

Waltham Abbey Royal Gunpowder Mills -7/11/2014

I was invited to the Board meeting on the 7th of November 2014 to watch the presentation by the Chief Executive Officer. Those present were:

Chief Executive of WARGM.
Chairman of WARGM Company Ltd.
Trustees of WARGM Foundation and other Members.

Afterwards I remained in the premises to watch the meeting /presentation with the volunteers.

As I mentioned in my last report, The Royal Gunpowder Mills is a unique, historic site, one of national and international importance. Its sustainable protection over the long term as a heritage asset, one which also enriches experience and greater understanding, must be a primary goal- indeed this is set out in the Foundation Trust's charitable objectives. Since 2002, the Trust has provided multi million grant aid to the Company, to cover operating and development costs, with a substantial annual subsidy.

Despite the considerable financial support, the trustees of the foundation feel that in current circumstances they cannot longer guarantee to subsidise the running of the attraction and at the same time ensuring the repair and maintenance of the sites of Special Scientific Interest, as well as the core zone. They feel that the current strategy will lead to decline and the deterioration of this heritage for which it has overall responsibility.

Different options were considered but unfortunately were ended up in the same conclusion until responding to an advert placed in the Estates Gazette by PGL , the trust agreed to explore whether or not a partnership opportunity with them might be possible, on a long term lease on full repairing and insuring terms.

The WARGM/PGL Partnership- A new era for the Mills? Key points and next steps of a potential future relationship.

Key points:

The Charitable Foundation grants a new lease to the Company and separately one to PGL (***but will enter into this if it is felt that the deal protects the site long term***).

The Foundation in accordance with its mandate and defined charitable objectives, assumes responsibility for preserving and sustaining the SAM and SSSI.

The Company meets its charitable objectives through the operations of a visitor attraction.

PGL take on a fully repairing lease on the building within the lease area and pay an annual rent which is used by the Charitable Foundation to help sustain the wider site.

The Trust and the Mills have found a potential partner whose values align with theirs and who could bring new life to the site and the opportunity to secure the long term future.

The Mills retain the museum and can run this along more sustainable lines. School groups will also be able to use the Queens Mead for letting off steam, enjoying their pre-arranged visits.

The input and knowledge of the volunteers would be retained by the formation of a committee which will work towards new schemes and ideas. Part of the Membership of this new committee will be volunteers, in order to make sure there is involvement by everyone.

The next steps:

Before the Agreement becomes effective there is a need for formal consent from:

Epping Forest District Council

English Heritage

The Charity Commission

Natural England and

Heritage Lottery Fund

The agreement is unlikely to be effective before the middle of 2015. Building work will be managed in such a way as to minimise the impact on the operation of the visitor attraction. The aim is for the first phase of the development to start in 2016.

My next report should have consultation schedules and more precise plans, as well as the outcome of the negotiations and the consents of the authorities mentioned above.