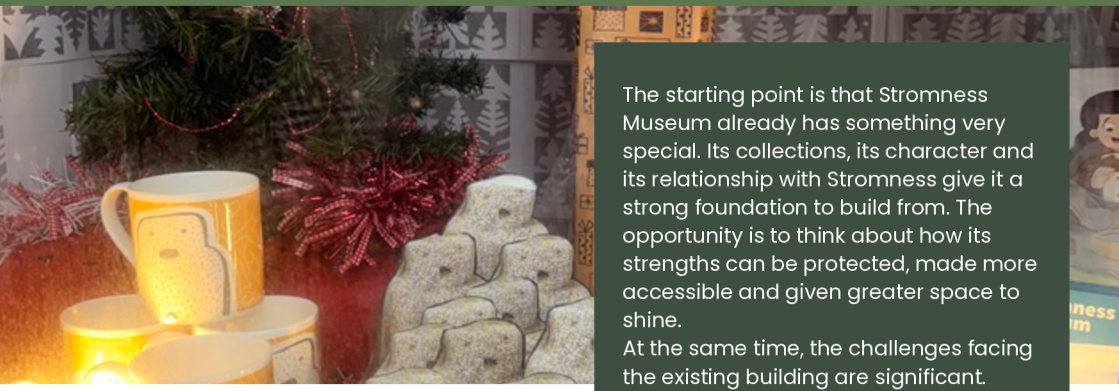
October 2026: An update for the Friends of

Stromness Museum



Stromness Museum is approaching its 200th anniversary. It is a much-loved part of the town, with remarkable collections and a very distinctive character.

A study is currently underway to look at how the Museum can be placed on a secure and sustainable footing for the future.

We are looking at what makes Stromness Museum special, what it should offer in future, how it can better serve both the local community and visitors, and what kind of operating model will be needed to support it over the long term.



No decisions have been made, and we are now at the stage where we want to begin sharing some of the emerging thinking and hearing from those who know and care about the Museum.

The starting point is that Stromness Museum already has something very special. Its collections, its character and its relationship with Stromness give it a strong foundation to build from. The opportunity is to think about how its strengths can be protected, made more accessible and given greater space to shine.

At the same time, the challenges facing the existing building are significant. Alongside substantial repair needs, there are fundamental issues around accessibility, toilets, space and how visitors move through the Museum. Addressing these within the existing building will be difficult without losing valuable space or affecting some of its character and integrity.

Doing nothing is not really an option. Without significant intervention, there is a real risk that Stromness Museum as we know it will not be sustainable in ten years' time.

This creates an opportunity to think positively about the future: how we protect what is special about the Museum, while creating an offer and an operation that are accessible, resilient, manageable and sustainable for the long term.

This also creates an opportunity to think more widely about the role the Museum could play in Stromness. A stronger Museum offer could help bring more people into the town, encourage them to stay longer and connect more of what Stromness already has to offer, while creating an operation which is resilient, manageable and sustainable for the long term.

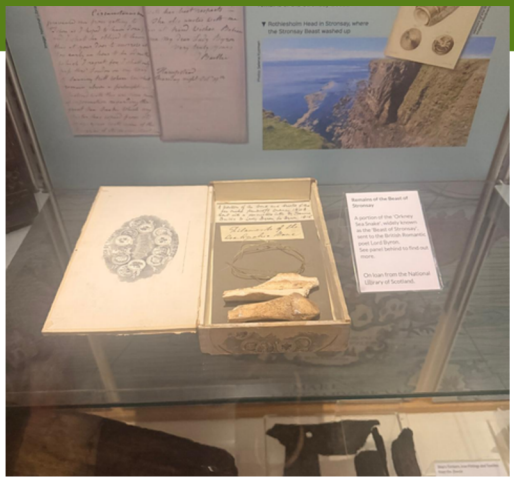


THE ISSUES AND THE OPPORTUNITIES

From speaking to staff, trustees and stakeholders, the study has highlighted a number of challenges within the current operation:

- the existing building requires significant repair and investment simply to secure its future;
- the building does not currently provide the accessibility or visitor facilities, including toilets, that would be expected of a modern museum;
- space is very constrained, with limited room for displays, temporary exhibitions, larger objects and collections storage;
- improving accessibility, visitor facilities and circulation within the existing building will be challenging without further reducing usable space or affecting some of the character and integrity of the building;
- without substantial intervention, there is a real risk that the Museum cannot continue in its current form over the longer term;
- the Museum can be missed by visitors arriving around the Pier Head;
- staffing and management capacity are limited, particularly for development, management and day-to-day decision-making;
- the current model has limited financial resilience, with little capacity to build reserves for future maintenance and unexpected costs; and
- any future solution therefore needs to address not only the building, but also staffing, management, governance, income generation and long-term sustainability.

THERE ARE ALSO SOME SIGNIFICANT OPPORTUNITIES



The collections themselves are a major strength. Stromness Museum has a real “treasure trove” quality, with parts of the collection – particularly the natural history offer – distinctive well beyond Orkney.

There is scope to tell more of the stories of Stromness, including its maritime history, ferries, science, climate, renewable energy and the many people who have shaped the town.

There is also a wider opportunity to strengthen Stromness as a destination. The Museum sits within an exceptional mix of heritage, culture, waterfront, galleries, shops and other attractions. Better connections between these could encourage people to spend longer in Stromness and create a particularly strong wet-weather visitor offer.

WHAT OPTIONS ARE EMERGING?



The work is still developing, but three broad possibilities are being explored.

RETAINING THE MUSEUM AT ITS EXISTING SITE

The existing building is an important part of the Museum's character and identity and has a very special relationship with the waterfront.
This option would examine what could realistically be achieved through repairing and adapting the existing building, recognising the constraints around space, accessibility and the integrity of the building itself.
One of the questions we need to test is whether the Museum needs to depend on passing footfall, or whether its collection and character are strong enough that visitors will actively seek it out.

A MUSEUM AT THE PIER HEAD

Another option is to consider concentrating the Museum offer in a more central and visible location around the Pier Head. The Town House and wider surrounding area are among the possibilities being explored, and Trustees have recently undertaken an initial visit to the Town House site.
This could potentially provide better accessibility, greater flexibility and a stronger connection with where many visitors arrive in Stromness.
But it raises an important question:
If the Museum moved from its existing building, would it still feel like Stromness Museum?

A MUSEUM ACROSS TWO SITES

A further possibility is a two-site model. For example, the existing building could retain a strong natural history offer, while another site closer to the Pier Head could provide space for maritime, social history and other collections and activities.
The existing Museum building could then develop as a more focused and distinctive place for natural history, learning, education and outreach, with opportunities for nature-based events, talks, activities and partnerships which make use of both the collections and its special waterfront setting.
This could allow the distinctive qualities and character of the existing Museum to be retained, while creating additional space elsewhere for the wider Museum offer to grow and develop.

Whichever option is taken forward, it will need to secure the future of both the Museum and its collections, and work operationally as well as physically, including capital and running costs, staffing, governance, visitor demand and long-term sustainability.

WE WOULD REALLY LIKE TO HEAR FROM YOU

As Friends of Stromness Museum, you know the Museum particularly well, and your views are important as we develop and test these ideas. We would particularly welcome your thoughts on:

- What is it about Stromness Museum that must not be lost?
- What makes the Museum distinctive and special?
- How important is the existing building to the Museum experience?
- What could the Museum do better if it had more space or different facilities?
- What are your thoughts on the three broad approaches being explored — remaining at the existing site, a Museum at the Pier Head, or operating across two sites?
- What would make a future Stromness Museum still feel like Stromness Museum, even if some aspects of it changed?

These are emerging ideas, not decisions, and this is the beginning of a wider conversation. Please contact Anne, or any member of the project team — Naomi, Davie or Tom — with any thoughts, questions or suggestions.

We would be very pleased to hear from you.



Anne - chair@stromnessmuseum.org.uk
Project Team:
naomi@eylandsky.co.uk
davie_campbell@btopenworld.com
tom@tgaplaceconsulting.com