



MIDDLETON HALL & GARDENS

Executive Summary

November 2019



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1.0

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Project Overview

Middleton Hall Trust aims to create a premier attraction in Warwickshire, elevating Middleton Hall and Gardens to a site of significant regional and national importance, attracting a larger number of visitors who not only have a fulfilling day out but return with friends and family on a regular basis.

Through a series of co-ordinated developments, the Trust will allow their immersive stories to be told in ways which appeal to and attract a range of audiences. Importantly, the masterplan will also enable them to complete the restoration of the remaining two unrestored buildings on site – a key requirement of their lease.

Focus Consultants with support from Imagemakers have worked alongside the Trust to review the existing offer at Middleton Hall and Gardens and to consider the options for the buildings, wider site and interpretation. This work has been combined into this overarching masterplan for the site which considers visitor flow, development phasing and interpretative principles.



MIDDLETON HALL TRUST – VISION AND AIMS

The Middleton Hall Trust has worked together to agree it's ambition for the site and have set the following vision and aims.



Vision:

Our historic gem kept alive by local people for all to enjoy.



Mission:

'To restore and maintain Middleton Hall and its grounds for the benefit and enjoyment of the public as a site of special and historic interest, revealing the stories of the innovative people who lived in and restored its wonderful buildings.'



Aims:

1. To restore and maintain the architectural integrity of Middleton Hall buildings.
2. To protect and develop the Georgian Gardens and SSSI lake and grounds.
3. To provide a heritage experience which engages our visitors in Middleton Hall's buildings, people and stories.
4. To provide diverse opportunities for volunteering, learning, and skills development based on our historic and natural resources.
5. To provide a programme of activities that engage with a wide range of audiences.
6. To ensure financial and organisational sustainability which secures Middleton Hall and Garden's future.

The ambition of the Trust is guiding the development of the masterplan and will enable them to develop the following:

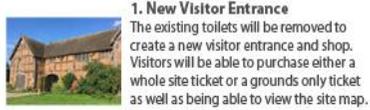
A Place of Creativity

To immerse the visitor in the stories of the creative residents and volunteers that have lived and worked on our site over the last 900 years. From the more typically creative pursuits of music, garden design and literature to the more domestic skills of spinning, cloth dying, blacksmithing and woodcarving. To encourage our visitors to learn about all levels and skill sets that people have had in the past and how these are still in use today, and how they can get involved with having a go themselves.

A Place of Discovery

To tell the stories of our famous natural scientists Francis Willughby and John Ray and our Tudor Explorer Hugh Willoughby. To explore the uniqueness of our architecture and what it can reveal about people's lives from the past. To engage people with the concept that discovery is often the result of trial and error, of perseverance in the face of challenges and how this remains true today.





1. New Visitor Entrance

The existing toilets will be removed to create a new visitor entrance and shop. Visitors will be able to purchase either a whole site ticket or a grounds only ticket as well as being able to view the site map.



2. Courtyard

This will remain open to all visitors and be free to enter. It will continue to house the popular cafe offer as well as our independent retail and craft units.



3. Tudor Barn

The Tudor Barn will be fully restored and brought back into use. The building will include a new introductory exhibition, toilets and flexible community / temporary exhibition space



4. New Accessible Toilets



5. New Visitor Footbridge

After visiting the Tudor Barn exhibition, visitors will be signposted over the new footbridge and into the main site. Visitors will then either go into the Jetted buildings or into the grounds.



6. Jettied John Ray / Stone Buildings

These will be re-interpreted and will focus on stories which are unique and special to Middleton Hall. Three broad topics will focus on the buildings, gardens and the people.



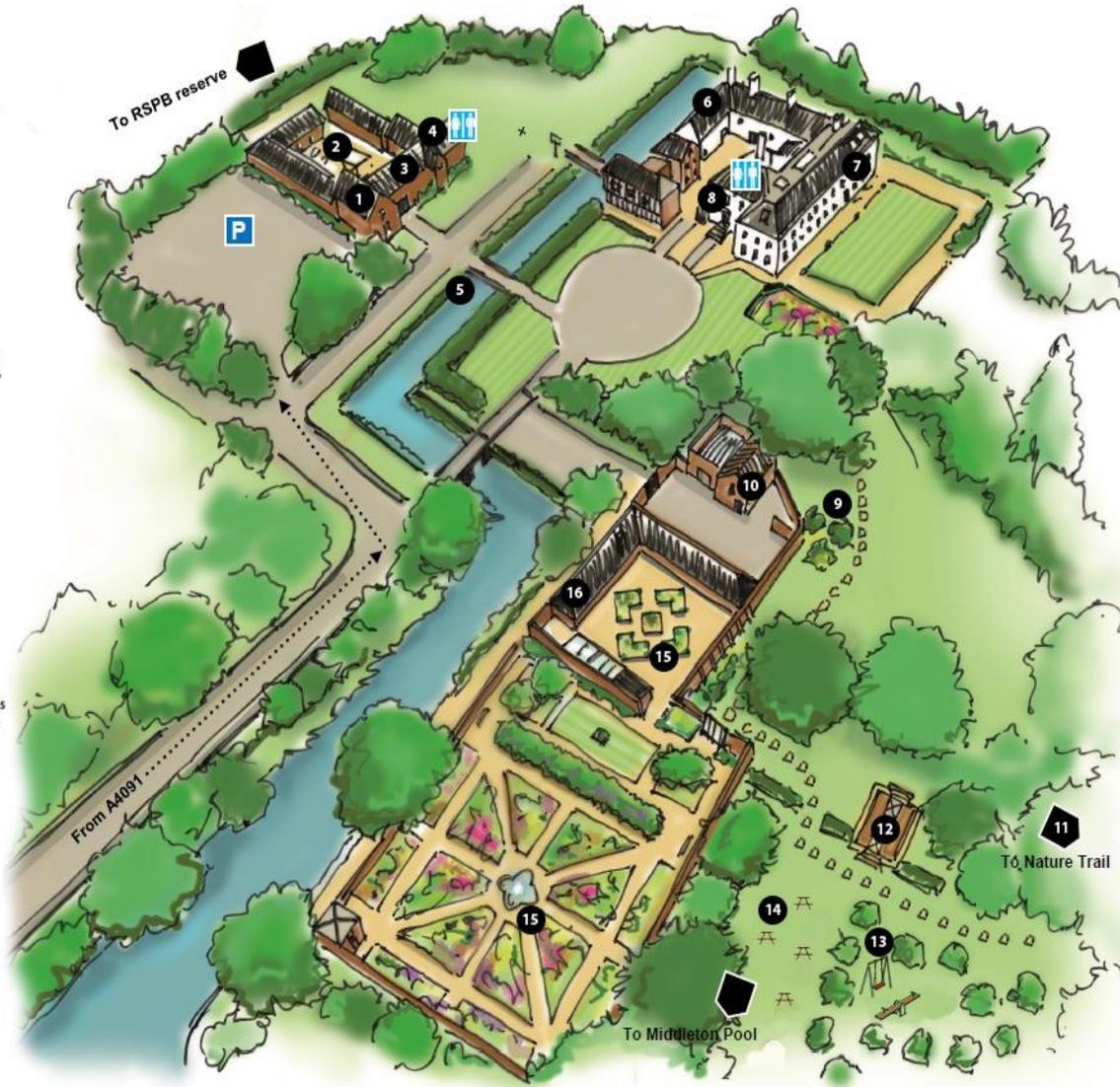
7. The Hall

Rooms on the ground and first floor will become our dedicated private hire and functions space. Decorated to a high standard, these rooms will be used for weddings, private events and corporate hire. These spaces are essential to our future sustainability.



8. The Great Hall

One of the most impressive rooms will remain part of the visitor offer whilst also being available for private hire.



9. External Interpretation

This will tell the story of the estate, grounds and gardens including Willoughby and Ray's nature study, the pool, the wildlife and the SSSI



10. Coach Yard

This will remain closed to the public but will remain as storage space and break out space for our volunteers.



11. Enhanced and Interpreted Nature Trail

Our existing nature trail will benefit from new interpretation and activities to appeal to a wider market. Subject to consents and approvals a new circular walk will bring visitors along a broadwalk across Middleton Pool walks of different lengths will be included with access improvements made.



12. Pop-up Cafe Kiosk

During busy event days and high season, we will have a kiosk available selling refreshments.



13. Natural Play Area

A new children's play area will be developed enabling children to explore the environment through adventure and discovery



14. Picnic Area



15. Herb Garden and Walled Garden

New interpretation will be available within these areas to explain the history of these areas and provide information on our vast array of plants and trees.



16. Coach House

This will remain as staff office accommodation with a long-term ambition of attracting designer / makers to the units who will make and showcase their products.



P Main Visitor Car Park

INTERPRETATION DESIGN STRATEGY

In this section we summarise our strategic vision for the future interpretation and related visitor experience at Middleton Hall:

4.1 Arrival experience – visitor welcome in the Tudor Barn

The visitor arrival experience needs to be a clear and accessible introduction for all first-time visitors. A newly-restored Tudor Barn beside the car park is the ideal location for visitor arrival, orientation and ticketing. The arrival information needs to answer visitors' basic questions about the facilities on offer, and what there is to do and see.

We suggest some form of overarching introductory display is developed on the ground floor of the Tudor Barn (with activity and learning spaces potentially above –NB floor sound damping needed), linked to a site plan / map, highlighting the key themes and elements of the visitor experience. This could also summarise a timeline history and introduce some of the key historic characters.

There would be space for a temporary exhibition if the whole ground floor is used for interpretation, although the standard of delivery would need to remain high to maintain a good 'first impression' on visitors. There should also be an easily updated 'what's on' display at reception, possibly in the simple form of a themed chalkboard. However, the welcome staff will have the most critical role in orientating visitors, answering questions, promoting events and introducing the core themes if asked.

4.2 Signage and waymarking – across the site

Visitor signage and waymarking needs to be upgraded across the site to enable people to be easily to find their way around. We envisage visitors with a house ticket accessing the Jettied Building via the footbridge, and then onto the walled garden / outdoor area via the courtyard. Visitors with a garden only ticket would walk around the moat to a refurbished Coach House, walled garden, pond circular walk and themed outdoor play area. All key visitors routes across the site need to be identified and a signage plan prepared for implementation. Links to the RSPB reserve may also need signing in both directions.

4.3 The building story – Jettied Building to Stone Building and Kitchen

The story of the buildings, their history, and occupants would be told in the historic spaces of the Jettied Building, the John Ray bedroom, Stone Building, and 18th century Kitchen. This would include a summary of Middleton Hall's sweep of history, and key events such as the beginning of each new family dynasty, the knighting of Sir Francis Willoughby, and the adventures of Sir Hugh Willoughby and Alex De Hamel.

The interpretation would introduce Francis Willoughby and John Ray as important residents, but refer visitors to the garden interpretation for their natural science story. The kitchen would continue to tell a 18th century domestic story.

The story of the restoration of the buildings would be told in these spaces, ideally through the experiences of the volunteers and 'before and after' photography, emphasising the incredible communal effort that has saved Middleton Hall and the positive future it now has. Providing level access to all these historic spaces might not be possible, even with a lift at the cottage end, so a virtual tour or experience would be desirable on the ground floor.

When there isn't a commercial event or private hire (i.e. most days), visitors would access the Main Hall for a volunteer talk about the Georgian building, before exiting via the courtyard. There would be no visitor access to the remaining rooms in the house, which we understand will be used for corporate, private and wedding hire, as outlined in the Business Plan. These spaces could also be included in a virtual tour.





4.4 The garden and nature story – Walled Garden, Coach House, Forge, Outdoor Area and Pool

The story of the estate, grounds and gardens would be told in the Herb Garden buildings and outdoor spaces.

An unmanned permanent exhibition in the restored Coach House (or other suitable building) would tell the story of Willoughby and Ray's nature study, the making of the Pool, and the wildlife value of the grounds and SSSI today (including reference to the RSPB Reserve and their on-going links with the Hall). NB if unmanned, CCTV links would ideally be needed with the back office / reception.

The exhibition would document the restoration of the grounds and gardens, using first person experiences and 'before and after' photography where possible. The interpretation would also emphasise the positive future Middleton Hall has as a focus for a more informed and harmonious relationship with the natural world and its resources, and how the legacy of Ray and Willoughby lives on.

Interpretation in the Walled Garden and Herb Garden would explain the horticultural approach and planting as far as possible through historic references and the restoration story.

Visitors would access the forge and ideally witness a blacksmith working (and selling products) and a traditional craft area. Interpretation associated with the forge and crafts would tell the story of innovation in rural industry across the estate, including the iron foundry and Tamworth pig.

A carefully designed and sited outdoor play space for children would have bespoke, themed interactive play experiences related to the natural history story and species (e.g. birds, fish, insects, flowers, waterlilies, mammals, Tamworth pig).

A circular walk would take people around the lake, designed to maximise lake views where possible and enjoyment of the surrounding habitats and wildlife.

Please note the full Interpretative Strategy can be found in Appendix 2.

INTERPRETATION - EXTERNAL



Activities for kids – observations/microscopes



Picture frame viewers/point of interest



Tactile experiences



Interpretation panels with tactile elements, audio and rubbing plaques



Activities for kids – rubbing plaques

Audience	Short Term tactics	Long Term tactics
<p>Families including those with children up to age 11, providers and family networks.</p> <p>Combined the family market represents 2 Million potential visitors within the 60-minute drivetime catchment area.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Family Friendly training for staff and volunteers. Create I spy or Treasure Hunt Challenge focusing on buildings, gardens, nature/wildlife, or Tamworth Pig/Owl trail – where they have to find them around the site. Include a Family Fun Day in next year's events programme – e.g. Lego Building Challenge. Take part in events such as Family Learning Festival or Big Draw Trial programme of holiday drop-in activities on same day and at same time each week during Easter/summer holidays Increase online and social media marketing Network with other local family/children's providers and organisations 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Engagement and Learning post included in future funding bids to develop, deliver and evaluate audience activities (not just families), train volunteers and develop 'how to' guides for them to refer to in future if the post doesn't continue. Children's Explorer Backpacks to hire Out of School Club at weekends Toddler Group – for Parents and/or Grandparents – could be a Nature Tots Forest School (see below) – to run on weekday morning. Outreach Activities during development stage using Roadshow model. Child orientated interpretation inside and outside – low tech, activity stations in Hall. Family Friendly Events leaflet and section on website.
<p>Local Community</p> <p>High proportion of audiences with less disposable income and limited finances.</p> <p>Note: families included in section above.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Set up a Community Panel representing different audiences within local area to explore how you can work together. Community Outreach talks Middleton Hall and Gardens Community Open Day. Take part in Fun Palaces weekend of action in October 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Middleton Art Community Roadshow Project and Pop-up displays in community locations linked to project. Develop a health and wellbeing offer Middleton Memories Oral History project Talk to Tamworth Community Transport to explore whether their minibuses can be used to get social and community clubs as well as schools, care homes and access groups out to Middleton Hall on set days of the week.
<p>Suburban weekend visitors and day trippers</p> <p>Mainly busy, reasonably well-off, 45 to 64 year- old, middle-aged couples living in city suburbs and more rural outskirts looking for something different to do at weekend.</p> <p>First time and infrequent repeat visitors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Improve marketing by reviewing website and leaflet content to cater for different types of audiences and interests and help with planning. Develop themed story maps or trails to provide curated routes around site Increase days offering guided tours 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Further enhancements to website including online booking facility, learning and family pages and an online Visual Guide to aid planning for those with access and SEN needs including autism as well as general visitors. Historic life weekends including bookable events Flower power botanical event – focusing on use of flowers, plants and herbs in drinks, foods, herbal cures, wellbeing, beauty products Middleton Music festival
<p>Infant and Primary Schools Including Key Stage 1 and 2 pupils and teachers.</p> <p>There are 9 Infant and Primary Schools within 3 miles of Middleton, 55 within 5 miles and 294 within 10 miles.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Use findings from schools project in 2018/19 and work with local teacher (or students) to develop and trial Key Stage 1 and 2 workshop linked to history curriculum. Develop trails to offer alongside workshop. Add learning page or section on website highlighting curriculum links, new workshop offer and resources. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> New learning facilities – classroom/multipurpose space, toilets, somewhere to eat lunch – and online offer including downloadable pre and post visit resources and information on website to support visits and topic work in school.

Audience	Short Term tactics	Long Term tactics
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Review/write risk assessment and safeguarding policy and put on website alongside other visit information. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Additional workshops linked to geography, science and environmental studies and other aspects of site's history, nature including Willughby and Ray and SSSI. Could include Forest School activities delivered by a member of staff/volunteer who has done Level 3 Forest School Leader training from Discover Outdoors at Austrey or Forest Schools Birmingham.
<p>Special interest/ enthusiasts Including organised groups and adults with a special interest in architecture, history, natural history and gardens and related traditional crafts. First time and Repeat visitors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Raise awareness of project amongst local representative organisations and special interest groups Outreach Talks Annual Francis Willughby Natural History lecture or conference Gardeners Question Time type event 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop activities/courses linked to gardening/seasons Traditional herbal and garden crafts Conservation Conference and/or training days Specialist information about the buildings, conservation, gardens, plants and their uses, trees, wildlife and seasonal changes.
<p>Volunteers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Targeted volunteer recruitment aimed at diversifying team to represent different audiences and skills required. Develop role profiles for marketing and PR (to include social media), family and schools activities, interpretation and research – plus any others needed for masterplan/project. Offer 'Meet the Team' Taster Days and Recruitment events Welcome to Excellence Welcome Host for Volunteers training. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Develop Training Plan focusing on giving volunteers the skills and knowledge needed to work with different audiences and deliver activities in the masterplan as well as areas identified by the volunteers themselves in the skills audit. Organise a programme of volunteer exchange visits with other organisations as a means of rewarding volunteers but also giving them opportunities to share and learn from others. Welcome Host Train the Trainer training for staff in Customer Services.
<p>FE/HE Students and apprentices Young people aged 16 to 24. This age group represents 13% of the target population but currently make up only 4% of visitors.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Continue to develop work-placement and internship roles and promote to sixth forms, colleges and universities. Talk to lecturers about students having one of their lessons or enrichment days onsite. Depending on course students can assist with gardening, events, tearoom or building maintenance. Talk to local colleges about project work opportunities linked to Middleton e.g. designing I-Spy or Treasure Hunt challenge, creating Sensory Experience Map 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Consider offering apprenticeships as part of project. These could be linked to gardening/horticulture, building/conservation or heritage sector. Develop relationship further with colleges by involving them in project. Projects with this group could include designing the new schools or family friendly leaflet, developing online resources and/or Discovery Packs for families.
<p>Access Visitors with sensory, physical and learning needs from within all audiences above. People facing financial and cultural/attitudinal barriers.</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Conduct an Access Audit. Offer an autism friendly day Create Easy Read guide and large print formats of existing information and promote on website. Create a Sensory Experience Map to encourage visitors with disabilities to explore the hall and gardens. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Get a Trumper for those with physical impairments to hire to aid physical access in the grounds. Develop an Audio Descriptive and Sensory tour of the Hall and Gardens for those with visual impairments. To tackle the physical access issue work with local college/Uni students to create an introductory film, or 360 Tour as part of their project work. Social and Therapeutic Horticulture workshops for older people, dementia or mental health sufferers.

6.1 Conclusions

This is an exciting time for the Middleton Hall Trust who have worked closely with the team of consultants to develop this masterplan for Middleton Hall and Gardens. They are enthused and ready to progress the first phase of the masterplan.

The masterplan and all the associated documents that sit alongside it should help to guide the Trust in not only improving the visitor offer at Middleton Hall and Gardens but increasing their organisational and financial resilience into the future.

The ten-year business plan that has been developed details how the implementation of the business will not only enhance the overall offer but will significantly increase visitor numbers to the site thus increasing income. This will be supported by a more robust Board of Trustees and a staffing structure to oversee the delivery of the wider offer.

The restoration of the Tudor Barn and the Coach House will not only remove these buildings from the Heritage at Risk Register but will preserve them for future generations.

The Tudor Barn will become a key part of the visitor offer and will orientate visitors with the wider site beyond them. Alongside this will be significantly improved interpretation both within the historic buildings and throughout the gardens and grounds which will also become the backdrop for a wider programme of events and activities to engage new audiences.

The main Hall will be re-established as a commercial venue which can be hired for weddings, corporate and private functions.

Together the masterplan provides a cohesive response to growing the reputation of Middleton Hall and Gardens and siting it as a premier visitor attraction within Warwickshire.

6.2 Next Steps

The next steps are:

1. Submit the Expression of Interest and Round One application to the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) to support the delivery of the phase one project.
2. Continue to develop partnerships with the local authority, LEP and other local organisations who can help the Trust in the delivery of the masterplan and the associated activities proposals.
3. Consider undertaking some fundraising training to help develop the skills needed to support future fundraising campaigns.
4. Work collaboratively as a Board of Trustees along with staff and volunteers to drive the delivery of the Business Plan not only in the short-term but in relation to the delivery of the masterplan.





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