



## Embrace Abbeydale FAQs March 2025



### What's happening at Abbeydale Industrial Hamlet?

Sheffield Museums is currently implementing the *Embrace Abbeydale* project, a series of improvements at the Hamlet generously supported by The National Lottery Heritage Fund.

Separate to *Embrace Abbeydale*, Sheffield City Council are also planning the delivery a programme of remedial work to repair a leak in the dam and weir that supply the Hamlet's waterwheels.

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### Embrace Abbeydale

#### What are the plans for the Embrace Abbeydale project?

The £235,000 grant from [The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#) will support Sheffield Museums to deliver a series of improvements to the site, including:

- A new welcome area including a shop
- New interpretation and displays that better tell the story of Abbeydale and the people that lived and worked here.
- An enhanced learning programme for schools
- Restoration of the Blowing Engine Waterwheel and the Boring Shop.
- New family resources, including the introduction of a play area.
- An improved car park
- Development of more volunteering opportunities linked to the site and the work needed to care for it.

#### What has happened so far?

While the Hamlet has been closed, our Historic Engineering team have carried out some significant restoration work on the huge blowing engine waterwheel. This major undertaking saw the old timber shaft removed and a brand-new oak shaft

delivered to site, where it was fitted with cast iron ends and the wrought iron rings that hold it in place, before being fitted in position in the waterwheel.

Over the winter, we've also been consulting with visitors, schools and local stakeholders to get their input and shape the improvements taking place. Families have been telling us about the importance of creative play and helping us look at how the forthcoming play area can best facilitate that. We've had lots of contributions from a wide range of people telling us about the types of stories they would like the information in the historic spaces to cover, as well as sharing their own insights about the Hamlet and the people that worked there. We've also had some fantastic input from teachers, which has helped create the schools' workshops we'll be trialing over the summer term.

In February, the team from York Archaeology carried out an archaeological investigation on the proposed site of the Hamlet's new play area. Dating back to the 1700s, the Hamlet is a Scheduled Monument, recognised for its historical significance. As such, before any development takes place onsite, it's vital that proper care is given to safeguarding its rich history. Archaeologists excavated four small test pits on the location of the proposed play area to understand how that area may have been used in the past. Any findings will be analysed before we apply for Scheduled Monument Consent and Planning Permission for the play area.

Prior to reopening, the first of the new display signage has been installed in several of the key historic spaces, highlighting their stories and those of the people that worked in them. Developed through new research and contributions from people with connections to the Hamlet, this new interpretation tells a compelling story of the workers and the role they played in Abbeydale Works' success.

Alongside the main project, work has also been underway on the Davy Bros steam engine. Thanks to the expertise of Sheffield Transmissions, we're now able to run the engine, which marks its 170<sup>th</sup> anniversary this year, using an electric motor so visitors can now see it in action.

Following guidance from Sheffield Swift Network, we've also installed artificial swallow nests in key areas around the site, providing more places for them to breed. Swallow nests must be situated inside spaces like open barns and outhouses, which are becoming rare. This, combined with climate change affecting their winter nesting grounds in Africa, has resulted in a rapid decline in population of these much-loved birds.

## **What's happening next?**

Over the coming months, progress will continue onsite with several more project milestones:

- Work will be completed on a new workshop for our volunteers, providing a dedicated space which will see them support our engineers and the wider team with the upkeep and maintenance of the site.

- The introduction of new audio in the Tilt Forge will help provide of atmospheric experience for visitors, while QR links to films will offer an even richer insight into the site and its history.

There's also more to come later in the year, subject to the relevant planning permissions and successful application for Scheduled Monument consent:

- We'll be opening a new welcome hub for the Hamlet in the former *All About Abbeydale* space which introduces to the site and its history and includes a new retail offer.
- Pending the results of the archaeological investigations, we hope to commence work on the Hamlet's new play area on land next to the Manager's House. The play area will encourage creative play and be inspired by the nature of the surrounding woodland and greenspaces.

Looking further ahead, the final stages of the project will then be implemented, again pending the necessary permissions and approvals from Historic England:

- Final restoration work will take place on the waterwheels, which visitors will once again be able to see in action, and improvements will be carried out on the Hamlet carpark.
- Work on the waterwheels and car park can only go ahead once Sheffield City Council have carried out repairs to the historic Dam – more on that below.

## Who are the funders?

The project has been generously supported by a major grant from [The National Lottery Heritage Fund thanks to National Lottery players](#), alongside further support from Sheffield City Council, the J G Graves Charitable Trust and match funding from Sheffield Museums.

## How can I help?

If you would like to be kept informed about ways you can get involved, please sign up to the Sheffield Museums mailing list <https://www.sheffieldmuseums.org.uk/sign-up-for-our-newsletter/> or follow us on social media:

Facebook: [@sheffieldmuseums](#)  
Instagram: [@sheffmuseums](#)

You can donate to Sheffield Museums through donation stations and boxes at our sites, or through <https://www.sheffieldmuseums.org.uk/support-us/>

## More Information

You can find out more about the project at

<https://www.sheffieldmuseums.org.uk/visit-us/abbeydale-industrial-hamlet/a-bright-future-for-abbeydale/>

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## Repairs to the Dam & Millpond

Sheffield City Council (SCC) have provided the following information on the remedial work needed on the dam.

### **Why is the millpond empty?**

A leak has been identified in the dam, allowing water from the millpond to enter the historic site and posing a risk to nearby structures, particularly the Grinding Hull. Sheffield City Council (SCC), who are responsible for the dam's maintenance, has lowered the millpond water level to stop the leak and conducted investigations to determine its cause. SCC has appointed a contractor who is currently in the process of developing a detailed repair plan, in collaboration with Historic England and the Environment Agency, with repairs expected to commence in spring 2026 and complete by autumn that year.

### **Why is the dam still empty, why hasn't the work been undertaken yet?**

The dam remains empty because the repair work is still in the planning and approval stages. SCC has appointed a contractor and is working with a specialist consultant to develop the best repair strategy. However, progress has been slower than anticipated due to the complex challenges of working within a historic site.

Accessing the damaged areas safely while preserving the Hamlet's heritage is particularly difficult. Contractors must navigate restrictions on moving heavy materials, tools, and machinery, which adds to the complexity. Additionally, obtaining statutory consent from Historic England is a lengthy process, taking several months, and construction work involving water can only be carried out during drier months.

Until repairs are completed, specialists have advised keeping the dam empty to prevent further damage.

### **When will the dam be refilled?**

The exact date for refilling the dam is not yet confirmed, as it depends on weather conditions. However, SCC aims to complete most of the repairs by mid-2026. Refilling will be done gradually to ensure it is managed carefully. Additionally, SCC plans to repair the weir that directs water into the dam via Beauchief Gardens, with the goal of reopening both together.

**Are there any impacts on wildlife?**

According to specialists consulted by SCC, the temporary emptying of the dam is expected to have minimal impact on wildlife, especially since the area has alternative habitats that can support species during this time. Once the dam is refilled, the environment should return to its usual state, ensuring the well-being of local wildlife.

**What will happen to the fish?**

The fish that were in the millpond have been safely removed. SCC are currently evaluating the best approach for restocking the millpond. While there are some considerations regarding maintenance that could affect the fish, they recognise the importance of the millpond for fishing and are carefully assessing all options to ensure the best outcome. The goal is to make a decision that balances the well-being of the fish with the community's needs.

**Why is the Grinding Hull still closed?**

The safety of visitors and staff at the Hamlet is the top priority of both SCC and Sheffield Museums. Although the immediate risk from water leakage has been addressed by lowering the dam's water levels and installing structural props, the Grinding Hull remains a high-risk area due to ongoing structural concerns. The scaffolding and support structures are temporary solutions as preparations are made for comprehensive repairs over the next year. Given that the wall's stability is still compromised, strict safety regulations must be followed to prevent any potential accidents. Unfortunately, allowing public access in the current circumstances, even on a limited basis, presents significant risk.

**Will there be any other impact on visiting the Hamlet when the works are undertaken?**

When SCC are ready to progress the work there will be some disruption onsite, but we are exploring plans to minimise this. SCC will need some space for the works, welfare cabins, deliveries and materials, so there may be some temporary reduction or closure of car parking spaces, and access to some areas of the Hamlet. As the site is small the priority is ensuring everyone's safety. SCC will notify everyone in advance of what will happen and when and we ask for your cooperation to allow them to get the work completed.

**How can I get in touch with Sheffield City Council about the work that's taking place on the dam at Abbeydale?**

You can email Sheffield City Council about the work at [PFMContactCentre@sheffield.gov.uk](mailto:PFMContactCentre@sheffield.gov.uk)

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## About The National Lottery Heritage Fund

[The National Lottery Heritage Fund](#) is the largest funder for the UK's heritage. Using money raised by National Lottery players we support projects that connect people and communities to heritage. Our vision is for heritage to be valued, cared for and sustained for everyone, now and in the future. From historic buildings, our industrial legacy and the natural environment, to collections, traditions, stories and more. Heritage can be anything from the past that people value and want to pass on to future generations. We believe in the power of heritage to ignite the imagination, offer joy and inspiration, and to build pride in place and connection to the past.