

Project Starfish

Interim Evaluation Report – October 2024

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Executive Summary

Project Starfish, managed by the Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust (NFHT), began in early 2024 with the aim of expanding access to heritage sailing experiences for children and young people, particularly from underserved backgrounds. Supported by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and additional local charities, the project offers transport bursaries and fully funded sailing experiences on Norfolk's Broads. This report summarises the findings of independent evaluation of the first year of activity.

Key achievements

1. **Access to Heritage:** The programme has successfully introduced the local heritage of the Broads to over 500 young participants. Through hands-on sailing, visits to historic vessels, and related activities in the boatyard, children and young people have gained experiential knowledge about the region's sailing history and culture.
2. **Awareness of Traditional Skills:** Although the visits focus on an engaging sailing experience rather than formal sailing instruction, children acquired basic knowledge of traditional sailing practices. Post-visit reflections showed strong retention of details, demonstrating the impact of the experience.
3. **Community Relationships:** Schools and youth organizations have expressed enthusiastic interest in continued participation. However, sustainability of these relationships depends on ongoing funding, as many schools cite financial barriers as a challenge to future visits without additional external support.
4. **Funding and Sustainability:** NFHT has made initial progress in strengthening ties with local funders, and early conversations suggest potential interest in supporting the Schools and Youth Project Coordinator role. However, securing sustainable funding remains a key priority for long-term viability. Alternatively, a lower cost model of activity could be explored.
5. **Inclusivity and Impact:** The project has effectively engaged children from diverse and disadvantaged backgrounds, including schools with high percentages of pupils receiving pupil premium funding. Teachers and youth workers noted that the experience positively influenced students' confidence and expanded their sense of place.

Recommendations:

- **Explore Non-Sailing Options:** Consider cost-effective, non-sailing visits to Hunter's Yard to maintain engagement with schools while reducing operational costs.
- **Strengthen Partnerships:** Explore further collaboration with the Wherry Albion Trust and others to enhance the heritage experience and broaden engagement.
- **Awareness and Outreach:** Increase visibility of the project's impact through social media and short films, which can also serve as a tool for funder engagement.

Project Starfish has made substantial progress towards broadening access to Norfolk's sailing heritage and supporting youth engagement with local history. Continued focus on sustainable funding and adaptable programming will be essential to secure and extend these achievements.

1. Purpose

This report summarises the findings of the independent evaluation into the progress of Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust (NFHT) in delivering the approved purposes of their project, Project Starfish. This report considers progress from the project start in January 2024 through to the end of the first season of sailing in September 2024. It will also consider how the project might develop into Year 2 and beyond.

2. Method

As per the requirements of the brief a logic model was developed to guide evaluation. Through this process the project outcomes were distilled and refined and these have been used to measure the projects progress. An evaluation framework was also developed to focus data capture on the project's outcomes. Evaluation of the first year of activity has drawn upon quantitative and qualitative data. Bookings data has provided information on the number of schools and youth organisation visits.

Given that data sets are relatively small, the evaluation has largely been guided by a qualitative approach. This has included analysing diary responses provided by some schools following visits using the Inspiring Learning for All system of Generic Learning Outcomes. The evaluator has also carried out a number of interviews and structured conversations with Trust staff, school teachers, youth organisation staff and other stakeholders. Details of the staff and organisations interviewed has been provided in an appendix to this report. Selected Trust staff were also asked to keep reflective diaries.

The evaluator also reviewed contextual material such as pre-visit materials sent to schools.

3. Context

Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust operate out of Hunter's Yard, in Ludham, Norfolk. The Yard was originally founded in the 1930s by the Hunter family. In 1968 the Hunter Family sold the business to Norfolk County Council who took the operation on with the aim of encouraging young people to sail, renaming it the Norfolk County Sailing Base. The council sold the site in the mid 1990s and The Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust was established and took control of the operation.

Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust support the traditions of sailing on the Broads, by maintaining and operating a fleet of vintage cabin yachts and half deckers (open sailing boats), offering commercial sailing experiences and continuing to promote youth sailing.

Hunter's Yard is located within the heart of the Broads National Park. The Broads Authority note on their website the important role that Hunter's Yard plays in preserving the culture and heritage of traditional sailing, along with the Norfolk Wherry Trust (located adjacent to Hunter's Yard) and the Wherry Yacht Charter.

On 1st February 2024 NFHT commenced Project Starfish, following an award from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and funding from other local charities (Alan Boswell, Anguish Foundation and Norwich Freemans). The project recognises the mission of the Trust to provide heritage sailing experiences for children and young people as well as challenges the Trust had recently responded to, including the impact of the Covid pandemic.

The sailing experiences offered for children and young people as part of the project are fully funded through the grant and offer a day long experience, which includes the opportunity to sail in one of the half decker yachts, a visit to the Wherry Albion or to the landscape of the Broads, as well as related activities in the boatsheds, such as knot tying. The funding also covers a £200 bursary towards transport costs. Broadly, the funding from the Lottery covers the salary of the Youth and Community Project Coordinator, skipper costs and materials; the hire of the boats and the transport bursaries are covered by funding from the other charities.

4. Progress against outcomes

The outcomes for the project were distilled through the process of creating a logic model. An assessment of progress has been made by the evaluator drawing upon the evidence gathered. Progress against outcomes has largely been drawn from qualitative data, with the progress against quantitative targets drawing on quantitative data.

4.1. Children and Young People are able to experience and learn about their local heritage

The timetable for school visits and youth organisations provides opportunities for children and young people to sail in traditional boats, but also to undertake activities in the sheds and with the nearby Wherry Albion Trust. Therefore, the visit is more than just an opportunity to sail but is grounded in the heritage of sailing on the Broads. This programme is further supported by other activities and information about the heritage of the local area.

The sheds have largely been unchanged since the 1930s and are still devoted to boat building and maintenance, providing a window into the heritage of these local traditions. These activities are also explained by display material around the tables where school and youth groups sit when they visit. The environment provided by a visit to the Wherry Albion provides a similarly immersive heritage experience.



Images showing the classroom and display area of and a view of boats undergoing maintenance

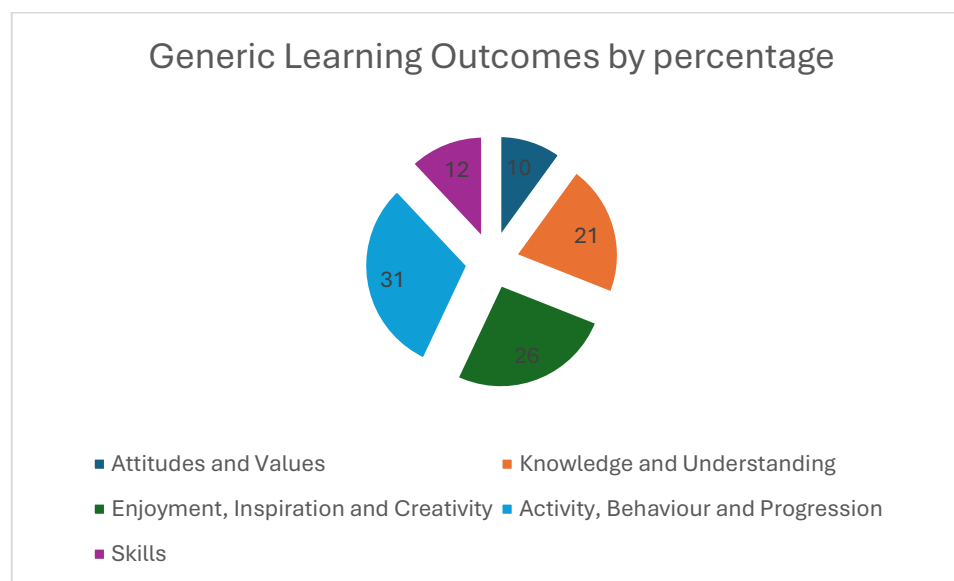
The skippers also take time to point out features in the local environment, such as the windmills which were used to pump water. This was particularly commented on by one teacher. Other teachers commented on how well the visit was managed, so that the children were well occupied in engaging activities when not sailing. Several teachers had prepared materials for their classes to occupy the children who were waiting to sail but mentioned that they did not need to use these activities as the class was fully occupied in the tasks and activities provided by staff at Hunter's Yard.

It is clear that children and young people are impacted by this experience and take on board information they learn as part of the experience. Evidence for this was provided by a number of post-visit diaries that some children completed. This detailed level of recall was repeated across all of the children's accounts as demonstrated by the following quotations:

“While group A was sailing we went to see the ships, not any ordinary ships, they were called the Wherry Albion, they were the only 2 types of ships left in the whole world. They carried coal, sugar, grain and other stuff at the time of World War 2. We went inside w[h]ere they slept. . .”

“When we got to the destination we got out of the bus and walked into the boat shed. There was a man painting and building another sailing boat it was quite impressive to watch.”

The qualitative data provided by the school pupils has been coded against the generic learning outcomes. A pie chart (set out below) shows the breakdown of generic learning outcomes by percentage. Knowledge and Understanding are represented by 21% of the generic learning outcomes observed, with the greatest proportion being linked to activity, behaviour and progression which relates to the very immersive and physical nature of the experience.



Pie chart showing generic learning outcomes by percentage

The schools and youth organisations visiting have been particularly targeted as being in areas of deprivation or need and tend to be located in quite urban areas, which contrasts with the rural setting of Hunter's Yard. This means that despite being in the same county, and at distances of no more than an hour away from the site it is not clear that the pupils and young people would consider the Broads to be part of their local area. In fact, when the teachers and youth workers were asked how the children and young people would characterise their local area, they reported that the children and young people tended to have a very local sense of place, centring on their immediate locality. Teachers variously reported that car ownership was low amongst families and that holidays away from home were relatively rare.

However, although the children and young people had not previously considered the Broads to be part of their local area, teachers did say that the visit 'opened their eyes' to their wider locality and helped to expand the children's horizons. It was also anecdotally reported by boat yard staff that at least one family had returned to sail independently.

Therefore, the evidence supports the conclusion that the visits have helped children and young people in learning about and experiencing sailing on the Broads. However, it is debatable as to whether or not the children and young people consider this to be part of their own local area and its heritage.



A view of one of the wind pumping stations

4.2. There is greater awareness of the traditional skills and knowledge associated with sailing on the Broads

The evidence for this outcome is very similar to the evidence for the previous outcome. The responses of the children and young people and their teachers illustrate a greater awareness of skills and knowledge. However, the clear focus of the visits is on the experience. A number of the skippers and boat yard staff commented that the children targeted as part of the project are in fact too young to sail on the boats provided by Hunter's Yard and that a short trip is not sufficient to teach sailing skills. The evaluator asked the Chair of the Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust why children of this age were targeted and he commented that the visits were about a fun experience, which can be supportive of children's wellbeing, rather than delivering training in sailing. Therefore, it is important to bear this nuance in mind when evaluating the success of this outcome.

It is clear that knowledge of traditional sailing methods was delivered through the visits. The children and young people are given opportunities to help with the sailing, pulling ropes and steering the boat. The skippers also explain specific terms. The children clearly retained this information and illustrated by the following quotation:

"...my job was to pull the jib rope. That moved the main sail and the other jib rope pulled the other flag called burgee and that did the same job."

Additionally, the visit to Wherry Albion was also critical in understanding the traditional skills of sailing on the Broads. Here the children and young people are able to understand how the Wherry's were sailed (by just two people, sometimes children) and relate this back to their experience of sailing the yachts. As noted in 4.1 above the children's recall of their visit to the Wherry Albion is very strong.

Based on these findings, it is reasonable to conclude that the visits have been effective in delivering a greater awareness associated with sailing on the Broads. Furthermore, Trust staffed are actively considering how they can support and facilitate further training in sailing for children and young people who show specific interest and a natural affinity for sailing.



A view of young people sailing

4.3. There are long-term relationships with schools and community groups in Norfolk

All of the representatives of the schools and youth organisations interviewed said they would like to book again in the future. In fact, they were unanimous in their enthusiasm for the activity and their desire to visit again, with some already having booked a future visit. Several organisations said they had told others about the visits and recommended them.

However, all the schools and organisations felt that a charge for the activities would be a barrier which would prevent visiting again. Some of the schools had related the visit to the curriculum, but this was opportunistic: the main purpose of visiting being to enable the children to have an experience that they would not usually have access to which in turn supported their broader cultural education. Therefore, although the teachers spoke enthusiastically about the benefits of the visit, because they were not explicitly linking the visit to the curriculum, they felt this would be an issue if the trip incurred a charge. Similarly, although the youth organisations saw huge value in the visit, in terms of contributing their objectives around supporting young people's mental health and wellbeing, their own funding situation would mean a charge would be a barrier to them visiting.

Given the short-term nature of the funding, this does mean that the long-term relationship between the schools and youth organisations is at risk when the funding ends, and therefore, steps to find other sources of funding could help mitigate this.

The teachers and youth workers spoken to were ambivalent about outreach activities (see 4.7), but one youth organisation representative did say that just the ability to visit Hunter's Yard, to see the boat building activities and speak to the staff would be valuable. All of those spoken to mentioned the enjoyment of the non-sailing activities, including visiting the Wherry Albion. The costliest element of the visit is the sailing, in terms of the skipper and boat hire costs, with the cost for a visit to the yard being minimal. Therefore, an alternative visit based around visiting the Yard and the Wherry Albion could provide an alternative way for NHFT to offer an engaging, but low-cost experience, thereby maintaining the relationships with schools and youth organisations.

4.4. There is sustainable funding for the Schools, Youth & Community Project Coordinator

The Trust have been successful in securing matched funding for the project from three local charities. However, the challenge will be to continue or renew funding agreements beyond the end of the current project. The Chair of the Trust has had several conversations with funders which indicate broad

support for the work to provide children and young people with opportunities to sail. Further discussions are necessary to convert enthusiasm to commitment. A clear understanding and articulation of impact may support these conversations.

4.5. The business model for the Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust is sustainable

This outcome was explored through work of Bryn Jones Associates and therefore is outside the scope of this report.

4.6. Relationships with other local funders are strengthened

This outcome is related to 4.4 above. It is very clear that NFHT has a good relationship with local funders. As part of the evaluation, the evaluator met the Chair of the Ranworth Trust, who expressed strong support of the work being done at Hunter's Yard. The Chair of NFHT also described a number of positive conversations with other local funders. As set out under 4.4 a clear articulation of the impact delivered through the project would support further discussions.

4.7. People who can't visit Hunter's Yard learn about the heritage of the Broads and benefit from an enhanced sense of place

The Schools, Youth and Community Project Coordinator initially prioritised the delivery of the schools and youth sailing visits and intended to explore how to address this outcome over the winter period. However, she expressed some reservations about this in terms of what was possible in the time available.

The project initially proposed the idea of developing STEM focused activities for schools. This idea was tested with teachers who were asked about whether or not they would find outreach resources valuable and if so, what would they be interested in. Universally, teachers reported that the value of the connection to Hunter's Yard was the experience itself. Some schools linked the visit to their study of rivers and said that they would make use of additional resources if they were available, but these would not replace the experience of visiting. Another teacher said that pre-visit materials would be useful in helping to build anticipation and excitement of the trip and a further school explained that the visit was not linked to the curriculum at all but used as a team and confidence building opportunity. There was certainly no strong appetite for STEM resources connected to sailing.

It is important to note that teachers were not looking to Hunter's Yard to deliver elements of the curriculum and that any links to the curriculum were seen as a bonus and not a driver. The teachers and youth workers were universal in their understanding of the impact the visits had on the children and young people's confidence and wellbeing and did not feel that could be replicated through outreach materials.

At this point therefore, there has been no progress against this outcome, but the value of this outcome merits further consideration and will be discussed in the considerations and recommendations section. However, it is fair to say that access to the Broads has been opened up to people who would not otherwise have visited.

5. Progress against quantitative targets

Project Starfish included an approved purpose to expand the programme of engagement with schools and youth organisations and engage with at least 590 school children by year 2 of the project.

The bar chart below shows the number of school and youth organisation visits by month during the 2024 season.

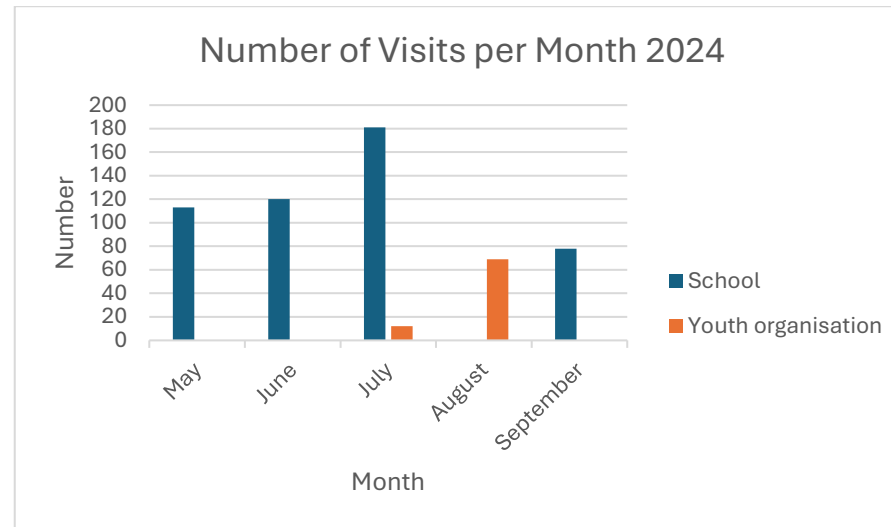


Figure 2. Bar chart showing the number of sailing visits during Year 1 of the project

573 children and young people have had the opportunity to sail during the 2024 season as part of the project, which means that NFHT have nearly reached their target for the entire project in Year 1 alone. Given that many of those who sailed in 2024 have expressed a desire to bring groups again next year or have already rebooked the Trust are on track to significantly exceed this target.

6. Inclusivity and access

The Trust targeted their offer and prioritised schools and organisations working with cohorts of children and young people experiencing disadvantage. The majority of the organisations taking part on sailing visits were located in urban areas of Norfolk. The youth organisations worked with young people at risk of substance abuse or others affected by substance abuse and young people who are homeless or at risk of homelessness. The schools targeted tended to include higher than average numbers of pupils in receipt of pupil premium funding (funding allocated for children receiving free school meals or with parents in the armed forces). The average percentage of children in receipt of free school meals in England in 2023/24 was 24.6%, whereas for the schools targeted this was as high as 41%. Therefore, the project has been successful in reaching children and young people experiencing disadvantage. This is significant, because the representatives of the schools and youth organisations interviewed were clear that sailing was not an activity that the children and young people would typically have access to and in that sense access to sailing had been broadened.

Many of the schools also reported an extremely mixed demographic, with one teacher explaining that 33 languages are spoken by the children from one of the schools that participated. Many schools also reported high levels of special educational needs and disabilities amongst the classes that visited. In one case the school explained that one child had an orthopaedic boot but was still able to sail. Another school felt that the ability to bring the whole year group was a real advantage as ordinarily they would have to select no more than 15 pupils to take part in sporting activities. In this case the opportunity to take an entire year group meant that all pupils could be involved and have access to the activity.

The teachers and youth organisation representatives felt the trip was accessible and inclusive in terms of the activities, but also in terms of the behaviour and attitudes of the staff at Hunter's Yard. In the case of one organisation the young people are often traumatised and therefore, need gentle instruction and patience. The staff were respectful of these needs. This sentiment was repeated by other interviewees who frequently commented on the patience of the staff and their understanding of the young people and their needs. The teacher from one school commented that she felt it was really positive that the children were able to interact with active older people, which was not likely to be something they typically did. In this sense the visits also helped to support intergenerational understanding.

Overall, those interviewed felt the trips increased access to an activity that would normally be out of the reach of the young people involved. This access was supported by the staff at Hunter's Yard who organised activities that were accessible and approached these with a commitment to inclusivity, which was present in the positive attitudes and behaviour of the staff.

7. Impact statement

In 2024 Project Starfish enabled 573 children and young people, who would not otherwise have the opportunity, to sail. The experience has had a profound and positive impact upon the children and young people: the staff from the schools and youth organisations reported that the children and young people were enthusiastic and engaged during the visit, indicated by their behaviour and demeanour and their high level of recall following the visit. All those interviewed expressed a desire to visit again and wanted to offer positive feedback in order to support the continuation of the opportunity.

8. Conclusions

8.1 The Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust has made good progress against the outcomes to broaden the access to the heritage of the Broads and increase awareness of the Broads

The Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust have made good progress in delivering their intended outcomes, having nearly delivered on the overall quantitative target for the whole project already and having shared the sailing heritage of the Broads with children and young people who would not otherwise had this access.

8.2. The Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust have established good relationships with schools and community organisations, but the long-term nature of these relationships need to be supported by sustainable funding.

All of the schools and organisations interviewed felt strongly that the visits provided great value and they were enthusiastic about visiting again, but these visits were contingent on external funding. At this stage it is not possible to conclude that the relationships will continue long-term.

8.3. The Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust have made some progress towards strengthening their relationship with funders and developing sustainable funding for the continuation of the work, but more effort is needed

Discussions with the Chair of the Ranworth Trust indicated that they saw great value in the work that NFHT do with schools and communities. This wider support from funders was echoed by the Chair of NFHT who has had several positive conversations with other funders. At this stage these conversations about future funding are indicative but demonstrate tentative progress around the outcome of strengthening the relationships with local funders. The key to success going forward will be to ensure the programmes offered continues to broaden access for young people and meets the specific requirements of the funders. NFHT will have to be able to dedicate staff time to this activity, to ensure relationships can be built and sustained. Currently, the lions share of the work rests with the Chairman and it is worth considering how Trust staff and other trustees can be involved.

One key element of this discussion is whether or not the activities offered by the project, i.e. sailing taster sessions for Key Stage 2 aged children and other young people is the right offer going forward. The experiences have opened up heritage sailing and access to the Broads for a large number of children and those involved have described the value of this in terms of impact upon confidence and wellbeing. However, the children targeted were in the main, too young to actually learn to sail on the boats that NFHT own and use. The Trust have considered whether focussing on fewer young people having a deeper experience would be a preferable approach. It seems apparent that there are merits to both approaches, but ultimately, the deciding factor may be which programmes are most attractive to funders.

8.4. Funders have indicated that they may be prepared to offer funding for the Schools and Youth Project Coordinator role, but more work is required to secure this

There is great value in this role, with schools and youth organisations being impressed by the activities on offer that the post holder had developed and the attention to detail in terms of organisation. However, further work with funders to establish funding agreements will need to be undertaken before a judgement can be made on whether or not there is a sustainable model for funding this role.

8.5. The Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust have made little progress around sharing the heritage of the Broads with those who cannot visit as they have prioritised other activities

The Trust have prioritised the delivery of the sailing activities over the development of outreach materials and using social media to promote the project. Given the limited resources available to the short duration of the sailing season this was a pragmatic and sensible decision and has enabled further exploration of what would be most useful going forward.

Teachers and youth organisation representatives were asked if they would find outreach materials helpful and if so what would be helpful. All felt the value of the work with Hunter's Yard was the sailing experience and therefore, they were ambivalent about outreach materials. In the case of one school, who had linked the visit to their pupils' study of the Broads, they said they would use materials if they were available, but equally they already had access to resources so this would not be filling a key gap. Another teacher said that short films to build anticipation of the visit would be useful, although this would not be supporting access for those who could not visit. Other schools and organisations were emphatic that such materials would not be useful, because they would not provide access to the experience, and it was the experience that was critical.

9. Recommendations

9.1. Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust may consider leaning into the most successful aspects of the programme and seek to raise awareness of the impact of these

Continuation of the programme of sailing experiences for children and young people would help the Trust to continue to raise awareness of the Broads and its heritage. Discussions with other local heritage representatives and organisations suggests that Hunter's Yard is fulfilling an important role in doing this. However, it would be advantageous to raise the profile of this work, by prioritising discussing this on social media as originally planned.

The creation of a short film, ideally with additional versions optimised for social media channels would support this aim. A short film to illustrate the impact of the programme would also be a powerful tool in influencing funders and gaining wider support. A film asset could also be used by schools and organisations in advance of a visit to build anticipation.

9.2. The relationship with partners, and in particular the Wherry Albion, is important and should be further nurtured

The visit to the Wherry Albion was clearly extremely memorable for the children and young people who visited. This was evident from the accounts of the visit written by the children of one school following their visit and from the comments of the school and youth organisation staff interviewed.

A visit to the Wherry Albion provides an immersive environment for the children and young people to further learn about the sailing heritage of the Broads, but it also adds to the programme, enabling more children and young people to access this important heritage. Work with others such as the Broads Authority is also valuable.

9.3. Norfolk Fleet Heritage Trust could consider whether or not developing a non-sailing visit to the Yard experience would help to create a more sustainable offer

All of those interviewed spoke enthusiastically about the experience of sailing, but this is a costly activity, given the cost of the skippers and the cost of the boat hire. However, all those who visited also valued the other additional activities, including visiting the Yard itself and visiting the Wherry Albion. The cost of a non-sailing visit is minimal (excluding the core costs of staffing) but also provides those visiting with access to the heritage of the Broads and an exciting and engaging experience.

Appendix

The following people were consulted through the course of this evaluation:

Aggie Rothon – NFHT

Andrew Tween– NFHT

Dan Plummer– NFHT

Ezra Bailey– NFHT

Guy Thrower– NFHT

Ian Grapes– NFHT

Isabel Cato – Ranworth Trust

Jade Crowe – YMCA

Kathy Moore – Friends of NFHT

Kelly Woodrow – Cringlefords School

Lea Denley – The Matthew Project

Marie Dawon - Ormiston Cliff Park Primary School

Martin Gunton(Skipper)– NFHT

Martin Hills – Wherry Albion Trust

Martin Whitaker – NFHT

Matt Burroughs – Bluebell Primary School

Neville Khambata – NFHT

Piers Warner – The Museum of the Broads

Spixworth Infant School – Polly Gilham

Stephen Lowy – Museum Development South East

Steve Mackay (Skipper)– NFHT

Su Booth – Norfolk Heritage Network

Toby Whalen – Milecross Primary School