Points
- Feedback on site features
- Marketing
- Improving the experience
- The next generation
- Working at the farm
- Opportunities
- Options and overall views
- Support and volunteering

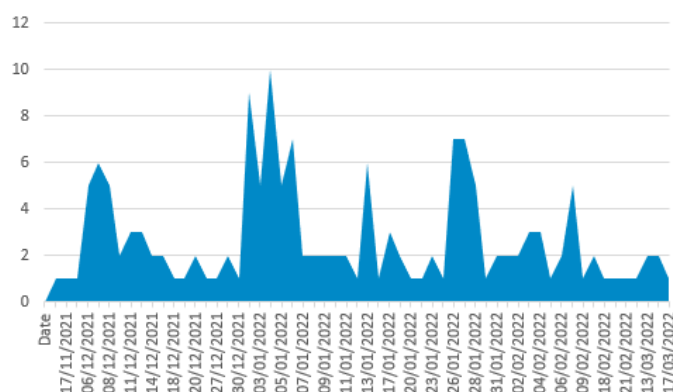
This engagement report has been designed to be shared with the Acton Scott Estate, Shropshire Council's Cabinet and, on approval, published as a public document.

# Research participation

The Acton Scott Historic Working Farm engagement resulted in a total of 1,122 survey responses (despite offering printed copies, 99% of people chose to complete the survey online) and 160 email and letter responses. The majority of written responses were provided by email rather than letter (93.8%).

The analysis of the email and letter response dates (see chart below) highlights that many of the emails were sent prior to the survey being issued, and many later emails included reference to completing the survey. This suggests that a significant proportion of respondents may have used both methods of response rather than one or the other.

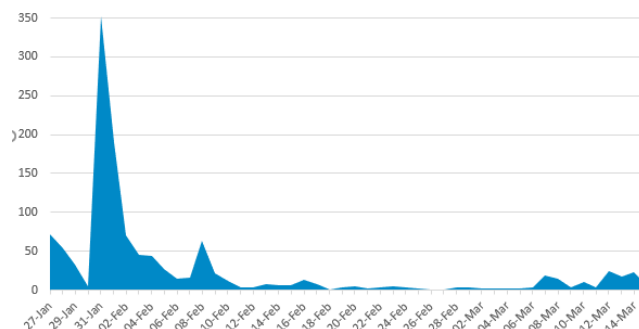
Email and letter responses by date



Although some selection questions were included in the survey, the feedback received was predominantly formed of open comments. This approach was necessary in an engagement exercise of this type where the views and suggestions of stakeholders and members of the public formed the focus and will be used to influence future decision making.

Work has taken place to turn this qualitative data into more structured data by categorising feedback into key themes (themes are determined through both sampling and considering the research objectives) and analysing the responses by theme. This makes it possible to find common issues and areas of consensus and also to illustrate a theme using example comments. Analysis of the emails and letters have been woven through the report, bringing all forms of feedback together under main headings.

Survey responses by date

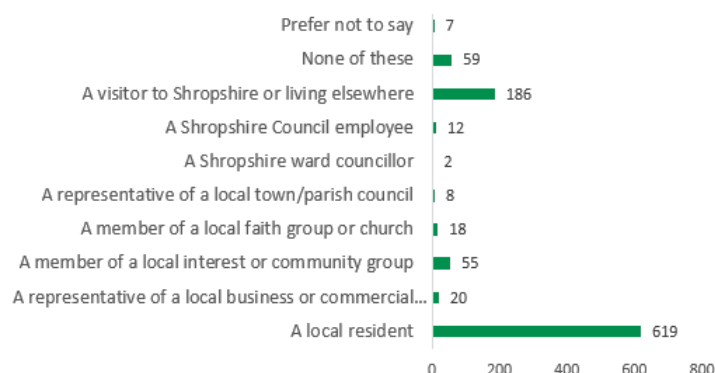


The 1,122 survey responses were submitted in greater numbers towards the start and end of the engagement period with peak numbers on the 31st January (the promoted start date) and the following day (1st February 2022).

103 people (9%) of the survey respondents indicated that they are a member of 'Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm'. This is helpful context for the engagement, particularly understanding how well people may understand the context and current issues surrounding the running of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm.

All survey respondents were also asked more about how they were completing the survey and the majority were providing views as a local resident (619, 55%). 17% of the survey sample described themselves as visitors to Shropshire (186). 66 people preferred not to answer this question or did not find a category to suit and the remaining 115 respondents were a mix of community group representatives, elected representatives, local businesses and other

Survey respondents by type



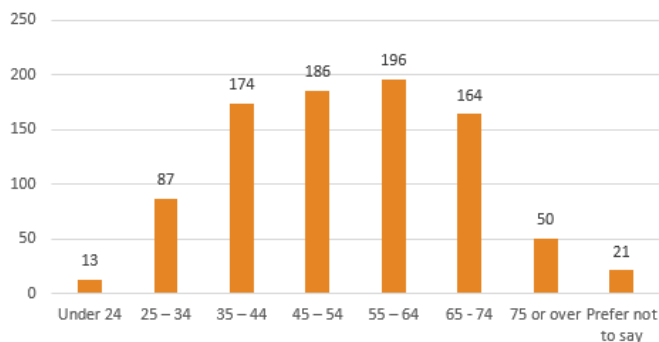


# Respondent characteristics

The survey included a set of more personal questions alongside the main survey questions. This is used to understand how representative of the wider Shropshire population respondents are, to understand a bit more about those engaged in the research and potential impact of change, and a little more about why respondents may respond to questions in a certain way. More detailed analysis is possible using this data but only headline results are included in this report. This data was not collected as part of meeting and written response engagement methods.

Of the total survey respondents, 55.3% (650 people) were female compared to only 22.5% (252) males, 0.2% preferred to describe their gender identity differently and 22% preferred not to say. Age group was also considered and the results shown below. The 1,122 survey respondents were from a mix of age groups but few under 24 year olds provided feedback as part of the engagement process.

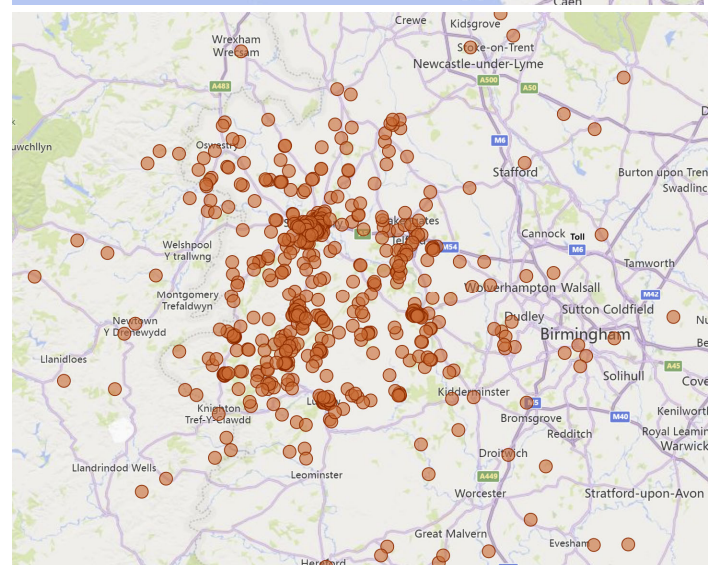
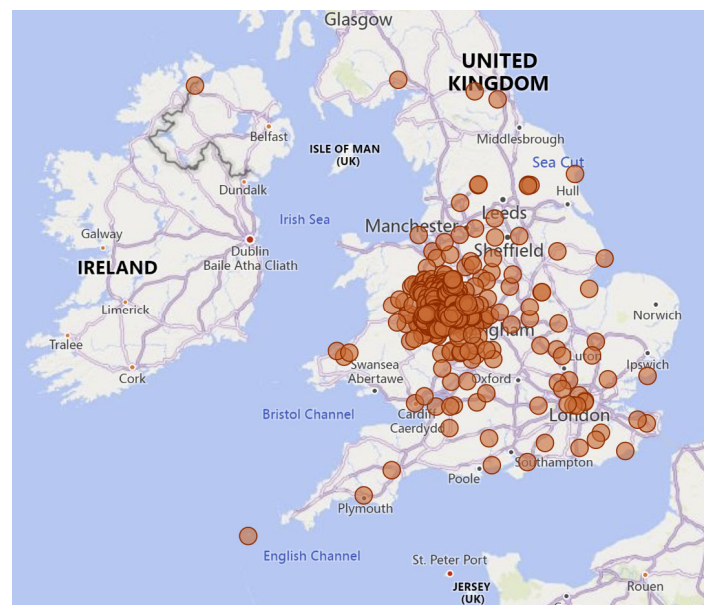
Survey respondents by age group



The survey included a question on ethnicity and the results highlighted that 829 respondents (74%) are of White British and Irish ethnicity, 24% preferred not to say or did not respond to the question. The remaining 18 survey respondents (1.6%) were spread across other ethnic backgrounds or did not know their ethnic background (0.4%) and it is encouraging to see some diversity within the response. When census 2022 data is available it will be interesting to understand how representative this response is of the wider population.

Survey respondents were asked about their daily lives and the results highlighted that more survey respondents are working (23%) compared to those in other groups. 3% are unemployed, 2% retired, 4% are carers or look after the home and 1% are in education. 44% preferred not to answer this question. The results reflect the age group results (more aged between 35-64) and compared to other Shropshire Council engagement activity the respondent sample reflects a slightly younger population with fewer retired respondents. The maps below show home location.

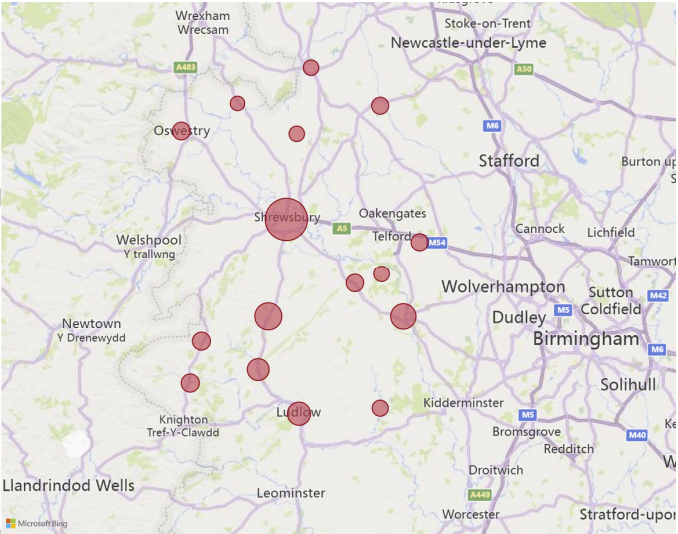
Map of survey respondents' home locations



Survey respondents living overseas are not shown. Dot locations are only approximate to prevent identification of any individual addresses.

The home location maps highlight the widespread interest in Acton Scott Historic Working Farm beyond county boundaries. The feedback includes visitor representatives from some distance away, with some overseas respondents not visible on the maps (as far away as the USA). Despite the wide geographic spread of responses, 837 respondents (74.6%) completed a response to provide their nearest town or settlement in Shropshire. The map below shows that more people living in the South of the county completed the survey (with Shrewsbury's larger population reflected in the response).

Map of survey respondents' home locations



A few important questions were included to cover caring status and disability/mobility to understand whether visitors who may have access or other needs and responsibilities had the opportunity to participate. 69 survey respondents (6%) indicated that they are carers, 11% have a long-standing illness or disability that limits daily activity a little and 2% have a long-standing illness or disability that limits daily activity a lot. Site or facility access and inclusion issues did not appear to be a theme throughout the feedback on this occasion but it is encouraging to note that the engagement sample was not limited to people of one characteristic type and did include some diversity.

Shropshire Council works to ensure that social inclusion, equalities and impact are considered within engagement activity and that Equality, Social Inclusion and Health Impact Assessments (ESIHAs) are completed to aid decision making prior to policy or service changes taking place. Engagement activity can provide important information to inform or update those assessments.

Reference: Map images based on Microsoft Bing Maps, MapPoint Web Service

The survey included the question ‘Shropshire Council works to meet the Equalities Duty and consider social inclusion and impact within all policy and service changes. If you have any comments on how any future changes to Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, could impact on different groups of people please provide your feedback below’. 158 people responded. Themes were evident within the comments and those are displayed in the table below. The feedback includes requests to improve access, expand the service offer for different groups within the community with different needs, and inclusion within volunteering or workforce opportunities. Concerns were expressed about potential closure.

Theme within comments	count	%
No changes required	15	9
Improve accessibility for disabled groups	28	18
Increase accessibility for diverse communities/groups	24	15
Request for specific activities/courses for disabled/disadvantaged groups	23	15
ASHWF as an education/learning facility - concern over the loss	18	11
Concern over the potential loss of the facility for disabled groups/guests	16	10
Loss of a historic understanding of country life - concern over the loss	14	9
More diverse workforce/volunteers	4	3
Other comments	16	10
<b>Totals</b>	<b>158</b>	<b>100%</b>

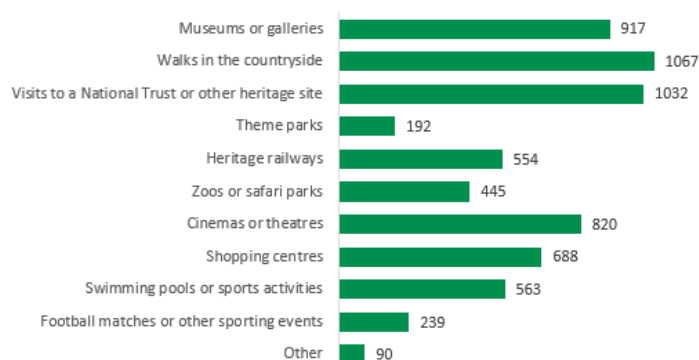
Example comments

- “.. the authority should be aware of intergenerational working, children and young people, catering for disabilities and ensuring inclusive engagement for all.”
- “As we have a number of special schools in our rural locations a venue like this is invaluable to people with special needs such as autism who find it difficult to be in noisy built up areas.”
- “This was a great day out for my autistic son as we could avoid too much noise and groups of people while he could still enjoy himself and experience the venue.”
- “Acton Scott is a fantastic resource that could surely be used to increase access to the countryside and to agricultural skills/careers for protected characteristic groups that may be more likely to benefit from this, for example through partnerships with neighbouring local authorities or care farming organisations.”
- “It is very easy to make it seem that the country's heritage is white and heterosexual, as though people of all ethnicities, from other countries and continents hadn't been walking nearly the whole way to England more than 1000 years ago, and as though LGBT+ folks have not always existed. Paid staff who are visibly neither white nor cisgender/straight should be sought to broaden perspectives.”

# Visitor patterns

The engagement sought to better understand visitor characteristics and interests from those responding to the Acton Scott Historic Working Farm survey. To gauge the interests of the engagement participants, the survey asked 'Apart from Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, what types of attractions have you visited in the last five years?'. The chart below displays the response. Most survey respondents selected a range of interests with the most popular being 'walks in the countryside' (selected by 95% of survey respondents), 'visits to a National Trust or other heritage site' (92%), and 'museum or gallery visits' (82%). The least popular attractions with the respondent sample were theme parks and 'football matches or other sporting events'.

Attraction types visited in the last 5 years



90 survey respondents provided a comment within the 'other' category box. The table below shows there is some overlap with the original categories and supports the answers highlighting the value placed on outdoor spaces and attractions. The top 3 or 4 themes within the comments mostly relate to the attractions enabling time outdoors.

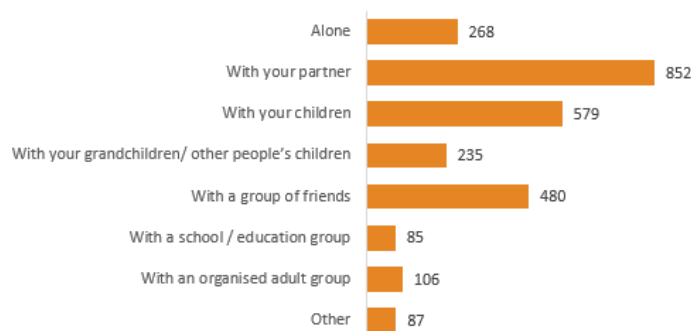
Theme within comments	count	%
Outdoor spaces/gardens/parks etc.	20	22
Organised events (e.g. concerts)	17	19
Country shows/agricultural shows/farms	13	14
Historic houses/churches/castles	12	13
Farm shops/restaurants and other retail (e.g. garden centres)	10	11
Other tourist attraction	9	10
Spaces to allow exercise	3	3
Other comments	6	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- "Antique and flea markets."
- "Canal path walks - various places."
- "Country fairs, woodland festivals."
- "Steam rallies"
- "Craft/makers events, farmers' markets, food festivals, Christmas markets."
- "Leisure cycling using Shropshire lanes."

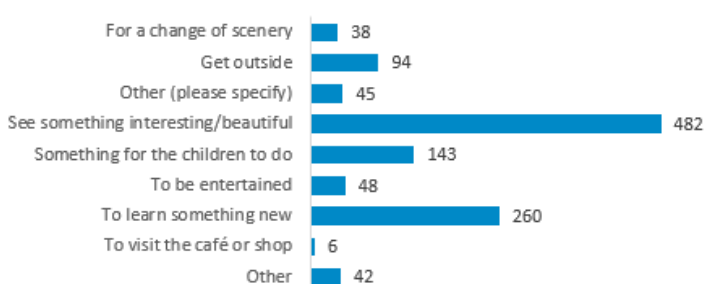
When asked about who visits are made with, the survey respondents chose a range of responses, highlighting that this varies. 24% make some visits alone, whilst it is common to visit attractions with partners, children, friends and grandchildren/other people's children. 87 people stated an 'other' including parents/grandparents, dogs and work trips.

Visit companions



The survey explored reasons for visiting attractions and the chart below displays the results. Top reasons for visits include 'to see something interesting/beautiful' (482, 43%), 'to learn something new' (260, 23%) and 'something for the children to do' (143, 13%). 42 'other' comments included meeting up with friends/family, understanding history/culture and a mix of many reasons.

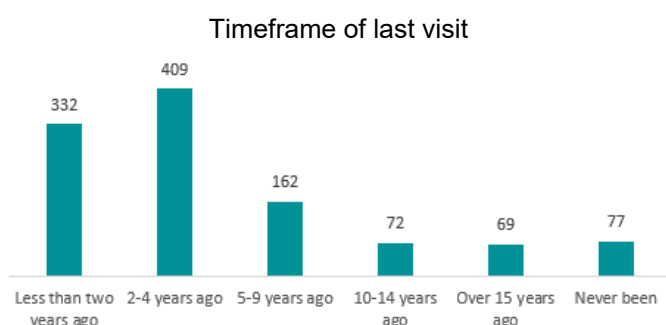
Main reasons for visiting attractions



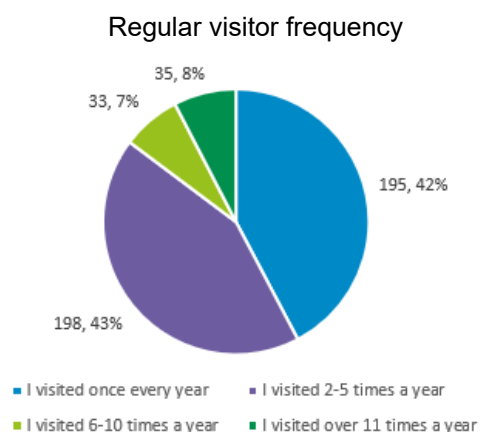


# Visitor experience

The survey and email/letter responses both provided information about visitor experience at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. The survey included questions about visit patterns, frequency, reasons for visits and more detailed questions to obtain feedback on the services, facilities and activities offered. The survey included a question to determine when survey respondents had last visited and the chart below shows the results.



66% of survey respondents have visited in the last 4 years, compared to 13% who visited over 15 years ago or have never visited. Engagement participation from regular visitors with a greater attachment to the site was expected, but it is interesting to see responses from 77 people who have never visited. Regular visitors were asked how often they visit: 18% (198 people) visit 2-5 times a year, 33 (3%) visit 6 to 10 times a year and 35 (3%) visit 11 or more times a year. Many of the more detailed comments within the survey and within the email and letter feedback reflect this regular use of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm for a range of reasons including to see the animals, spend time outdoors, courses etc.



The survey asked regular visitors why they make return visits to Acton Scott Historic Working Farm.

There were 438 responses to the question (only just short of the total 461 people who visit twice or more often a year). The table summarises the themes from the comments. Aside from generally positive comments about the attraction, many people visit for a day out with family/friends and to see the animals and other farm attractions.

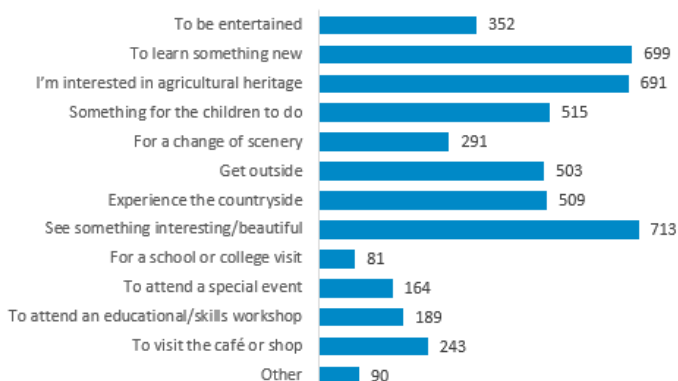
Theme within comments	count	%
General positive comments	82	19
Enjoy a day out with the family/children/friends	106	24
Visiting the farm and seeing the animals and farming practices	77	18
Interest in historic farming methods and lifestyle	72	16
Friendly, peaceful and accessible environment	32	7
Demonstrations / courses / activities / learning	41	9
Volunteering / Work	9	2
Other comments	19	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>438</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- “We like to visit at least once a year and try to go at different times as the experience differs greatly e.g. lambing in spring and harvesting in summer.”
- “We all love getting involved with the talks, collecting eggs, seeing the new life on the farm in the spring, watching the harvest in the autumn. We have enjoyed making butter and horseshoes over the years as well as feeding the lambs. The coffee shop is always a hit.”
- “The children love it - it's fab seeing the farm through changing seasons and stages of the animals' development. It was affordable to visit on the season ticket. Enjoyable setting lots to learn and appreciate including the school cafe did amazing cakes.”
- “It is a lovely learning environment for young people to learn about so many things, animals, animal husbandry, wildlife, history, in an interactive way. Something you wouldn't necessarily get in a school environment.”
- “I have been visiting Acton Scott since I was a child, I have now moved a long way from Shropshire with my family, but I still come back to Shropshire and visit Acton Scott with my children at least once a year. We would be absolutely devastated if we were not able to visit anymore.”
- “I live locally and have been visiting since primary school age; now I take my children. It's a beautiful place and an important part of history. It helps my mental health and is very educational for all.”

Building on the feedback from regular visitors, all survey respondents were asked for the main reasons they visit Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. The chart below displays the feedback received. Most respondents selected multiple reasons for visiting but 'to see something interesting/beautiful' was the top response (64% of respondents) followed by 'to learn something new' (62%) and 'I'm interested in agricultural heritage' (62%).

Map of survey respondents' home locations



90 people used the 'other' comment box to provide a comment. Of those, 20 people highlighted that they visit to see or to feed the animals, 13 visit to volunteer/obtain work experience or for work. Other themes tended to overlap with the original options or were general comments about the reason for visiting. The summary is shown in the table below with example comments also displayed.

Theme within comments	count	%
Enjoy a day out with the family/children/friends	27	30
See/feed the animals	20	22
Education or courses	14	16
Volunteer/work experience/work	13	14
Learn about local history and farming	10	11
Other comments	6	7
<b>Totals</b>	<b>90</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Example comments

- "Training with the working horses. [I've] been on one day and two day ploughing courses."
- "To see the rare breeds and historic way of farming."
- "To join with "little farmers" sessions."
- "Gain knowledge for use in a theatrical production."
- "To see a Victorian working farm in action, and to discover what's changed since those times."
- "Some of my ancestors' farm equipment was donated there."
- "To enjoy an ambience of historic times - not entertainment, but the feel of the times."

Two of the three meeting discussions included feedback on why people enjoy visiting Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. The staff member discussion notes of 'why do visitors enjoy visiting?' are shown in the box below. Some of the points reflect the comments from the survey (e.g. outdoor experience, interest in farming, interest in history, seeing the crafts/demonstrations and taking part in activities) but other points are slightly different interpretations (e.g. backlash against modern living, looking back to the past etc.). This interpretation is not incorrect and indeed a few comments suggest these points are true for some visitors, but perhaps are less common reasons.

#### Staff discussion - why visitors enjoy visiting

- Nostalgia.
- Look back into the past.
- View of a past way of life/ not just farming.
- Quaint nature of the site. "It's like a historic drama/ novel".
- Seeing traditional crafts in action/ learning about historic skills.
- Interest in sustainable/self-sufficient/organic farming.
- Interested in recycling/re-use/ 'make do and mend'/ no waste of resources.
- Answers some climate change questions.
- Backlash against modern living/modern de-tox.
- Interaction with the staff/demonstrators.
- Safe countryside/outdoor experience.
- Closer to nature and land.

A similar discussion was covered within the meeting with the Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and the wider community. Again this summary complements the survey feedback.

#### Community discussion - reasons for visiting

- Because it's beautiful and fun.
- Season ticket holders return/ would return for advertised events and small-scale activities.
- To enjoy themselves/allow their children to have fun.
- Allows generations to relate to each other.
- Safe place for those on the autistic spectrum.
- Clean air to enjoy with the family.
- To de-stress/ it is peaceful.
- To get close to nature.
- To see seasonal changes.
- Something new to see every time.
- To see animals grow.
- New residents to the county can learn about Shropshire's heritage.
- The café and shop.
- Folk at the Farm- there are folk music events.
- Attend traditional skills courses.



The value of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm was a strong theme throughout all the engagement methods and feedback collected. It links closely with the reasons why people visit and make return visits, but many people who responded to the engagement process using email or letter wanted to highlight why Acton Scott Historic Working Farm is important to them/their family or the wider community and county. Of the 160 email and letter responses, 92 people made comments about the value of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. Themes within the comments covered:

## **Economic Value**

- Attracts tourists to Shropshire
- A site of national importance
- Offers employment and work placement opportunities.
- Offers volunteering opportunities.
- Teaches skills and courses (linking to other employment opportunities).
- A venue for events and activities.

## **Environmental Value**

- Home to rare breeds.
- Untouched, organic farm with ecological value.
- Demonstrates sustainable, low impact farming methods.
- Past practices are relevant for modern problems (climate change and the impact of intensive farming methods).
- Learning about the environment and wildlife.
- Learning about seasonal changes and where food comes from.

## **Historic and Cultural Value**

- Historic buildings and farm site
- Historic farm machinery and tools
- Demonstrations and courses teaching historic skills/crafts.
- Local heritage and history.

## **Social, Health and Personal Value**

- Educational value, offering benefits for children, schools and others wishing to learn.
- In situ learning through interaction and activity rather than in a classroom setting.
- Opportunity to spend time outdoors.
- Mental health benefits of a peaceful environment.
- Somewhere to meet friends/family and interact with staff and demonstrators.
- Particular benefits for those with dementia, autism and other needs.
- Appreciation of rural beauty.

## **Example email/letter comments**

- *"In my opinion there are few other places like Acton Scott in the country and it must surely be one of the jewels in Shropshire's crown."*
- *"Acton Scott Working Farm is an important heritage site within Shropshire, and has national importance. It enables visitors to experience a by-gone life and time, and is extremely important to our social history as well as valuable educational tool for younger generations.."*
- *"... we have visited the Acton Scott farm many times over the years and been enchanted by the window it gives into 19th century farming. We have relished the chance to take our children into this time capsule. It provides a charming and vivid insight into traditional farming methods now lost. Acton Scott Farm challenges our assumptions about modern life. We are all increasingly aware and concerned about the damage done to the natural world by modern farming, and this museum reminds us of what we have lost and, more than any other such museum, makes us question whether these changes were for the good."*
- *"The Victorian Acton Scott Farm has much going for it, on so many fronts. It is a wonderful visitor attraction and is a valuable educational facility. We have taken members of our family and their children on several visits over the years. The hands on opportunities were enjoyed by all."*
- *"I am 35 now and one of my clearest childhood memories is of Acton Scott from a pre-school trip when I was 4-5 years old. I still remember the huge Shire horses, feeding the ducks and smell of hay pellets. I was greatly looking forward to taking a friends child to Acton Scott earlier this year and was devastated to hear it was closed. ...As an adult I had (pre-Covid) looked at taking craft courses there. Again devastated at the loss of these. Ignoring my personal feelings, this attraction has the potential to offer so much more beyond a pleasant day out."*
- *".. It seems, these days, that our past is unimportant, but if we do not understand our roots we are lost, how can we make our way forwards, without the balance of knowing where we come from? The farm gives us that, and so much more..."*
- *"The wealth of knowledge would be lost forever. Places like this should be preserved and encouraged and continue to thrive."*
- *"It's not only beautiful it's necessary for the children today to learn about the children and families of yesteryear and how they lived and worked . In these highly tech oriented times this is an oasis of normality, a huge lesson in real life skills and survival."*

# Unique Selling Point (USP)

Determining a Unique Selling Point (USP) can be really helpful within business development including marketing and communications. Many of the comments about the reasons for visiting Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and the comments about value highlighted within the email and letter feedback link to this topic but there was a specific discussion on this within the staff discussion workshop. 32 different points or comments were noted within the session and these have been grouped into themes and shown in the box below.

## Staff discussion - USP

### Staff approach and service provided

- The friendly approach to visitors
- Personal touch of the experience
- Skills and knowledge of the team
- Season ticket holders become friends
- The historic demonstrations
- Its an invaluable function

### Site ethos and culture

- Curators
- Authenticity of the experience
- The depiction of real life
- It's still a working farm
- There is a connection between the landowner/family and the farm.

### Farm and environment

- Location and the landscape it sits in
- Untouched landscape and AONB
- Draws people into the countryside
- Being able to see the livestock life cycle
- The working horses and rare breed animals
- Unique collection of original buildings
- The buildings are all authentic

### History and atmosphere

- Immersive experience of stepping into the past and the immersive atmosphere of the site.
- The intangible heritage of passing stories and skills onto the next generation.
- Living history
- Unbroken tradition
- It's not just Victorian (depicts other periods of history).
- A snapshot in time.

## Education and learning

- Place of learning
- Allows people to learn from the past how to live sustainably.
- The preservation of rural crafts and skills.
- Offers special events.

## Wellbeing

- The location is peaceful and great for visitors' wellbeing.
- Allows nostalgia and reminiscence.

The discussion notes highlight how different elements come together to give Acton Scott Historic Working Farm its unique characteristics, including:

- o Location
- o Site history, preservation and management
- o Purpose
- o People (visitors, owners, staff and volunteers)
- o Impact (experience, learning and wellbeing)

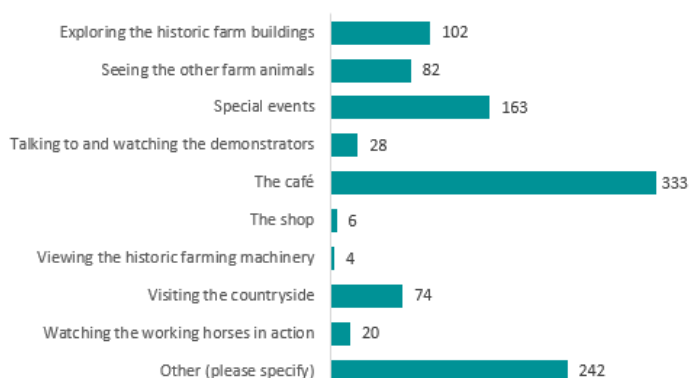
The attraction's unique selling points were not discussed within the other engagement workshops, and a question was not added to the survey, but the themes from this discussion are crosscutting and are reflected, not only the reason for visiting, but also in the feedback covered in other sections of this report including the feedback from staff about working at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, and in the feedback focused on future opportunities for the attraction.



# Feedback on site features

Building on the reasons for visiting Acton Scott Historic Working Farm, its value and unique selling point, more detailed feedback was gathered through the engagement survey. The survey asked respondents which aspects of visits they find most appealing, about experience of special events at the site, and for feedback rating different aspects of the visitor experience or attraction. The first more detailed question within the survey was 'What aspect of your visit was the most appealing?' The chart below displays the results. The feedback is interesting because the café came out top even though it had not really been mentioned significantly in the feedback on why people visit.

Most appealing aspect of visit



Following the café, the special events were also popular and this was considered in more detail in a separate question. 242 people commented in the 'other' box and the table displays the themes from comments. Most people feel it is a combination of things that makes Acton Scott Historic Working Farm special. Seeing the animals was mentioned by 15% of people, 13% commented on the value of learning about local history and farming, and 9% mentioned attending a course or workshop.

Theme within comments	count	%
All of it / General positive comments	36	46
Interacting with the animals	12	15
Learning about local history and farming	10	13
Attending a workshop	7	9
Good family day out	5	6
Volunteering	2	3
Other comments	7	9
<b>Totals</b>	<b>79</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- "It is the combination of these things that make the visits enjoyable, not the individual parts."
- "Many reasons; it's very interesting love stepping back in time."
- "Great fun for young children, including displays for children to 'milk' (pretend) cows..."
- "Impossible to choose! Demonstrators/working horses/other animals/historic farm buildings - ALL of these were very important."
- "All of the above! The site is incredibly interesting as a whole and important to promoting the history and legacy of the area."
- "For me the buildings and the history, for my children the animals & the cafe!"
- "Plant sales, craft days, light horse."
- "Took part in a course, in a nice environment."

To find out more about experience of special events, survey respondents were asked which events they had enjoyed the most. 94 people made a comment and the table below summarises the themes from those comments. Festivals and events (e.g. Harvest Festival, 1940s weekend and open days) came out top, followed by the event opportunities displaying the threshing/harvesting/ploughing/machinery. The example comments are helpful to illustrate the feedback.

Theme within comments	count	%
Festivals and events (e.g. Harvest Festival, 1940s weekend, open days)	30	32
Threshing/harvesting/ploughing/machinery	28	30
Demonstrations and courses	19	20
Animal events and interactions	11	12
Plant sale	1	1
All events good/excellent	3	3
Other comments	2	2
<b>Totals</b>	<b>94</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- "The Children's Folk Festival July 2019 was amazing!"
- "1940s Event"
- "Hay baling powered by a steam engine."
- "Butter making and apple pressing have always been favourites."
- "Demonstrations such as Shire Horses, brick kiln, Bodger, Harvest Festival."
- "I liked the free entry events as I have 4 children and can not afford to go normally."



The survey was the main engagement method used to gather feedback on the attraction and how people feel about different aspects of their visits to Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. The workshop discussions and the feedback within emails and letters tended to focus more on the future of the site.

The chart shown below covers 13 different aspects of a visit to Acton Scott Historic Working Farm ranging from marketing before arrival, to site facilities and overall enjoyment and experience. Overall fewer people commented on the shop and café compared to other categories but all comments have been considered as a percentage of the total and the average response to each category was by a total of 1,016 survey respondents.

The top levels of satisfaction (very good) were for overall enjoyment (93% selected good or very good), the attraction as a countryside experience (92%) and the animals (92)%. Slightly lower ratings were given for the café (72% scored good or very good) and the shop (68% scored good or very good). Fewer than 10% of survey respondents provided poor or very poor scored (average of 4%) with the exception of one category: marketing. Marketing was clearly the one main areas of divided opinion. 38% scored marketing 'good' or 'very good' and 26% responded 'poor' or 'very poor'. Marketing was a strong theme throughout and within the email and letter responses received. Due to the large number of comments made, it is covered in more detail in the next section of the report.

Some more survey comments have been included below to help illustrate more of the feedback obtained. The survey feedback was very positive overall with very few negative comments. The main concerns were from people who had wanted to visit but found the attraction closed.

## Example comments

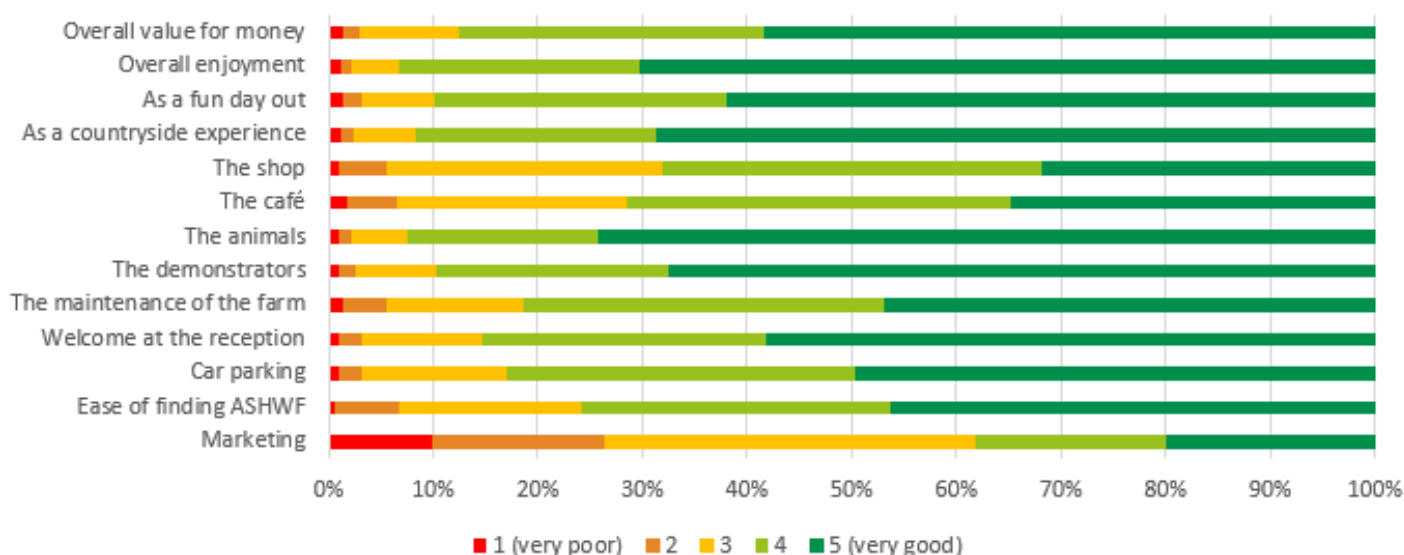
### Positive feedback

- "All of it is wonderful!"
- "The overall experience of absorbing the past in a beautiful place and introducing the children to all the animals."
- "To be immersed in the special historic landscape."
- "Watching our son interacting with the animals and people and being so relaxed with them."
- "Seeing rare breed farm animals."
- "I also loved the horses. All of the animals are of interest in this lovely setting."
- "Acton Scott used to be and should be again a great experience of a working farm, done properly it could be a great asset to both the community and the owners."

### Negative feedback

- "I've never seen advertisements about the farm, if I had I known we would have visited. Feels like you let it fail without trying."
- "It is impossible to answer these questions as the museum has been closed for two years or so."
- "Sadly I was unable to visit as it was closed. I would have loved to have been able to do all of the above, perhaps most of all the demonstrations."
- "The farm was closed when I visited."

How would you rate the following aspects of your visit to Acton Scott Historic Working Farm?



# Marketing

The marketing and advertising of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm was a very strong theme throughout the engagement. Many people suggested that Shropshire Council has not spent enough on marketing. Example comments are included below from the survey feedback.

## Example comments

- *"Much better publicity. One reason why the farm has fallen off the radar is the fact that it had its "marketing throat" cut around 8 years ago."*
- *"...more marketing to advertise.."*
- *"Better marketing and more going on."*
- *"Targeted marketing to schools and community groups."*
- *"To close it is sheer vandalism! The marketing of it has been very poor."*
- *"Better marketing via social media and local publications."*
- *"The advertising/marketing is minimal and poor. Get someone in who knows how to advertise, especially online."*
- *"A bit more active marketing could reap a lot of money coming into Shropshire, which feels very grudging to tourism."*
- *"Better marketing and publicity, as well as more thought given to how the farm promotes sustainable living - maybe tie things in with sustainable technology / lifestyles?"*
- *"More marketing - I haven't seen any marketing for a number of years."*
- *"No advertising/marketing seen where I lived at the time (recently moved to North Shropshire, intend to visit this year). Learnt of the farm through TV series, I don't believe that publicity was capitalised within other counties. Lessons to be learned from Black Country/Blists Hill/ Avoncroft? Good marketing & advertising."*
- *"Robust marketing strategy, clever use of social media."*
- *"Promote it! Get it onto YouTube and other social media."*
- *"Marketing it more for filming Companies and TV Programmes."*
- *"It is fantastic how it is. The staff are great, it's the marketing that is rubbish."*

19% of all the email and letter responses commented on marketing (or lack of marketing) so more examples have been included to represent that different sample of respondents.

## Example email/letter comments

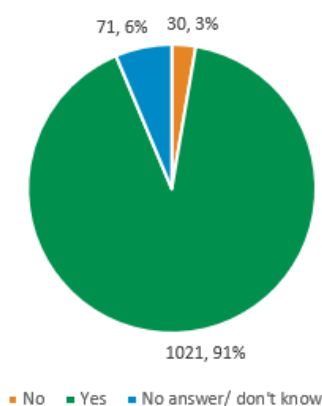
- *"Maybe visitor numbers have fallen because it has not been sufficiently promoted?"*
- *"It always surprises us how many people are unaware of the farm, particularly residents of Shropshire. Perhaps more targeted publicity would assist..."*
- *"The website needs improving and be more dynamic. Information about the site needs to be pushed rather than searched out."*
- *"The Farm used to offer a wide range of courses covering traditional farm work, craft activities, cookery and animal husbandry. If these courses were reinstated, and properly marketed, they would bring in much needed income for the Farm."*
- *"With more staycations on the horizon, I believe an investment in better marketing of the site would be an appropriate response. Remember how popular it was with the screening of the 'Victorian Farm'? People genuinely love their product but it's been allowed to be forgotten and neglected. Turn your TV on and people are smitten with a sheep farming family in the Dales. Surely Shropshire can do better for itself?"*
- *"I do believe there is a lot more that could be done regarding Marketing and PR of this site from towns within Shropshire and outside of the county. Tourist Information and social media sites could be used to advertise the venue much better than presently."*
- *"Many businesses have struggled during Covid and there needs to be a prompt marketing campaign to re-open the site as soon as possible. ...The benefits to many people's health will far outweigh the costs to support the site but if money is really the issue then even as a historic working farm the site needs to adapt and be more innovative..."*
- *"I am sure that, with sensible management and decent publicity, Acton Scott Farm could be a self-funding, if not profitable, local enterprise."*
- *"Until I read today's Observer article, I did not know the farm was still working. Better publicity seems to be required, both on social media and in the press. Given my areas of interest I am surprised that Acton Scott Farm has not appeared on my news feeds."*
- *"I am shocked to learn that the council is considering closure. Particularly as they do not seem to have actively pursued ways of increasing income effectively. The lack of publicity around the alleged plight of the farm is astonishing and a huge lost opportunity to garner support and help."*

The comments provide some clear and consistent feedback on the theme of marketing.

# Improving the experience

The engagement survey asked respondents how their experience of visiting Acton Scott Historic Working Farm could be improved but it is important to note that many comments highlighted very high levels of satisfaction and included comments that improvement is not necessary. Another question supports this feedback. When asked if they would recommend Acton Scott Historic Farm to friends or family 91% said 'yes' (3% said 'no' and 6% didn't comment).

Would you recommend to friends or family?



There were 500 survey comments responding to the question on improvements. 129 of those (26%) suggested that no improvement is necessary. The remainder highlighted some suggestions and the themes are shown in the table below followed by some example comments. Calls for a wider range of activities (demonstrations, courses, animal interactions) was a strong theme (21%).

Theme within comments	count	%
No improvement required/ general positive comments	129	26
Wider range of activities (demonstrations, courses, animal interactions)	105	21
Improved cafe and/or shop facilities	65	13
Improved maintenance/ updated facilities/ investment in the site	43	9
Improved marketing and promotion	35	7
Improved information (e.g. information boards, from volunteers)	28	6
Improved activities for children	24	5
Improved/ increased opening times	16	3
More special events	14	3
Reduced entry fee/ season tickets	12	2
Improved accessibility	11	2
Other comments	18	4
<b>Totals</b>	<b>500</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- "Wheelchair access was OK but not brilliant in places, although I appreciate it is a Victorian attraction."
- "Directions and advertising events could be improved, also the entrance area could do with being revamped."
- "The place is tired and disjointed - a visitor entrance, a stretch of so-so grounds and then a collection of farm buildings at the end - there needs to be a greater cohesiveness to the place."
- "We went on a very cold and wet half term, there was a lack of warm shelter and this forced us to leave early."
- "More activities for families - large playground, places to picnic under cover, takeaway coffees, snacks..."
- "Cafe food is excellent and staff friendly but service is slow and the entrance is inadequate for queuing and exiting."
- "Perhaps more staff demonstrating and more animals, but understanding it is a working farm so not always possible. The café is fabulous in the old school don't change!"
- "Cafe wasn't open when we went. The play area needs major updating and more exhibitions needed. Information boards telling you about the machinery, half the machines don't even tell you what they are!"
- "Better information boards - especially useful when there aren't many staff/volunteers to talk to."
- "Additional people on-hand with farming experience demonstrating their skills."
- "More themed special events - such as an old fashioned village fete/steam fair, Morris dancing festival, 'have a go' days."
- "Needs to be cheaper or free for Shropshire residents."
- "By staying open - longer season. Christmas at Acton would be magical!"
- "Shropshire council have failed to invest in the site and run it into the ground - it was so much better when we first visited. Poor marketing, poor management and the Council should be ashamed of itself for abandoning this special place. It's a jewel to South Shropshire- and it's been dumped when times got tough and it was most in need of help."

The wider engagement process collected more information on the theme of improvement and the next page details main points from the discussion workshop with the Friends of Acton Scott and members of the wider community.



The box below highlights many of the main discussion points focused on improvement and covered at the public meeting with the Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and the wider community. A few points have been removed from this section because they are more focused on future opportunities and options. Within the comments there is a strong theme on potential improvement related to food and low-impact farming, comments on inclusion and accessibility, ideas for partnership working and suggestions for additional features (e.g. play area).

#### **Community discussion - areas for improvement**

- Work more closely with the disabled community.
- Changing Places and more accessible toilets.
- Look at more training events including 'Restorative Farming'.
- Expand the educational offer beyond the Victorian themes.
- Celebrate local food.
- Local food- field to fork.
- Grow your own.
- Work with partners re farming in a protected environment.
- Low impact farming.
- Showcase skills of University students.
- Greater joined up working with other local attractions and create a visitor trail.
- Build a play area.
- Café offer should be developed, and all income should be allocated to the Farm.
- Have non-Victorian days.
- Don't call it a museum.
- Work with Airbnb network.
- The site has lacked investment and has drifted in recent years.
- Create a common vision.

The email and letter feedback included criticism of the way Acton Scott Historic Working Farm has been managed by Shropshire Council. 37 people expressed their dissatisfaction with Shropshire Council in some way (23% of all the email and letter respondents). Main points covered include:

- Inadequate marketing and communications.
- Inadequate commitment to the site.
- Closure for an extended period and suggestions that Covid has been inappropriately used as a reason to withdraw support/ not re-open.
- Reduction in activities and visitor offer over time.
- Lack of adequate investment to attract visitors and income.
- Queries over budget decision making and prioritisation given the wider value of the attraction.

#### **Example email/letter comments**

- *"There obviously needs to be some sensible thinking in order for it to run viably. I remember when educators were asked to do sessions when required, e.g. for a school visit. This changed to using permanent staff. think that these sorts of decisions have created unnecessary costs in the past."*
- *"Acton Scott was given national prominence by The Victorian Farm but the Council has failed to capitalise on this. An opportunity was lost to market a major tourist attraction; recently the farm has suffered from a loss of focus and investment which could attract the returns to make it a viable concern and significant local employer."*
- *"I also understand the impact that covid has had on businesses and tourist facilities. Coupled with this the recent outbreaks of E.coli at the farm has forced closure of the site. Making decisions regarding funding at this time seems a knee jerk reaction to issues which can be overcome."*
- *"Sadly, many of the Museum's activities were reduced and then discontinued over the years and the Museum became a less interesting place to visit. Inevitably, visitor numbers fell."*
- *"Another car park, cycle lane or new bins in the high street, whatever you are thinking you could do with the saved money, all that is fleeting. In ten years it will be forgotten and probably out of use, Acton Scott is real, it matters, it changes lives, when you visit you come away and see the modern world in a new way: the good and the bad and that matters."*
- *"I read that the council are considering spending £4 million on purchasing a car park in Shrewsbury. Surely this money would be much better spent on Acton Scott Farm?"*
- *"It is such a shame that the council has got to the point of seeing it as a drain on resources when it has the potential to be anything but."*
- *"I understand why this has happened. Shropshire County Council, in common with other councils, has faced serious problems with repeated cuts in funding, which has led to a progressive reduction in the funding of a range of services, including the Acton Scott Farm Museum. The approach of gradually reducing funding has inevitably produced a downward spiral to the point whereby the Museum has ceased to be viable, and this is why it now faces closure. I am, nevertheless, left with the uneasy feeling that this has been the County Council's long-term aim. With financial cuts continuing, some services would have to close, and Museums are one of the easier options."*
- *"It does seem bizarre that Shropshire Council are investing in tourism development at this moment, while calling time on a facility which broadens the offer."*

A few more additional questions were included within the survey to further understand how visitor experience or the attraction itself could be improved. The survey asked: 'If you've never visited, or if you stopped visiting, please tell us why...' and "how do you think the site could attract more people?". The table below highlights that 249 people commented on why they hadn't visited or had stopped visiting. Top themes included living too far away/ transport concerns, Covid restrictions, farm closure and children growing up.

Theme within comments	count	%
Live too far away/ moved away/ transport issues	62	25
Covid restrictions	46	18
No longer as attractive to family (e.g. children grown up)	38	15
The farm has been closed	30	12
Wasn't aware of Acton Scott/needs improved marketing	27	11
Need more/new activities to encourage a return visit	15	6
Farm is run down or expensive	2	2
Other comments	29	12
<b>Totals</b>	<b>249</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Example comments

- "No Active Travel options for example there is no encouragement to visit by Bicycle and there is no cycle route."
- "I visited regularly as a child before moving away from the UK. I've been back in Shropshire since July 2020 but on my last visit to the house, the farm was still closed because of Covid."
- "Not been last couple of years due to COVID."
- "Now need wheelchair access."
- "The marketing has been abysmal. A dreadful shame. Even offers of free publicity rejected. All my friends think the same. A hidden gem not creatively run, no engagement with the Shropshire community, Haven't seen it in social media or newspapers etc for an age. Just achieved a run-down facility. Not pro-actively publicised or marketed. Is there a Business Plan?"
- "One trip was sufficient for me ,but I went many times with others and enjoyed their reactions."
- "I wasn't aware it was still open! Lots of childhood memories here. I remember from when I was tiny."
- "Visits have tended to be less frequent as the children have grown up - great for primary age schoolchildren."

The last question more focused on improvement within the survey was 'How do you think the site could attract more people?' There was a very large response to this question with 733 comments in total covering a very wide range of themes shown in the next table.

The suggestions for attracting more visitors are varied but, as highlighted previously, marketing and promotion remains a strong theme. Other suggestions include more activities and events, encouraging group visits, and taking a stronger focus on the environment and farming practices. Example comments illustrate some of the issues.

Theme within comments	count	%
Improved marketing/advertising/social media presence	447	61.0
More/improved activities and events	54	7.4
Encourage groups/tours to visit (e.g. schools)	34	4.6
Focus on the environment and farming practices	33	4.5
More/improved courses and demonstrations	23	3.1
Improved transport links and signposting to Acton Scott	22	3.0
More/improved children's activities / hands on experiences	19	2.6
Improved café/restaurant facility and shopping experience	19	2.6
Accommodation (e.g. glamping, B&B, holidays lets)	17	2.3
Reduced entrance fees/ alternative entrance pricing (e.g. free for children)	17	2.3
Improved maintenance / updated facilities / investment in the site	15	2.0
It couldn't be improved/no changes are needed	7	1.0
Other comments	26	3.6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>733</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Example comments

- "By giving people a reason to visit other than as a spectator - adding in local produce and sustainable farming practice."
- "Have an area which is separate and caters specifically for children to play: zip wires, maze, soft play."
- "Base for teaching crafts and heritage practises. Education about animals and how to look after them too. Encourage walkers and could sell local artisan food etc. Artists."
- "Some form of public transport to link to Stretton station and Carding Mill etc."
- "Selling local produce or running rural courses at weekends. Offer camping weekends to the brownies/ guides and scouts."
- "Further television appearances to bring in investment and publicity. Settings for films, TV shows or educational pieces."

The next section in the report is linked to attracting more visitors but is focused on how Acton Scott Historic Working Farm can be made more appealing to the next generation.

# The next generation

The question 'How can the farm be made even more relevant for the next generation?' was a theme throughout the engagement activity. The question was included in the survey, staff workshop, Friend of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and community meeting and, although not prompted, some people mentioned this topic in their feedback by email and letter.

There were 721 responses to this question within the survey. Comments have been categorised into the themes shown below. A large proportion (163 comments, 21%) expressed a view that nothing should change because the farm is already relevant and engaging for the next generation. Of those who did suggest changes, 109 (14% of the responses) suggested more demonstrations, courses, workshops and/or school visits.

Theme within comments	count	%
Don't change it/ already relevant/engaging	163	23
More demonstrations, courses, workshops, school visits	109	15
Link to sustainable farming, organic production, climate change	89	12
More for children to do (play, activities)	77	11
Improved marketing, promotion, social media	59	8
Hands on experiences e.g. craft, farming	59	8
Use of technology (e.g. audio guides, QR readers, VR, interactive exhibits)	57	8
More animals, animal interaction, animal therapy	26	4
Shop, café, food and craft shops	12	2
Other suggestions or ideas	25	3
Other comments	37	5
Don't know	8	1
<b>Totals</b>	<b>721</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- "I think if you change its purpose you are missing what its actually all about."
- "More interactive features, allowing children to gain a 'hands on' experience of farm life from Victorian times to modern day. More fun activities for kids, tractor rides, dress up in Victorian clothing, a museum with features such as, learn how to shear sheep, modern milking process, the ethics of good animal care etc...."
- "Interactive engagement: QR codes. Geocaching, treasure hunt on farm, and activities you get to do."
- "Use as a training hub for crafts and other skills."

5 main themes came through in the discussion with staff covering both suggestions and approaches for engaging the next generation.

## Staff discussion - Relevance for the next generation

### Approach to learning and education

- Tell the story of climate change/ environmental concerns
- Veganism and organic farming
- Explain more about Biodiversity
- Tell the story of ethical food production
- More animal husbandry
- More about self-sufficiency and sustainable food production

### Engagement approach

- Use 'seldom heard voices' to tell the story
- Relatable history
- Teach lessons from the past
- No modern sounds or tech
- Quiet spots
- Learn whilst you visit without realising
- More living history
- More nostalgia
- Make it fun
- Build people's self confidence
- Allow more social interaction/ counteract impact of COVID

### Activities

- Give people things to do/Try something yourself
- Hands on learning
- Use the site for performances/ art activity
- Tell the story of family life/ living memories
- Find objects that resonate with modern day ones
- Digital detox
- Develop life skills

### Promotion

- Get more TV Coverage
- Provide escapism
- Tell the story of low impact farming

### Other developments

- Introduce alternative technology such as wind power
- Help people reconnect with the earth, animals, nature
- Community events
- Wellbeing events to support mindfulness and positive mental health.



The community discussion meeting with the Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm also explored how to engage the next generation. Many points came from the discussion and they have been grouped into themes below. There is some overlap with the suggestion from staff members but overall the feedback covers a wider range of themes across a broad spectrum of issues.

## **Community discussion - the next generation**

### **Approach to learning and education**

- Tell the story of food
- Link with sustainability and climate change/ low impact farming
- History of farming pre and post Victorian period
- Make more relevant for cross curricula education visits
- Run more training programmes, including accredited courses including Building Maintenance
- Run apprentice opportunities/ link in with heritage craft apprenticeships e.g. Rural Craft Council
- Work with university for work experience
- Partnerships with universities and education
- Tap into international education – develop suitable accommodation offer

### **Demonstrations and activities**

- Craft/skills students could learn and demonstrate on site
- Give young people access to seasonal activities
- Improve appearance of the site and have more demonstrations
- More demonstrations such as butter making
- Live streaming demonstrations
- Grow your own
- Local food- field to fork
- Move into the 1940s and introduce vintage tractors

### **Services and facilities**

- Transport to Church Stretton
- Play and picnic areas
- Have a farm shop
- Move café and shop
- Produce to be sold and used in café
- Get a pub

### **Other engagement ideas**

- Use more social media such as TikTok
- More animals/ Adopt an animal
- Community fund raising/ Crowd funding
- More events with different themes
- Extend the season and do Christmas events
- Hold auctions and sales
- Passport with other attractions

## **Other comments**

- Look at Ford Hall Farm
- Check out Museum of Rural Life
- Potential partnerships
- More connections with health and social care
- Link with social care, dementia/autism friendly
- Work with Middle Marches Community Land Trust
- Don't call it a museum
- Find new target markets
- Better consultation

There were a lot of ideas and suggestions within the list, ranging from new ways of embedding education opportunities into the work of Acton Scott Historic Working farm, to new ideas for activities and demonstrations, new partnerships and suggestions for other developments. This feedback was further built on when those engaged were asked more about options for the future and their ideas and suggestions for new opportunities. These are explored later on in this report.



# Working at the farm

The staff discussion workshop included four main areas of discussion: why visitors enjoy visiting; the unique selling points of the attraction; considering changes and relevance for the next generation; and working at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. This employee perspective is very important. Alex Langlands (who appeared in the BBCs Victorian Farm and now based at Swansea University) ran a session with the staff group to gain clarity on key points and provide some more independent/ external facilitation.

The main focus of the discussion regarding working at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm was 'what do you enjoy about working on the site?'. The point/comments captured at the workshop are divided into some core themes below. Themes range from providing a service to visitors, the workforce (including working with volunteers and as a team), the environment and animals to the importance of preserving history and passing on knowledge.

## Staff discussion - Working at ASHWF

### Interaction with visitors

- Enjoy watching the visitors' reactions to the site/ seeing the joy on their faces.
- Giving visitors WOW moments and memories.
- The authenticity of the experience.
- Getting to know our visitors
- Stimulating visitors' interests
- Creating a calming and healthy environment for visitors.

### Workforce and culture

- Working with volunteers
- Working with passionate people
- Having colleagues/volunteers and visitors to talk to.
- Passing on a love for the countryside
- Team work
- Learning something new
- No day is the same
- Common Bond
- Pride in the farm
- Support for each other
- Working with the owners
- It's a way of life.

## Environment and Farm Setting

- The location with its stunning views
- It's a rare working environment
- De stress when leaving the office
- It's a privilege to get up close to the animals/ work with the animals.
- Caring for the animals.

## History and atmosphere

- Keeping traditions alive
- Sharing stories and memories
- Keeping alive traditional crafts
- Historical environment
- Enthusing visitors about social history

The discussion with staff about Working at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm covered a lot of different areas and reflects some of the strong themes from the visitor feedback highlighting how much people value the site, activity and atmosphere. The staff members were very positive about their interactions within visitors and with each other and the volunteer workforce. The comments suggest the attraction provides a very positive employment opportunity and that the farm and animals have a positive impact on employee wellbeing.



# Opportunities

Opportunities for the future were highlighted throughout the engagement. The email/letter feedback and one of the discussion workshops included a range of ideas. 43 of the 160 email and letter responses listed suggestions, some included a wide range of ideas and possible opportunities for income generation. Suggestions reflect the themes highlighted previously and cover education and learning; animals, farming and environment; visitor offer/tourism and a mix of other ideas. Some example comments are included below.

## Example email/letter comments

- *"It must be possible to find a middle way between all out commercialism and the current lack of any attempt to cash in. ...As a former primary teacher I could see it's huge potential not only for EYFS and KS1 but for older children looking at the Victorians or their own local history....schools are desperate to get their children out again when Covid permits."*
- *"...my ideas to make Acton Scott a Heavy Horse Centre... I began to explore the opportunity to offer professional qualification status for these courses and bring in apprenticeships. I had visited a similar site in Bulgaria and seen how letting workshop space out to professional craftsmen could be a possible way forward..."*
- *"As climate change and the cost of living begins to bite we're going to need to return to older traditions and more economic ways of living, Acton Scott can build on what it has started and become a major educator in biodiversity, more thrifty ways of living."*
- *"...the rare breeds could be much extended....a 'healthy eating' programme, and active engagement (better publicised) in addressing the consequences of climate change."*
- *"Potential for a cafe/restaurant using local produce, perhaps from the farms own vegetable garden...apprenticeship schemes - cooking, gardening.. land management."*
- *"I wondered if you had considered utilising Acton Scott as a safe space for LAC children to meet with their siblings if they are not with them in care, or for access visits for parents...."*
- *"...another farm-based attraction is Gogges Manor Farm in Witney, Oxford. Small farm animals, listed farm buildings, walled garden, refreshment/café ....Oxford CC bought the farm several years ago, but then withdrew funding in 2009 and it closed. A charitable trust was set up and they reopened in 2011, paying a nominal rent to Oxford CC."*

The discussion workshop held for the education and heritage skills sector focused almost entirely on opportunities and ideas. These have been summarised and grouped into some main themes below.

## Education and heritage skills sector discussion

### Education and activities

- Some education establishments had not used the farm on a regular basis others were regulars.
- There is growing interest in farming and Forrest School- Horticulture.
- Unique experiences are the main draw for the family - however playgrounds and other attractions would help e.g. introduce Victorian toys.
- Parent empowerment- opportunity for parent education.
- Uniqueness of site is important as is the focus on Victorian Period.
- Access wider learning opportunities. Loss of opportunity for outdoor education.
- Early years- good opportunity to visit- need to clarify how families visit what can family's do.

### Skills and workshops

- Need to look forward to how we can look at land stewardship- using routes- how can create a learning space that looks at future food and farming.
- Lots of contact with visitors- encouraging next generation to learn new skills.
- Workshops could be videoed and you pay to view.

### Health and Wellbeing

- Acton Scott could link up with Social Care Day Services. Users could spend a day at ASHWF
- Looking at buildings and whether they could be adapted for supported living- could become location for apprentices.
- Look at additional provision for those with additional needs. Need to make the paths more accessible.
- Heritage crafts- Wellbeing and good for mental health.
- Social prescribing.

### Community and business

- Vision could be so much more looking at land stewardship. Community supported agriculture. Community Owned farms.
- Community Businesses.

Continued....



## Education and heritage skills sector discussion Continued...

### Volunteering and work experience

- Volunteering and work placement very valuable.
- Always looking at different opportunities for volunteering for young people with additional needs.
- Work placement and volunteer could be of interest to further / Higher education. Students are always looking for opportunities.
- Uni students can do remote research and online activity.
- Embed volunteering into curriculum.

### Accommodation

- Groups from further afield need accommodation. Some accommodation on site- Wenlock lodge could be adapted.
- Campus accommodation funding colleges holidays- DOE weekly residential.
- Camping could be an option.

### Possible support and partnerships

- Charity could apply for funds from NFU.
- British Agricultural Society could help?
- Guilds - national association of spinners and dyers
- Further develop links with Shrewsbury Guild of Weavers.
- Lots of smallholding courses in demand and universities looking for opportunities.

### Other ideas

- Can we do a study on native breed sheep and pigs- i.e. carbon content of soil on a pig farm- research into profit of rare breeds.
- Goods sold in the shop.

There were a wide range of comments made by the education and heritage skills sector but overall these suggestions fit very well with the public feedback obtained and highlight that most of those engaged have broadly similar views. The thought and detail put into many comments highlights how much people wish to see Acton Scott Historic Working Farm stay open.

The suggestions seem in keeping with the purpose of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm since they are largely linked to education, history, environment and visitor engagement and enjoyment. There were very few suggestions made that would be considered too 'radical', although some may require significant investment of time and/or resources to explore and then put into practice.

Some were keen for Shropshire Council to take learning from other museums and visitor attractions. Many were mentioned as a possible source of inspiration or good practice, including:

- Weald and Downland Living Museum
- Chiltern Open Air Museum
- Beamish
- Manor Farm, Hampshire
- Cob Tree Manor, Kent
- Gogges Manor Farm
- Museum of English Rural Life
- The Centre for Alternative Technology
- Black Country Museum
- Blists Hill
- Ironbridge Gorge

An open question was included at the end of the survey for any other comments and many respondents used this space to share other suggestions, ideas and possible opportunities. There were also comments on options (explored in the next section of this report) and requests to keep the farm open. The table below summarised the feedback with example comments also shown.

Theme within comments	count	%
Don't close the farm	54	20
Negative comments about Shropshire Council and/or its proposals	35	13
Concern about impact on the local area	40	15
Concern loss of education/learning for children and adults	16	6
Opportunity to attract funding	15	5
Opportunity to increase volunteering	8	3
Opportunity to increase courses, marketing and deliver new activities	37	14
Opportunity to approach other organisations to help or support	29	11
Other comments	40	15
<b>Totals</b>		<b>100%</b>

### Example comments

- *"I volunteered over 30 years ago, I spent a week in a tent with a friend and worked hard, it was fantastic. I then went on to work there for 2 seasons and loved it. More teenagers need to do this, make it part of the duke of Edinburgh awards, or part of the community lessons in schools."*
- *"Create an international profile- Shropshire needs more international visitors I am sure the Chinese and Japanese would love it! Sell the Old English story!"*
- *"Is there some research that could be based there too, that could feed off the more ethical principles (not intensive farming) of 1900-ish? Would Harper Adams Uni have any ideas to suggest?"*
- *Yes, if it was run as a learning Centre you would need less staff...tutors would be paid from course fees...."*

# Options and overall views

Through the engagement, different options were considered for the future of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and presented within discussions and supporting information to encourage feedback and any alternative suggestions. Some possible options include:

- Opening the site without any animals or demonstrators (to reduce subsidy).
- Using the site as a county park.
- The set up of a charitable trust or Public Interest Company to run the site.
- Finding a commercial operator who would be interested in running the site.

Overall sentiment was to retain current provision and prevent closure but there was some support for an alternative body to run the site. The survey contained a statement which read 'Subsidising the site is no longer considered a financially sustainable option for Shropshire Council, particularly given the need for it to prioritise statutory services (a statutory service is one the Council is required to deliver in national legislation such as social care). Please tell us what you think about this...' The table below summarises the 803 comments made. 66 people (8% of comments) suggested subsidy shouldn't continue but many more expressed a desire to retain the farm. Dissatisfaction with Shropshire Council and national Government was expressed by significant numbers (including those who wouldn't want another organisation to take over).

Theme within comments	count	%
Recognise wider social value and benefit e.g. education, tourism	135	17
Must preserve history, site and skills	110	14
Prioritise this over other spend	107	13
Upset by the proposal to close	99	12
Retain under a community led or other organisation	84	10
Agree cannot keep subsidising	66	8
Dissatisfaction with council management/marketing	49	6
Develop commercial opportunities	48	6
Innovate on site e.g. more tourism, education and social care	44	5
Shrewsbury focused spend - rural areas not supported	13	2
Other comments	48	6
<b>Totals</b>	<b>803</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- *"It will be a shame to lose this attraction however I agree that other council services need to be prioritised."*
- *"Understandable really, money is short and things like social care are important more."*
- *"This is a very sad state of affairs but all too understandable given the government's determination to "destroy" local authorities."*
- *"It would be a tragic loss to future generations."*
- *"This is an absolutely heart-breaking, heart-wrenching end to the beauty of the farm. Generations have adored the peace the farm offers, the unique experiences, the horses ploughing up and down the fields, the sweet goat kids who bounded up and ate your sandwich crusts...and all this has to go down the drain for the sake of the economy? It can't. ..We would do anything for it not to be closed down."*
- *"In the current situation, more people are suffering with mental health as well as physical health, closing Acton Scott is short sighted when the Council have a means of helping and supporting people with disabilities, mental health issues, physical health issues by utilising everything this farm offers. ...Acton Scott isn't only about our heritage, it is about our future."*
- *Whilst I do appreciate the huge financial pressures the council is under, I strongly believe that the council should continue to run Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. I believe that the council has a responsibility (legislated or not) to protect and preserve our cultural heritage. ....Whilst the farm is run by the council, the people of Shropshire technically have a say in it's future, and, as now - can act to protect it. This will not be the case (at least not in the same way) if the farm is operated by a different organisation..."*
- *"There is a large gap between the social care structure and the farm, it should be utilised for social care needs e.g. carer respite activities. ALD interaction day."*
- *"I think Shropshire Council is a real disappointment, they waste/haemorrhage money on things that are not educational such as car parks and shopping centres... Shropshire Council never seem to listen to the voices of their council tax payers and just barge ahead with whatever they want to do anyway!"*
- *"... Shrewsburyshire council seems to only care about the county town. Also you have spaffed a colossal amount of money on shopping centres at the expense of the county. Acton Scott is a jewel in the county crown and is nationally recognised. Be creative, get lottery funding, Covid funding or whatever it takes. Once it's gone it's gone and won't be replaced."*

Across the survey, email/letter comments and the discussion workshops the very dominant call was to ensure Acton Scott Historic Working Farm is not lost to Shropshire and remains open. A specific question on options was not included in the engagement, rather the approach encouraged a wider consideration of options and any alternative ways forward. The feedback from the community discussion workshop and email/letter responses are summarised below.

## Community discussion - options

### Overall sentiment

- The meeting attendees appeared to show universal support for Acton Scott Historic Working Farm remaining open.

### Comments

- There were mixed opinions on whether the Council should continue to operate the attraction or a different organisation could take it over, such as a charity or community group.
- There were questions about whether a Charitable Trust or Community Interest Company could be established.
- It was suggested a business plan for an alternative model of operation could be prepared.
- Comments were made that any change in management would require an effective transition period.
- People were keen to help support the farm in different ways, including offering their professional advice or operational support.
- There were queries concerning how Shropshire Council could afford to keep other museums open (such as Shrewsbury Museum and Art Gallery, free of charge) but not Acton Scott Historic Working Farm.
- There were calls to re-direct funds for other projects or proposals to support the attraction to avoid closure.
- There were comments that Shropshire Council could have made changes to increase income or attract grants and other forms of investment.

There were 103 comments opposing the closure of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm (64% of all the emails and letters received). There were 3 comments agreeing with closure with 2 below:

- *"While I have visited Acton Scott and think it is a wonderful resource, I don't think it justifies the cost to local taxpayers."*
- *"The museum as it is currently operated is not sustainable. It loses a considerable amount of money every year, money that could be spent on adult or child services. The facility is run down; how much council money would have to be spent to open it up again? I don't believe it is a huge draw for visitors outside of Shropshire..."*

## Example email/letter comments

- *"We absolutely love everything about Acton Scott and would be heartbroken if it closed for good."*
- *"Acton Scott Working Farm Museum is an opportunity to increase income. Not an opportunity to save a few quid by closure."*
- *"Shropshire as a whole is only just beginning to be rediscovered as a tourist destination and is crying out for someone to take the bull by the horns and make things happen. The world is slowly reopening post-Covid. More and more people are viewing 'staycations' and UK based holidays as a viable option. Shropshire could and should be leading the way.."*
- *"In my opinion it would be a crying shame for the county to lose this historic farm. It is a fantastic visitor attraction, and a gentle reminder of times gone by. Please do all you can to save it."*
- *"...Please think deeply about the social and cultural value at stake here. This is about more than the cost of running it. Please find a way of preserving this Salopian treasure for future generations."*
- *"Just wanted to add our voices to the many others who don't want this amazing place to close. It's such an asset and brings a wealth of knowledge to children. We love visiting this place please find a way to keep it open."*
- *"Please could I urge Shropshire Council to think long term and imaginatively about the future of Acton Scott and not make a decision based on short term financial problems. Future generations will be grateful!"*
- *"I am writing to express my dismay at hearing of the proposed closure of such a fine example of heritage outreach and engagement facility."*
- *"Why does number crunching ALWAYS have to ruin irreplaceable history!!!! WHEN will we ever learn!!!!... There ARE options if you try hard enough!!!!..."*
- *"I am writing in support of Acton Scott Farm because it is a vital educational resource for children and adults as well as being a wildlife and rare breeds haven. The crafts that are demonstrated there need to be maintained so that these skills are not lost to future generations."*

The email and letter responses predominantly called on Shropshire Council to do more to try to keep the site open. There were some more mixed messages about how the site should be managed in future. Despite some criticism of Shropshire Council (e.g. lack of marketing, lack of investment to boost visitor numbers and income etc.) many of those who commented did not suggest an alternative organisation to take over the running of the farm. Only 8 people made clear suggestions (including a charity/community led organisation or a national body e.g. National Trust/English Heritage).



The feedback on alternative arrangements for management was explored more within the survey than within any of the other engagement methods. There were two complementary questions: ‘Apart from operating as a historic working farm museum, how else could the site be used?’ and ‘Are you aware of any organisations that could be interested in running Acton Scott Historic Working Farm? Is so please tell us about them...’. The table below summarises the themes from the 758 comments suggesting how the site could be used.

Theme within comments	count	%
Retain current use	129	17
Extend education and training offer (e.g. residential courses)	146	19
Events, festivals, markets, activities	102	13
Extended use as a farm (e.g. rare breeds, farm research etc.)	66	9
Camping, glamping, holidays, residential stays	60	8
Weddings, private parties, TV and bookings	54	7
Food - café, restaurant, farm shop	30	4
Wellbeing and mental health uses	19	3
Other suggestions	42	6
Multiple suggestions and themes	74	10
Other comments	36	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>758</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Example comments

- “Do not use it for anything else, value what we have there.”
- “Can agencies concerned with countryside heritage, biodiversity and sustainability be caused/encouraged to make it a cooperative focus for their training and education needs and activity? Is there any part that Harper Adams University might play a part?”
- “Increase activities and events on the site, not necessarily directly related to agriculture: EG Music festivals (not a la Glastonbury etc., more middle-of-the road and light classical - proms in the park etc., choirs. Country fairs, re-enactors, garden and plant fairs. Food-related events. What about holiday lodges, shepherd’s huts, glamping etc. Walking trails.”
- “The site could be used to explore the benefits of, and educate people about, more traditional forms of agriculture and regenerative practices. These are crucial to addressing the climate and ecological emergencies - Shropshire Council has declared a climate emergency so should act accordingly.”
- “The craft workshops and courses programme could be expanded. The site could be used for markets and special events such as Christmas fairs. It could be used for adults with additional needs to benefit from working with animals and growing plants.”
- “Could they sell more produce? There is a massive market for sustainable local produced food.”

17% of the comments highlighted that some people do not wish to see any changes but there were also some commonly repeated suggestions such as an extended educational offer, events/festivals and extending the farming focus. 42 suggestions were more unique (this information is all being considered); examples included a centre for alternative technologies, focus on walking opportunities, family history centre, arts or music venue, re-wilding, forest school site etc.).

The table below summarises the comments received when survey respondents were asked about any organisations they thought may be interested in running Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. Although 386 people commented, 154 didn’t provide a suggestion; 3% want Shropshire Council to continue and 5% made other types of comment. Exploring interest among existing charities was the most common suggestion.

Theme within comments	count	%
No or not applicable	154	40
An existing charity	132	34
Establish a charity, CIC or similar	27	7
Volunteer to support Friends of ASHWF	21	5
Local college (e.g. Harper Adams, Walford)	18	5
Shropshire Council to continue	12	3
Private business or enterprise	4	1
Other comments	18	5
<b>Totals</b>	<b>386</b>	<b>100%</b>

#### Example comments

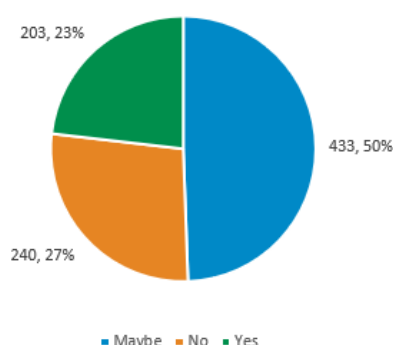
- “Why don’t you consider a resident tenant farmer e.g. like Home Farm, Attingham...”
- “Sorry no I don’t. Have you explored places like Derwen College, Oak Farm, Walford just thinking about the learning disabled population and work/learning settings for them.”
- “Perhaps some partnership working with local agricultural colleges, or other historic organisations, such as Blists Hill or the Ironbridge gorge museum trust as a whole.”
- “The model of a cooperative and shareholders like the one at Fordhall farm would be a good start.”
- “No, but lots of people are keen to keep it open so probably a steering committee and then a trust can be set up and will be well supported.”
- “Not as individuals but would a community project/friends of the farm. or as I mentioned in a previous answer, an agricultural university?”
- “Shropshire Council should be running it for the benefit of Shropshire and British farming.”

A full list of suggested charitable organisations has been prepared from the survey results.

# Support and volunteering

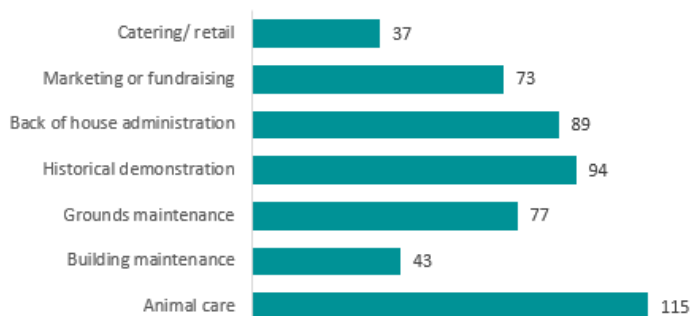
The feedback obtained suggests there are many local people (and some further away) who would be keen to volunteer and support the farm to ensure its survival. The email/letter responses included many offers of support. Of the 160 emails and letters, 35 people (22% of the written correspondence) either asked to be kept informed/involved in some way or detailed skills and experience that could be helpful. 7 suggested they would be happy to make donations. The survey explored this more closely and the chart below shows interest in volunteering. 203 people offered to volunteer (18% of all the survey respondents or 23% of the question respondents). 433 answered 'maybe'.

Would you be prepared to volunteer?



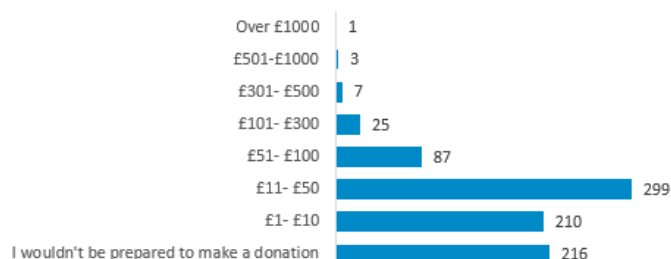
When asked about volunteer interests, there was some interest across all areas. Animal care was most popular, followed by historical demonstrations and back of house administration. The least popular opportunities would be catering/retail and building maintenance. The support is encouraging and highlights that many people would act to try and prevent closure.

Which volunteer areas would you be interested in?



632 people would be prepared to make a donation with £11 - £50 the most chosen value.

Would you be prepared to make a donation?



The last question related to volunteering was 'Would you be interested in setting up or being part of an organisation that could run Acton Scott Historic Working Farm? If so, tell us about the skills or help that you could offer...' The results are summarised below.

Theme within comments	count	%
No or not able to (e.g. health)	180	45
Maybe/possibly in the future	30	7
Yes - remotely	6	1
Yes - volunteer on site	43	11
Yes - use professional skills e.g. marketing/finance	70	17
Yes - general comments	43	11
Willing to donate/buy shares etc.	8	8
Other suggestions	9	2
Other comments	14	3
<b>Totals</b>	<b>403</b>	<b>100%</b>

## Example comments

- "I could be interested in a role such as a trustee on the board of a charity or CIC which may eventually run Acton Scott Working Farm."
- "If a suitable organisation were to come into existence, I would be prepared to serve as a Trustee/Director bringing financial management skills..."
- "Could potentially offer brand positioning advice and help in reshaping the offer to have broader appeal and therefore increasing visitor numbers."
- "Yes. I am adept at all things animal and arable in farming, I speak 4 languages to help open up tourism and can use social media to promote the farm."
- "I have lived on a farm all my life and would love to be a part as I know about animal welfare and wellbeing."
- "Yes, I work with 2 charities already to source grant funding to enable them to keep running and could work in this capacity."
- "This would need to be done on a paid basis. I know various skilled crafts people who would enjoy being paid demonstrators...To make the site sustainable, people need to be remunerated for their skill and time."

# Feedback summary

## Context

- Acton Scott Historic Working Farm attracts approximately 20,000 visits a year, but visitor income has not been sufficient to cover costs, and it has been operating with a deficit of £168,000 per annum. Recognising the budgetary challenges faced and the need for a financially sustainable approach, Shropshire Council launched a public engagement exercise in January 2022.
- The engagement included a series of meetings, feedback by email/letter and a survey (available online and as paper copies). Survey responses gathered between 27th January 2022 and 14th March 2022.
- There were 1,122 survey responses and 160 email/letter responses. 9% of survey respondents were Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and may also have attended the community workshop.
- The survey respondents were representative of a wide range of age groups and backgrounds with some living a significant distance from Acton Scott.

## Visitor feedback

- Survey respondents were asked about the attractions they have visited in the last 5 years. The most popular types of attraction were walks in the countryside, visits to National Trust/other heritage sites, and museums and galleries.
- 24% of survey respondents visit alone but large proportions visit with partners, children or grandchildren.
- The top reason people visit attractions is to see something interesting and/or beautiful.
- 30% of survey respondents had visited Acton Scott historic Working Farm less than a year ago, 36% 2-4 years ago and 14% 5-9 years ago. Only 7% had never visited.
- Regular visitors were asked how often they visit. 18% visit 2-5 times a year and 17% annually. 6% visit very frequently (6 or more times a year). 42% describe themselves as infrequent visitors.
- Those who stopped visiting commonly referred to reasons such as distance/travel and transport or children having grown up.

- The top reasons given by survey respondents for visiting Acton Scott Historic Working Farm are to 'see something interesting/beautiful' (64%), 'to learn something new' (62%) and 'I'm interested in agricultural heritage' (62%). Most survey respondents selected multiple reasons for visiting.
- The top three themes from other comments related to why people visit Acton Scott Historic Working Farm are: 'to enjoy a day out with the family/children/friends', to 'see or feed the animals' and 'for education or courses'.
- Interestingly the café was seen as the most popular aspect of a visit.
- When asked to rate different aspects of visits to the attraction, the top-rated category was 'the animals' followed by 'overall enjoyment' and 'as a countryside experience'. 'Marketing' was not rated well compared to other categories. This was a theme highlighted throughout.
- Dominant within feedback were explanations of the value of the site and experience to individuals as well as its wider social, educational, economic and environmental value.
- Staff members explored the value differently, focusing on the USP (unique selling points) such as ethos/culture, wellbeing, environment and historical education.

## Improvement to attract visitors

- Many survey respondents were very satisfied with their visitor experience and could not suggest areas for improvement.
- Marketing was the top suggestion for improvement. It was covered as a separate theme due to the strength of feeling that marketing has not been adequate.
- Other suggestions include a 'wider range of activities (demonstrations, courses, animal interactions)', 'improved café and/or shop facilities' and 'improved maintenance/updated facilities/investment in the site'.
- Offering accommodation, volunteering, educational opportunities/apprenticeships, group visits and a stronger focus on the environment/sustainability were also common suggestions.



## The next generation

- When asked within the survey how the farm could change to make it more relevant and engaging to the next generation, 21% of comments referred to comments that the site should not be changed and was already relevant and engaging. Where suggestions were made, 14% suggested more demonstrations/courses/workshops/school visits, 11% suggested linking the farm to sustainable farming practices/climate change/organic farming, and 10% suggested more activities/play/things for children to do.
- The staff workshop considered that more hands-on activities, more focus on farming and food, and technology free/digital detox time could be effective methods of engagement for younger people.
- Members of the community wondered if a stronger educational offer, more demonstrations, apprenticeships and links to universities would be effective.

## Working on the farm

- Staff members commented on what they enjoy about their work at Acton Scott Historic Working Farm. Themes range from providing a service to visitors, the workforce (including working with volunteers and as a team), the environment and animals to the importance of preserving history and passing on knowledge.

## Opportunities

- Suggested other uses for the site included an extended offer of training/education/courses and more events/festivals/markets/activities.
- Summarising the opportunities, ideas and suggestions made is challenging because they were diverse. Overall the survey feedback reflected the themes highlighted elsewhere and covered education and learning; animals, farming and environment; visitor offer/tourism and a mix of other ideas.
- The education and heritage skills sector workshop suggested opportunities in a range of areas from developing the skills offer to volunteering/work experience, more work with schools, providing accommodation, exploring opportunities to maximise wellbeing benefits and establishing new partnerships.
- The thought and detail put into many comments highlights how much people wish to see Acton Scott Historic Working Farm stay open. Some also suggested exploring examples of good practice from elsewhere in the UK.

## Options

- Overall opinion was to retain current provision and for Shropshire Council to re-consider proposals to withdraw from managing the historic working farm.
- Many asked Shropshire Council to prioritise spend to retain Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and emphasised the value of cultural services and museums.
- There was some support for an alternative body to run the site.
- When asked for suggestions common responses included existing charities (e.g. National Trust) or moving to a community/volunteer run model. Others suggested closer working with local colleges or universities. Some suggested partnerships with other nearby museums and attractions.
- 66 survey respondents and 3 email/letter respondents agreed that Shropshire Council should not keep subsidising the farm and that other statutory priorities must come first.

## Support and volunteering

- Significant numbers of those involved in the engagement activity were keen to do more than voice their opinions.
- 35 email/letter respondents and 203 survey respondents suggested they would volunteer or become more involved in finding a way forward.
- 632 survey respondents would be happy to make a donation if it allowed the farm to continue to operate.

## Next Steps

A significant amount of feedback information was gathered through the engagement and there were a wide range of suggestions made. It is now important to take the results of the engagement to key stakeholders including the Acton Scott Estate, Friends of Acton Scott Historic Working Farm and other stakeholders.

It is recommended that the main messages are used to populate a response document with areas in need of further attention or action (commonly referred to as a 'you said' 'we have/we will' document). This approach, allows those who have provided feedback to understand how their views have been considered and acted on. It can also help to explain issues not previously communicated. This report will be shared with decision makers at Shropshire Council as they weigh up all the information available and determine a way forward.

June 2022  
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