

Gunpowder Mills

LEE VALLEY

Appointment of Chair
March 2026 PBBSRB

Saxton Bampfylde



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Letter from the Chairman & CEO

Thank you for your interest in joining Gunpowder Mills LeeValley as Chair of the Board of Trustees.

The Gunpowder Mills is home to over 300 years of scientific and technological heritage, starting with the production of gunpowder, through to rocketry research after the Second World War, and latterly through the preservation of nature and wildlife within the Site of Specific Interest (SSSI) at the heart of our 170 acre site. With 21 listed buildings and over 80 historic structures, hidden across a wild woodland landscape, it is a unique place that is full of potential.

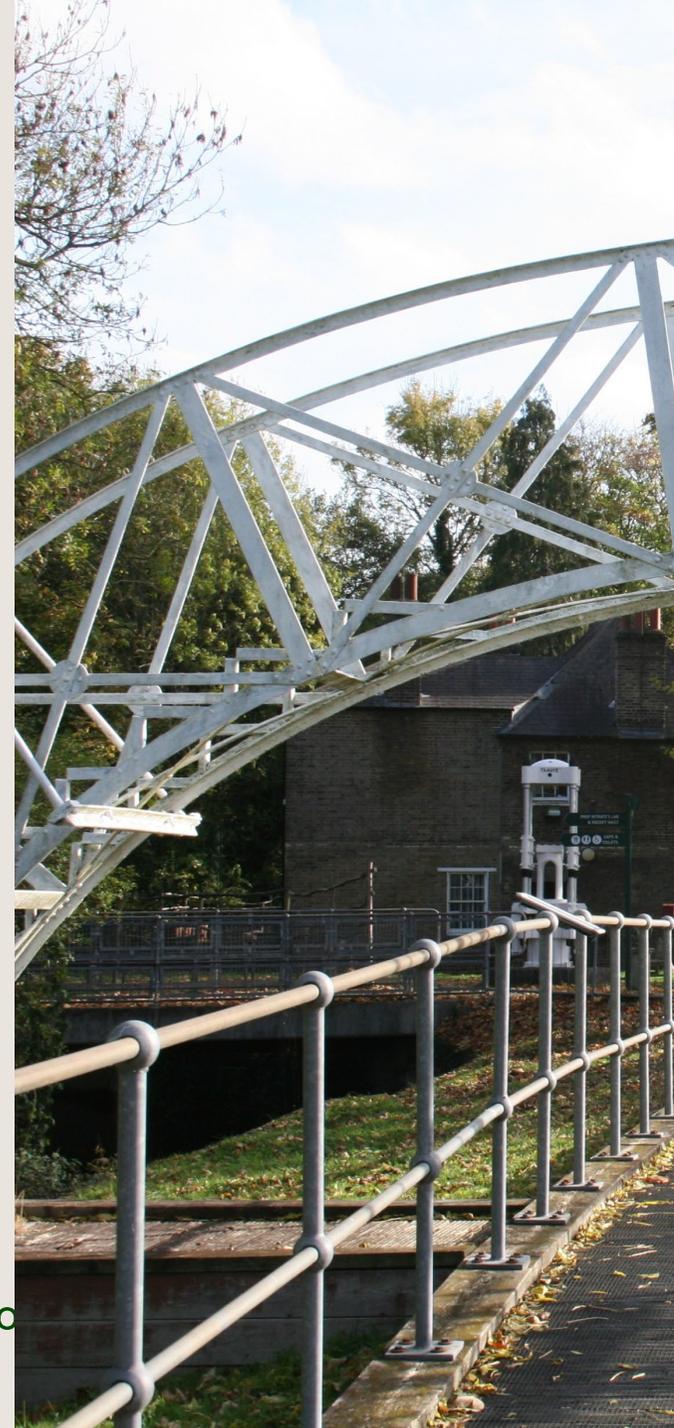
It is an exciting time for the Gunpowder Mills. In 2025 we recruited a new CEO and set out on a rebranding exercise that repositions the site as cohesive, modern and approachable. In 2026 we have renewed our focus on offering an engaging and enjoyable day out for our visitors. We will be open every weekend through the Spring and Summer and offer a fantastic blend of family events, train rides, tractor trailer tours, rocket-making, children's activity days, walking tours and school trips.

Alongside this we are beginning to explore new commercial opportunities, setting the building blocks in place for future developments that will see some of the historic buildings converted into workspaces to create a hub for local businesses to thrive in. 2026 will see the launch of our new 25-year strategy, focused on creating a self-sustaining and thriving organisation that will grow into a leadership role in Essex and East London.

The Gunpowder Mills is often seen as a 'local secret'. However, anyone who has visited knows we should and could be more than this. The range of stories and topics that the site's history covers, and the sheer wonder that our spaces inspire make this magical site come alive. People who visit fall in love with the place and want to keep coming back. Hopefully, you will too! We have a small but dedicated team of staff and volunteers and are in a place where we are ready to grow and develop in many different ways. If this sounds like a challenge that excites and inspires you, then we would love to hear from you, and hope you can bring your skills to this unique and wonderful space.

Mark Pemberton, Chairman

Joe Sullivan, CEO





About

The WARGM Charitable Foundation (the Foundation) owns and is responsible for the Waltham Abbey site which was the home of explosives production for over 300 years and a secret MOD Research Centre from 1945. In 1991 the Ministry of Defence decommissioned the site, and handed it to the newly created WARGM Charitable Foundation, with a small endowment. The site reopened as a visitor attraction in 2001.

The site covers over 175 acres most of which is designated as a Site of Special Scientific Interest (SSSI) and a Scheduled Ancient Monument (SAM) containing some 250 structures once used to produce explosives. It has 20 listed buildings, with one at Grade 1 and seven at Grade 2*. It has extraordinary potential, but the original business model – that a visitor attraction could on its own finance the conservation of a site of this scale – has proved unworkable.

The Foundation is responsible for managing the endowment, the day-to-day operation of the site as a visitor

attraction, the conservation of the historic structures and for developing a strategy to secure its long-term future. The Foundation has 2 main objectives, to conserve and maintain the historic buildings and monuments and to make them accessible to as diverse an audience as possible.

Over the past two years governance has been overhauled and a new vision identified for the site as a multi-use place, where commercial and leisure uses sit alongside the visitor attraction to sustain the underlying heritage. The visitor proposition is being expanded to reflect a broader approach and appeal to a wider range of audiences – not just explosives, but industrial and technological change in its broadest sense, wildness alongside conservation, scientific development alongside nature.

The Foundation has recently appointed a new CEO, Joe Sullivan, and in conjunction with the Board he is committed to developing and delivering its new strategy.

Onward Strategy



You will be joining the Gunpowder Mills at an exciting time.

Our work during your term as Chair will set us on the path towards establishing a sustainable organisation with a mixed-use site by 2031. Our Strategic Plan aims to ensure that our historic monuments and estate are conserved for the future and support a thriving visitor attraction which covers its costs. To achieve these goals, we aim to generate income from commercial use of the historic estate that relieves pressure on our endowment, ultimately allowing us to utilise it for future investment in the site.

In 2026 a new name and brand was announced to signify the next stage in our development. Our strategic planning for the following five years has identified a key priority project in the historic Queens Mead Incorporating Mills, which we aim to turn into 18 leasable business units across three historic buildings. Through letting these spaces we hope to make a genuine contribution to the

local economy in Epping, encouraging innovation and creativity through small business start-ups, as well as securing vital core income for the organisation.

Alongside this we will be improving our visitor offer, focusing on our Rocket Vault and Woodlands. These projects will deliver better understanding of the post-war rocket research history at the site, and improved access to the natural environment and the SSSI. They will also enhance the public offer, bringing new parts of the site and building into reach, and installing new family-focussed activities.

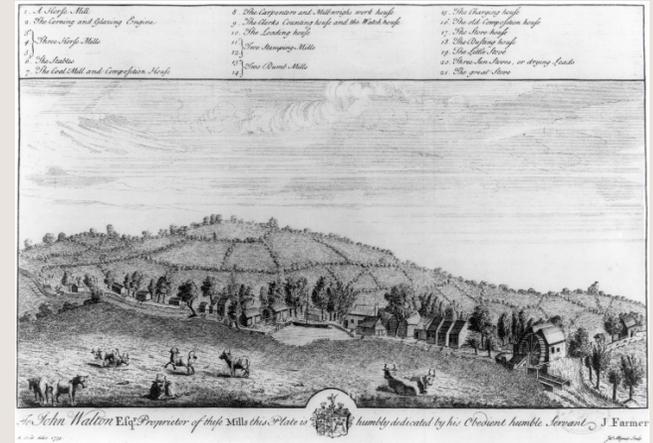
300 YEARS OF HERITAGE

The first water-powered gunpowder mills were established at Waltham Abbey from the mid-16th century onwards. Initially privately owned they were nationalised by the government in 1787, keen to produce a consistent standard of powder.

Many of the major technological improvements of the next two hundred years were pioneered here, from the harnessing of steam power in the mid nineteenth century, to the creation of nitro-glycerine plants, the production of cordite, and the development of chemically-based high explosives.

The Waltham Abbey site is important because many of the processes used in this international industry were invented and developed here. In addition, the works survive in a remarkably complete state, with many of the structures so rare as to be nationally and internationally significant.

When production ceased and the mill buildings were repurposed for research after 1945, much of the site was abandoned. Taken back by nature, this area is now a SSSI, remarkable for its alder woodland and varied natural habitat which has taken ownership of what man has left behind.



Earliest known image of the site from John Farmer's 'History of Waltham Abbey' 1735



The extensive narrow gauge railway on the site

300 YEARS OF CHANGE AND TRANSFORMATION

Gunpowder

The saltpetre melting and the ingredient mixing houses adjacent to the exhibition centre date from the time of Government purchase in 1787.. The steam powered gunpowder incorporating mills to the east of the Millhead are an impressive expression of the growing power of the nation in the Victorian period and the underfloor drive train reflects the weight and bulk which characterised Victorian engineering.



Chemical Explosives

The end of the dominance of gunpowder coincided with the end of the Victorian era in the last years of the 19th century. The north of the site containing the chemical explosive production area is an evocative industrial landscape with grass covered blast mounds, prominent features such as the nitrating hill and deserted process buildings such as the mixing houses. It was here that a large part of the cordite requirements of the British Forces passed through the hands of skilled workers engaged in the dangerous task of mixing the ingredients.



Waterways

The waterways of the Mills are a unique two level industrial canal system, originally extending to five miles, with two locks between the levels and a cut to the Lee Navigation to enable the transportation of finished product by sailing barge to magazines on the Thames. Smooth shock free water was preferable to road for transport of materials between the process buildings.

Industrial Railways

When the first steam powered incorporating mills were built in 1857 a hand pushed tramway was introduced linking the mixing house and the mill. An industrial railway with authentic rolling stock is being re-created on the site.

Rocketry

One of the main activities of the post WWII research era was investigation of rocket propulsion materials. Test firing was carried out in the buildings of a disused nitro-glycerine factory in the New Hill area.



The Archive

Reflecting the industrial archaeology of the site, the Mills Archive has an extensive holding of historical maps dating from 1590 and building drawings from the 1850s. In addition, around 5000 documents and 80,000 images are held, covering the history of gunpowder and explosives.



FINANCE AND FUNDING

The Foundation has a small permanent endowment that delivers core funding which contributes to the costs of managing the site, but does not cover them in their entirety, nor can it fund the future development of the site.

The aim is to become more commercially focussed, using venue hire and location filming alongside visitor-related income to cover the operational budget. At the same time, we aim to raise funds to support the learning and schools programme, to develop projects and to secure partners and funding to transform the wider part of the site.

The Foundation has benefitted in the past from significant funding support from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and National Heritage Memorial Fund and has good relations with both. In line

with the vision for the mixed use of the site, moving forwards will involve raising funds from a variety of sources:

- a) Commercial development via leases or rentals to commercial operators or developers of those parts of the site identified for commercial use;
- b) Public sector funding including funding from Natural England and Historic England for conservation management and repairs to the Scheduled Ancient Monument and Site of Special Scientific Interest;
- c) National Lottery and private trust and foundation funding for projects to bring areas of the site into wider public use and realise the vision for a visitor attraction with broader appeal.

OUR TRUSTEES

Mark Pemberton OBE, Outgoing Chairman

Mark is Chairman of the WARGM Charitable Foundation. He has spent his entire career in the heritage sector, at the Science Museum and finally at English Heritage where he was Director of National Collections. He is Chairman of the Trustees of the Ironbridge Gorge Museum, a Trustee of Barts Heritage and a trustee of Trent Park Museum Trust, and a non-exec Director of NMRN Operations Ltd-the operational arm of the National Museum of the Royal Navy.

Fiona Baxter, Vice-Chair

Fiona has had a career as a senior HR practitioner, working for several large firms throughout her career. Her most prominent roles have concerned change management and culture shift to ensure successful delivery of strategy. Joined the Board in 2018.

Je An

Je An is founding Director of Studio Weave, an architecture practice devoted to the social significance of architecture and the technical accuracy within which it is executed. He lives locally.

Andrew Coates

Andrew is a director of CO2 Architects. He was formerly a director of Real Live Leisure Group and Grant Leisure Group. He was, for 5 years Chief Executive of the WARGM Company

Rosanna Lawes

Rosanna Lawes was Executive Director of Development London Legacy Development Corporation responsible for the delivery of development programmes on Queen Elizabeth Olympic Park, one of the largest and highest profile urban regeneration projects in the UK and Europe. She was also the SRO for East Bank, the new creative and education hub.

Andy Mciver

Andy trained as a Chartered Accountant and Investment Banker before undertaking senior finance roles in large international retail and leisure companies. For the last twenty years he has operated in the online gaming industry, being Chief Executive of two UK listed companies and is currently Chairman of a private equity owned Italian operator. Joined the board in 2021.

Kate Miners

Kate is Director of Public Engagement and Commercial at the Old Royal Naval college, Greenwich, and was previously Head of Visitor Experience and Head of Commercial Partnerships.

Will Palin

Will Palin is currently the CEO of Barts Heritage Trust and Chair of Sheerness Dockyard Preservation Trust. A heritage professional, he has served as Conservation Director at the Old Royal Naval College Greenwich and as Director of Save Britain's Heritage.

Oliver Pearcey

Oliver served for 21 years at English Heritage finally as Director of Conservation. He has been a trustee of the Historic Houses Association and Chair of the London Water and Steam Museum

James Richardson

James is a Chartered Accountant, having trained with PwC before specialising in Mergers & Acquisitions. He has 25yrs experience working across a variety of international consumer focussed financial services, payments, property, gaming, airports and technology businesses and is currently Chief Financial Officer at Inspired Entertainment Inc. Joined the board in 2021.

The Role

The Chair will provide strategic leadership and vision for the Gunpowder Mills working closely with the CEO and Trustees to deliver the new 10-year strategy as it evolves.

Board Leadership

- Lead an engaged, skilled Board of Trustees in setting and owning the long-term vision and strategic plan that secures the financial future of the Gunpowder Mills.
- Ensure robust governance, financial oversight and risk management.
- Play a central role in Trustee recruitment and succession planning to maintain a diverse and future-focused Board.
- Chair Board and committee meetings effectively, ensuring informed decision-making on strategy, capital projects, and business planning.
- Ensure Board-level oversight of sustainability, conservation priorities, and organisational resilience.

Strategy & Stewardship

- Lead the Board in delivering the strategy for a sustainable multi-use site that integrates visitor attraction, commercial and leisure uses, and heritage conservation.
- Safeguard the long-term integrity of the endowment and the charitable assets, ensuring decisions reflect both current needs and future stewardship.
- Ensure that capital and maintenance programmes, including major

initiatives such as the NLHF “Reimagining the Mills” project and canal re-watering workstreams, receive appropriate Board scrutiny and support.

Partnerships

- Act as the public face of the Gunpowder Mills, representing the organisation locally and nationally.
- Champion the site’s heritage to broaden audiences and deepen engagement, particularly among schools and learning partners.
- Leverage networks and partnerships to unlock new opportunities that support the long-term vision.

Philanthropy

- Take a role in fundraising, working with Trustees and the CEO to cultivate relationships with trusts and foundations, sponsors, and institutional partners.
- Advocate for and support future capital and endowment campaigns that strengthen the site’s financial resilience and conservation impact.

Person Specification

The ideal candidate will bring all or most of the following attributes:

Knowledge & Skills

- Effective and collaborative chairing and leadership skills, demonstrating strong influencing skills and emotional intelligence.
- Excellent communication and listening skills, able to articulate vision clearly and build consensus while respecting differing views.
- Personal integrity and a confident public speaker, advocate and networker, with the willingness to assist the Gunpowder Mills fundraising activities where possible
- Enthusiasm for the Gunpowder Mills vision, mission and philosophy.
- A genuine passion for connecting people with heritage.
- Comfortable with analysing financial performance, audience data, risk, and other key indicators.
- Fully developed business-commercial acumen.
- Commitment to equality, diversity, and inclusion.

Background & Experience

- Previous experience of being a charity Trustee or other Board level role.
- Highly developed professional networks.
- Experience of partnership working and stakeholder engagement across public, private, community or voluntary sectors.
- Appreciation of heritage, culture and place-making, and awareness of the opportunities and challenges facing the wider heritage sector.
- Experience of organisations operating across multiple sites or locations (desirable).



Terms of Appointment

Length of Term & Time Commitment

Trustees are appointed for three-year terms with a maximum of three terms. The time commitment is approximately 2 days per month, this includes quarterly board meetings.

Remuneration

Voluntary position with reasonable expenses reimbursed.

Process

Interviews will take place in person in Central London, with the following interview panel:

- Fiona Baxter
- Will Palin
- Rosanna Lawes
- Andrew Coates

Due diligence

Due diligence will be carried out as part of the application process, which may include searches carried out via internet search engines and any public social media accounts.



How to Apply

Saxton Bampfylde Ltd is acting as an employment agency advisor to Gunpowder Mills on this appointment.

Candidates should apply for this role through our website at www.saxbam.com/appointments using code **PBBSRB**.

Click on the 'apply' button and follow the instructions to upload a CV and cover letter and complete the online equal opportunities monitoring* form.

The closing date for applications is noon on **Friday 10 April**.

* The equal opportunities monitoring online form will not be shared with anyone involved in assessing your application. Please complete as part of the application process.

GDPR personal data notice

According to GDPR guidelines, we are only able to process your Sensitive Personal Data (racial or ethnic origin, political opinions, religious or philosophical beliefs, trade union membership, genetic data, biometric data, health, sex life, or sexual orientation) with your express consent. You will be asked to complete a consent form when you apply and please do not include any Sensitive Personal Data within your CV (although this can be included in your covering letter if you wish to do so), remembering also not to include contact details for referees without their prior agreement.



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