

Growing Knowsley's Future – celebrating our agricultural heritage

Introduction:

Exploring and collating an agricultural history of Knowsley using personal histories to demonstrate how heritage can be harnessed to support the future of the borough in its 50th year.

Knowsley was previously a vibrant agricultural landscape of farms and market gardens. Now, 77% of Knowsley is a food desert, with limited opportunity to produce and buy healthy and affordable food, work in the sector or learn food skills. Knowsley currently ranks low in the RSA Heritage Index, highlighting an untapped opportunity to use tangible and intangible heritage assets for the benefit of people and the economy, creating local pride and a stronger sense of place.

We have worked in Knowsley since 2019, developing partnership projects which provide affordable, sustainable fresh food, through our mobile food shop, and distribution of hot meals during the pandemic. We have a deep understanding of the needs in the local area via qualitative research, and how we can use a heritage engagement project to drive inclusion, improve health and wellbeing, support skill development, and employment. We have forged strong relationships with different communities across Knowsley, within the wards and estates, and have consulted widely about the activity plan. This is a major project for whole borough inclusion.

What is the heritage?

Knowsley was a largely rural collection of parishes until the 1950s. Subsequently housing, road building and industry have changed its character. Our focus is agriculture; how former residents grew, produced, and ate local food. We will work with agricultural workers and residents, exploring archives, recording memories and mapping the borough to understand changes in land use, employment and lifestyle. This was inspired by the conversations we have had with older residents about current food access and their memories of childhood. We will explore the rapid changes which have taken Knowsley from rich farmland to 'food desert' in 100 years.

How will we capture it?

We want to produce a travelling exhibition that can be accessed both in person and digitally. It will live on our website and will be organic in its development, allowing for additional materials to be added. Our inspiration is the borough's rich lost heritage of agriculture and food production, and we will work closely with residents from across Knowsley to research and bring to life this history, sharing stories, skills, recipes, archive material and oral histories. The project will have a transformative impact on heritage inclusion as well as celebrating the diversity of the historic districts and parishes that comprise Knowsley in its 50th year. Our first task will be to recruit a steering group of residents to shape the project and create a timetable of activities. This will include working directly with the Knowsley Archives, artist practitioners who will conduct workshops using a variety of methodologies

to collate memories, stories and maps. We are aware of uncatalogued archives for the area from the Whiston Cooperative Society, which Knowsley Archives have identified as a key source of information. We have included the conservation and access to these documents within the project costs.

Activities:

The cataloguing and conserving of the contents of the Whiston and District Cooperative Society Minutes, held by Knowsley Archives. Our project will cover the costs of an early career archivist to work on this with the assistance of volunteer community conservators.

Story telling with a range of methods including oral capture, video, interviewing. Working with groups of younger people to build these skills and create a digital archive.

Seeing Pictures using photography, mapping, films to capture the essence of where the farms were, what's there now and how that might be in the future. Creating large scale maps showing Knowsley of the past, present and future that will also be digitalised so can be accessed via our website.

Eating Knowsley by exploring what used to be available or grown in Knowsley, creating a menu for the celebration event. We will be exploring some key ingredients such as potatoes which were grown in Knowsley and supplied Liverpool markets. Drawing on the memories of participants to reproduce and research heritage recipes and methods for preserving food such as pickling, jams, chutneys; baking breads made from flours of heritage grains previously grown in the area and potato scones. We will also take participants to the National Trust's Speke Hall for Apple Day in September, an opportunity to learn about heritage apple varieties, try fresh apple juice and make apple crumbles. Potato planting sessions with school children to directly link back to the past harvests.

Creative Crafts is yet to be determined as we want our participants to guide us. One of the tasks for the education intern will be to research and engage with existing crafting groups in Knowsley. Examples might be working with textiles, making banners, embroidery or knitting.

Celebrating Knowsley with an afternoon tea event, to thank all participants and stakeholders.

Exhibition Planning working with guidance of museum professionals to plan materials and displays for the end of project exhibition.

What outcomes?

Wider range of people will engage in heritage – with few existing heritage destinations in the borough, our project will offer residents an opportunity to participate in heritage and be included. We will target activities at people of all ages, focusing on those who experience food insecurity and lack employment and education opportunities.

People will have greater wellbeing – the project addresses the paucity of affordable healthy food available in Knowsley, builds awareness of healthy and sustainable food choices, and engages people in new activities, creating a sense of achievement, boosting self-confidence and social interaction.

People will develop skills – working with archivists, artist practitioners and community activists will support participants to expand their own skill sets. There will be opportunities to undertake historical research, conduct interviews, write, design and plan exhibition materials. Two jobs are on offer – early career archivist and community education officer.

Our organisation will benefit from this project embedding us further into the local area and working with new groups. It follows our theory of change model of activity, education, and advocacy.

Heritage will be better understood as something that can be intangible, not just bricks and mortar. People will have learnt about the importance of capturing memory and stories to help our society evolve from one generation to the next.

Who's involved?

The project will be run by Feedback Global's northern team, comprising a senior project manager and community researcher; and the steering group of Knowsley resident volunteers we will recruit as a first task. We will bring in additional support staff, with two community education officers. Freelance artist practitioners will be commissioned to deliver engagement events and workshops. We will work with Knowsley's Arts and Heritage Service; Kirkby Gallery; Liverpool Museums; Knowsley Hall; Stockbridge Village Primary; Stockbridge Village Residents; Livv Housing tenants in Halewood and Quarry Green; and Knowsley Archives.

How long?

Project application submission: June 2024

Project start date: September 2024

Research phase: October 2024 to May 2025

Exhibition preparation : April 2025 to July 2025

Exhibition: July 2025 to November 2025

Additional evaluation: August 2025 to November 2025

Project end date: January 2026