


the
forum
Here for Everyone

Annual Report 2024-25





Since opening,
The Forum has
welcomed more
than twenty-two
million visitors.

Here's a summary
of our activity
over the last year...

A word from the Chair

At the heart of Norwich and Norfolk, The Forum is open for everyone – early morning to late at night, 364 days a year. Home to the Millennium Library and BBC East, a hub for cultural exchange, creativity and learning, Norwich Pride, Run Norwich, the Lord Mayor's Weekend and so much more.

In the last year we welcomed around 1.8 million people through our doors – the equivalent to twice the population of Norfolk. It was a year filled with festivals, events and celebrations, engaging the many and varied communities of Norwich and Norfolk, its workers and visitors. From Virtual Reality gaming, and the science of beer, to welcoming spoof fictional horror author Garth Marengi (Matthew Holness). From heritage tours of Jarrolds and meeting bugs in Waterloo Park to celebrating Norfolk's Queen of Knitting, Margaret Seaman at Norfolk Makers' Festival.

More than 248,000 people participated in the 756 events The Forum Trust delivered. Over 62% of the events we programmed were free or 'pay what you can' – removing some of the financial barriers to access. Nearly half our festival audiences are under 44 years of age, and on average 15% identify as disabled – in 2025 this rose to 28% for Norwich Games Festival. We've still got a way to go, but every year, we're working hard to ensure The Forum really is 'here for everyone'.

Highlights included launching Norwich Book Festival and relaunching Norwich Games Festival. Norwich Science Festival delivered 250+ events, reaching more than 75,000 people, Norfolk Makers' Festival welcomed an audience of 40,000 and Norfolk Heritage Open Days presented 308 free events across the county, run by magnificent volunteers.

In addition, The Forum hosted over 450 events with charities, non-profit organisations and local businesses – events which, alongside income from our tenants and car-park customers, help fund our cultural programme.

We also completed a major LED lighting replacement, saving thousands in energy costs and reducing our environmental impact and started repairs on our external steel framework – a significant investment in weather-proofing the building.

As we move towards our 25th anniversary celebrations, collaboration remains central to what we do. From playing a role on the Norwich Creative City Compact, Norwich Business Improvement District Board and Local Cultural Education Partnership committee, to new links with Business in the Community.

Without our partnerships, we could achieve little – so a huge thanks to Norwich City and Norfolk County Councils, who brought The Forum into existence, to UEA, Norwich University of the Arts, and City College Norwich for linking us to the region's excellent education ecology, and the many organisations and volunteers who make our work possible. Sincere thanks, also, to The Forum staff – the front-line for all our relationships and for keeping us running all-year-round.

Finally, we're deeply grateful to the thousands of people who cross our threshold every day. As a charitable trust with no regular public funding, your energy drives what we do.

Here's to another year of fun, creativity and culture ahead.

John Fry



“The Forum is the heart of Norwich,
in my opinion.”

NORWICH SCIENCE FESTIVAL VISITOR



The Forum: here for everyone

The Forum is a unique space in the centre of Norwich, built for the benefit of the public. It was established, with a 125-year charitable purpose, as a landmark building for culture, recreation and learning. The building is nearly 25 years old and is embedded in the local landscape: known as a hub for communities, a welcoming venue, and an iconic landmark.

The Forum is well established in the minds and hearts of communities across Norfolk, with an excellent reputation for collaboration and partnership.

We work independently and with stakeholders throughout the city and region for the public good – maintaining an agile and responsive approach to opportunities, and resilient in the context of the wider economy and current challenges. The Forum is here for everyone, and continues to be a place that supports creativity, learning, exploration, debate and conversation for everyone who lives in, works in, or visits Norwich and Norfolk.



Our trustees

The Forum's trustees are responsible for guiding the mix of activities delivered and the stewardship and governance of the Trust's 125-year lease on the building.

Our trustees and management team confirm they have referred to the Charity Commission's general guidance on public benefit when reviewing the aims and objectives and in planning future activities.

At the centre of Norwich life

The Forum Trust is the independent, self-financing educational charity that runs the building, car park, events and festivals.

It sits at the centre of Norwich life – neighbouring Norwich Market and City Hall, reflecting the imposing 15th century church St Peter Mancroft in its stunning glass facade.

Since opening, The Forum has welcomed more than twenty-two million visitors; from event attendees to library customers. Home to one of the busiest libraries in the country, we are a cultural hub in the centre of Norwich and provide fantastic free events for the city and county, supporting creativity and learning.

We present:

Norwich Science Festival – one of the UK's leading science festivals.

Norfolk Makers' Festival – a celebration of creativity and crafting.

Norwich Games Festival – an inclusive event celebrating the gaming industry and showcasing local creative talent.

Norwich Book Festival – a celebration of stories, in the City of Stories, for all types of readers.

We also coordinate **Norfolk Heritage Open Days**; part of the country's largest free heritage festival.

A bit of history

The Forum was the landmark Millennium project for the East of England, part of a £2 billion range of buildings, environmental projects, celebrations, and community schemes funded from the National Lottery. In that way, we stand among the likes of the Eden Project, the National Space Centre, and London's Millennium Bridge.

The Forum was created from the ashes of the Central Library in Norwich. After the library was destroyed by fire on 1st August 1994, Norfolk County Council and Norwich City Council had two choices: to build another library, or to combine two city centre sites to create a project with far greater impact. They took the ambitious route and out of that emerged the iconic glass fronted building we know today – designed by award winning architect Sir Michael Hopkins, at a cost of over £67 million pounds. The Forum opened to the public in 2001 and was officially opened by HM Queen Elizabeth II in July 2002.

“We love the spirit of curiosity that the festival brings through our doors.”

HODS ORGANISER

“Thank you for bringing my county’s history to life and making it accessible. You made me smile and I needed that!”

HODS VISITOR

“We all thought the festival was a triumph. We had a great time being involved. Throughout the whole festival there was so much to do...”

NORWICH SCIENCE FESTIVAL EXHIBITOR

“A fabulous way to engage children and will remain with them for a long time, impacting their views and understanding.”

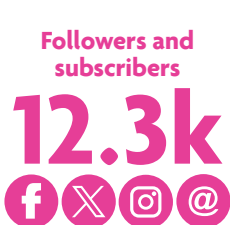
NORFOLK TEACHER

Festivals at The Forum: the impact

Norfolk Heritage Open Days

6-15 Sep 2024

Heritage Open Days (HODs) is England’s largest free festival of heritage and culture, run by hundreds of local organisations and volunteers. Every September, thousands of people learn the stories behind some of our most loved buildings and places, discovering untold tales and unsung heroes. Norfolk HODs is coordinated by The Forum and 2024 saw visitors journeying from city to countryside to coast, discovering hidden gems and learning more about local cultural heritage.



Norwich Science Festival

15-22 Feb 2025

An eight-day celebration of science and technology, with a focus on showcasing scientific excellence in the region. In 2025, we invited visitors to discover the ways in which science shapes our future – from climate to technology, biodiversity to health. A vibrant programme of workshops, performances, talks, and hands-on activities explored these new frontiers, encouraging us all to see the future as fluid, not fixed.

At the very heart of the festival is The Explorium at The Forum, a space for visitors of all ages to enjoy free, hands-on science activities.



The Forum on your doorstep: Science edition

22 events 3,000+ participants

73% of participants lived in target postcodes

86% reported an increased interest in science

Taking the Norwich Science Festival to communities’ doorsteps in: NR3, NR5, NR6 and NR8 postcodes, including a science trail in Mile Cross and Bugs and Beasts at Waterloo Park in August.



“Proud and very pleased to live in a creative city.”

NORWICH BOOK FESTIVAL VISITOR

“It’s a big achievement getting people to try things out. It brings people together and highlights the benefits of ‘making’ on health and wellbeing too.”

NORFOLK MAKERS FESTIVAL CONTRIBUTOR

“Not only is being part of the Norwich Games Festival a chance to reach a large number of visitors, many who were eager to engage, but the staff and organisers provide a first-class level of support. I also believe that as it is a free event, in the city centre, it attracts a wide range of ages and interests.”

NORWICH GAMES FESTIVAL CONTRIBUTOR

Festivals at The Forum: the impact

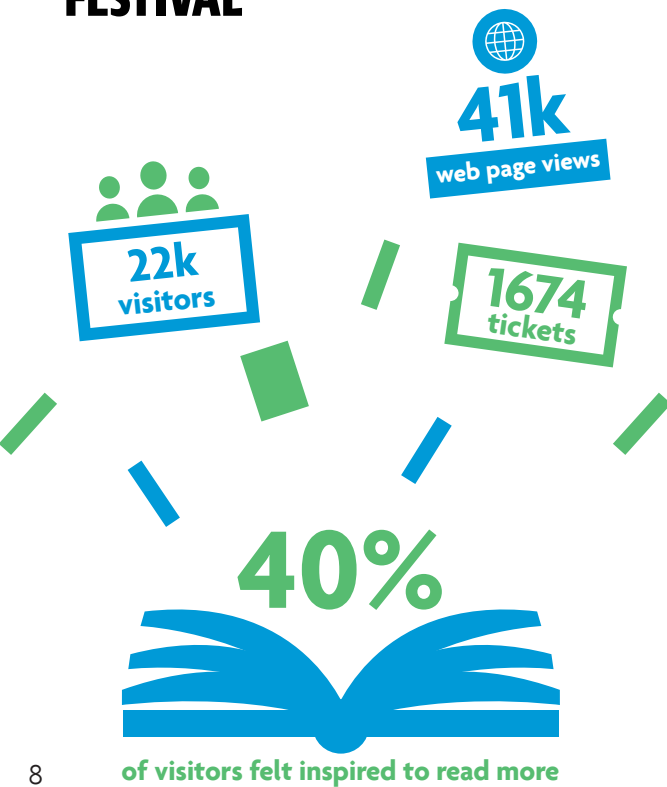
Norwich Book Festival

24-27 Oct 2024

A brand-new festival for Norwich, City of Stories and first English UNESCO City of Literature, to encourage and celebrate reading, stories and creative writing, and showcase its incredible literary history.

Presented by The Forum and delivered with a range of partners, including National Centre for Writing, University of East Anglia, and Norfolk Library and Information Service.

NORWICH
BOOK
FESTIVAL

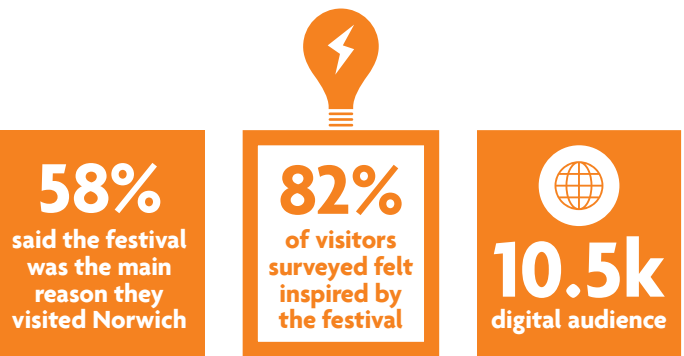


Norfolk Makers Festival

13-21 Apr 2024

A unique and eclectic festival, showcasing and celebrating the diversity of creative skills in the region and encouraging people to try something new.

NORFOLK
MAKERS
FESTIVAL



Norwich Games Festival

30 May-1 Jun 2024

After a four-year pause, we relaunched this festival with the aim of making it even more inclusive and accessible.

Working alongside lead partner Norwich University of the Arts, we delivered three days of engaging and interactive content – with 61% of the events free to attend. The festival was a showcase of local talent, in the fields of game design, animation and development, and a way to inspire the next generation of the games’ workforce.

NORWICH
GAMES FESTIVAL



“The event allowed us to showcase our centre... we were able to network with other organisations and chat to the public, something that we don’t get to do very often as we are based in a rural location.”

NORFOLK MAKERS FESTIVAL PARTICIPANT



A year of partnerships

Collaboration is at the heart of everything we do. Our partnerships enable us to extend our reach, and to present a programme of events and activities which recognise and celebrate the strength of the region.

We are proud to partner with both the city’s universities. Norwich University of the Arts, as lead partner for Norwich Games Festival, has committed to the strategic development of the event. Together, we’re working to establish a nationally recognised platform for the city’s games development sector and showcase the university’s reputation as a leader in the field of technical game art, design and development.

Our partnership with the University of East Anglia is at the core of Norwich Science Festival.



For the past decade, the festival has celebrated and communicated the world renowned and ground-breaking scientific research and discovery taking place in Norwich, reaching new audiences each year.

As we mark the tenth anniversary of Norwich Science Festival, we are working with colleagues from Norwich Research Park to create a unique Microbe Zoo, which will be free to visit at The Forum for the duration of the festival.

We continue to support Norwich Pride, as the central venue for the annual celebration each year and during the summer of 2025, have supported Break Charity as the city centre focal point for their GoGoSafari Trail – helping raise valuable funds to improve the lives of young people and their families.

Our location in the heart of the city centre, the expertise and experience of our staff, and our charitable purpose, place us in a unique and fortunate position, where we are able to invest in our relationships and support partner organisations, while exploring new opportunities to work with colleagues across the community.

Our strong relationships allow us to support valuable community projects and extend the reach and impact of our activities. This ethos of collaboration has helped us reach diverse groups, build trust in areas of low engagement, and together achieve great things.

Looking ahead

Festivals and events

Our festival calendar is our main cultural offer, delivering a vibrant programme celebrating the best the city and county has to offer along the themes of: books, games, heritage and science.

Norfolk Deaf Festival started life at The Forum in 2021, as a community festival led entirely by volunteers. Working in partnership with the organiser, The Forum has secured grant funding to support the employment of a three-year post to develop and deliver Norfolk Deaf Festival; adding a fifth festival to our programme.

Our ambition is to build on the incredible foundations established by the team of volunteers, developing the festival to reach new audiences to enrich and support the wider D/deaf community in Norfolk and beyond.

Following the successful pilot event in 2024, Norwich Book Festival returned in 2025 with an expanded programme across eight days, based at The Forum, with partner venues across the city hosting author events, workshops and activities. The festival celebrates stories in all forms, encouraging reading, writing and creativity, supporting literacy, and engaging local communities in further developing the direction of the festival.

Anniversary activity

We are working on a programme of events and activities to mark The Forum’s 25th anniversary in 2026-27.

Welcoming communities

The Forum sees around 1.8 million visitors each year, but we recognise that while it is a welcoming, safe and familiar place for many, there are still people in the community we are yet to welcome through our doors.

We are continuing to extend our programme of activity beyond the physical doors of The Forum, taking our work out into communities in Norwich and Norfolk who find it challenging to visit the building.

Science on Your Doorstep has been invaluable in building relationships with families and young people in under-served areas of the city. This initiative has seen almost 5,000 people take part in hands-on science and discovery events in their neighbourhood. A ‘Bugs and Beasts’ day in Henderson Park (NR5) reached new audiences, and we’re working with partners and funders to extend this important work to reach communities who do not currently visit our festivals.

As an organisation, we have set up an access and inclusion group to help us to improve our building, develop our programme of activity to be as inclusive and welcoming as possible, and make sure our communication is clear and engaging.

“I often feel a little nervous when working with a venue I’m not familiar with, but this was put to rest very quickly... everyone I interacted with from The Forum was friendly, attentive, and incredibly helpful. The venue itself is lovely, and we received plenty of positive feedback from our guests.”

CORPORATE HIRER

What
our
tenants
think

“All the staff are so friendly, professional and it is a joy to work from The Forum. It’s a pleasure to come in every day.”



“The organisation of the event was great and the staff were fantastic and attentive at the event. The audience was a wide range of individuals and families.”

PARTICIPANT



The Forum: an amazing team

Occupier
Survey 2024
feedback

89%

of tenants said The Forum functions well as a business space for them

84%

of respondents said The Forum is a happy place to work from

80%

of respondents feel they and their organisation are valued by The Forum



1.8 million

people visit The Forum each year



Our customer services team are here for all our visitors

- They welcome people into the building from 8am to midnight, 7 days per week.
- They’re on-site 24 hours a day, 365 days a year.
- They are qualified first aiders and several are trained security guards.



...in an amazing building



0.5 million bricks and 1,500 lorry loads of concrete

2k+

light fittings

600+

fire detection devices

94

CCTV cameras



1,235 panes of glass!

The building has 18,000 square metres of glass, equivalent to 3.5 football pitches; and it takes 3 days and 3 nights to clean them!



800+



sprinklers with 160,000 litres of water stored on site and ready for use supplied by 2 pumps, each capable of pumping 2,700 litres per minute



Our strategy is based on four key pillars

Aim 1

Reaching wider communities

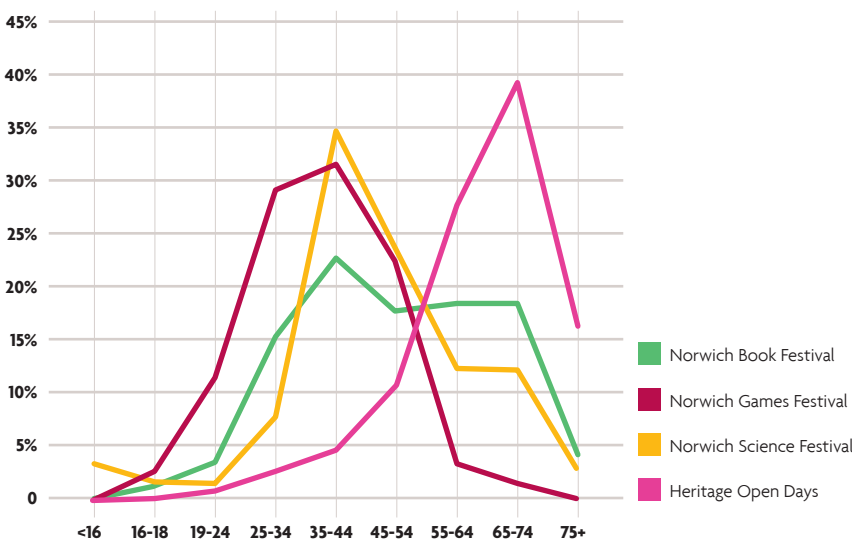
How we do this

- We work with our partners to extend the reach of everything we do.
- We deliver a broad and inclusive programme of activities, so the whole community can get involved.
- We create a high-quality visitor experience and are continually improving it.
- We increase awareness of our work, which strengthens The Forum’s reputation.

How are we doing?

- Science on Your Doorstep**
Over 3,000 participants, 86% reported an increased interest in science.
- Norfolk HODs**
79% of organisers estimated at least half of their visitors were visiting for the first time.
- Norwich Book Festival**
77% of survey respondents felt inspired to visit more events like this in future.

Forum Audiences



Aim 2

Working towards net zero

How we do this

- We have a staff sustainability group and are joining the Norfolk and Suffolk Carbon Charter.
- We are working to reduce our carbon footprint, and our other environmental impacts.
- We will move to sustainable procurement for equipment, suppliers, and materials across our operations.
- We will be a green champion: charting our carbon journey, knowledge sharing, and promoting environmental changes across the city.

How are we doing?

- We have installed LED lighting across our building.
- We have more water-efficient toilets.
- We look after more than 100 trees.
- We use environmentally-friendly cleaning products.
- We have EV charging points in our car park.
- We have water refill and recycling points.

Emissions data summary

	2024/25	2023/24
CO2e from gas use	23.5	31.2
CO2e from electricity use	19.6	17.0
Total measured emissions (tonnes carbon)	43.1	48.2
CO2e from water use	1.4	1.2
CO2e from waste	6,109	4,834

2024/25

10% reduction in total measured emissions

Aim 3

Boosting the local economy

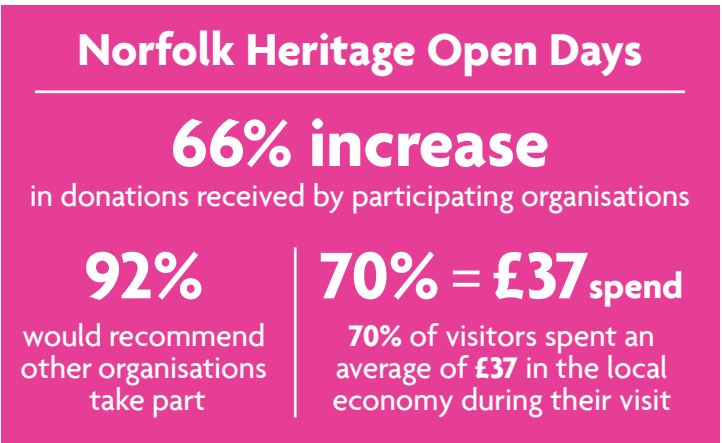
How we do this

- We are delivering a programme of cultural events, and helping facilitate partnerships to enable others to deliver community activity and engagement.
- We are attracting more people to Norwich, creating a wider economic benefit.
- We are providing affordable, high-quality spaces for tenants and events nurturing local businesses and supporting and helping create community activities.
- We are playing a key role in Norwich's economy, as a city centre stakeholder and champion voice.
- We are supporting new projects across Norwich and Norfolk, offering resource and expertise.

“We have been overwhelmed with our experience... I'm so glad we were able to be part of the science festival this year. It's not just been the interaction with the kids we've enjoyed and seeing how positively people engaged with our activities, but the staff development we've seen.”

How are we doing?

Our tenants are a crucial part of The Forum. We also welcome a diverse range of hirers and events to The Forum throughout the year. Our hire events drive footfall to the city, The Forum building, animate our spaces, bring income and create a vibrant and varied calendar.



Aim 4

Investing for success

How we do this

- We make the best use of our assets for the benefit of Norfolk and Norwich.
- We look after The Forum building with a programme of long-term maintenance and reinvestment, maintaining independence by prioritising long-term financial stability.
- We maximise our income from the car park and our other assets, to reinvest in our activities.
- We find opportunities to generate appropriate additional income.
- We invest in our staff, our partnerships, and our relationships with key stakeholders and tenants.

How are we doing?



“Super easy parking in the centre of Norwich. Safe and secure.”

CAR PARK CUSTOMER GOOGLE REVIEW



Our finances

How we generate income

The Forum Trust is a registered charity and does not receive regular government, council or lottery funding. Our income comes from:

- **Our car park.**
- **Rent from tenants.**
- **Space hire** for exhibitions, events, meetings, and performances.
- **Grants, sponsorship, and in-kind support.**

Financial performance summary of unrestricted operations (day to day income/expenses and projects)

	2024/25 (£)	2023/24 (£)
Net Income from Car Park	886,911	852,476
Net Income from tenants and investments	520,508	360,307
Net costs of operations (consisting of grant, public facing and corporate activity)	(847,549)	(722,023)
Governance costs	(115,594)	(106,013)
Depreciation	(137,112)	(128,749)
Unrestricted operating surplus	£307,162	£255,998



Income from events and hires increased by **£57,430**



Unrestricted operating surplus

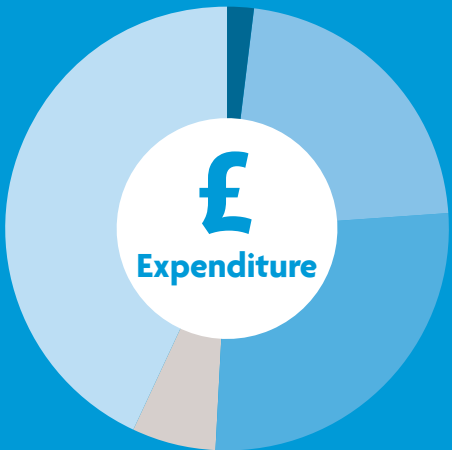
2024/25: **£307k**
2023/24: **£256k**

A snapshot

Finances



- 0% | Government grants
- 2% | Donations
- 32% | Car park and trading activities
- 9% | Charitable activities
- 57% | Investments (tenants and interest)



- 2% | Governance (legal and professional fees)
- 22% | Depreciation
- 27% | Charitable activities
- 6% | Raising funds – car park
- 43% | Raising funds – tenants

Events and visitors

1.8 million visitors

Equivalent to every resident of Norfolk visiting twice

248k+

people participated in the 756 events presented by The Forum Trust

62%

of pre-bookable/ticketed events were FREE or 'Pay What You Can'

Nearly half our festival audiences are **under 44 years of age**

54%

of visitors are from outside Norwich

15%

of our festival visitors identify as disabled, rising to 28% for Norwich Games Festival in 2025

450+

events with not-for-profits and local businesses

Sustainability

100

trees on The Forum site (and lots of lovely bird boxes)

10%

reduction in total measured carbon emissions



95%

of lighting replaced with LED low energy lighting



Electricity usage down (-12%)



Gas usage down (-13.1%)

122k

water bottle refills at our water refill station since their introduction in 2019



“Our sincerest thanks go to both our company members and trustees, who together provide scrutiny, strategic oversight, advice and counsel based on their collective wealth of knowledge and experience.”

CHRIS GRIBBLE, CEO OF THE FORUM

Governance

Members of the Company

John Fry | Andrew Barnes | Susan Guest
| Caroline Jarrold | Christopher Maw |
David Merrick | City College Norwich*
| Norfolk County Council* | Norwich City
Council* | Norwich University of
the Arts* | University of East Anglia*

Trustees

The appointed Trustees (and Directors) are: John Fry (Chair) | Andrew Barnes | Susan Guest | Caroline Jarrold | Christopher Maw | David Merrick | Jeremy White (City College Norwich) | Stephen Morpew (Norfolk County Council)** | Professor Simon Ofield-Kerr (Norwich University of the Arts) | Claire Kidman (Norwich City Council)** | Professor Catherine Richardson (University of East Anglia)

* As represented by the appointed directors ** Not subject to retirement by rotation



Charity Name The Forum Trust Limited

Charity Number 1074619

Company Number 03470398 Limited by Guarantee

Principal office The Forum, Millennium Plain, Norwich, NR2 1TF

Auditor Price Bailey LLP, Anglia House, 6 Central Avenue St Andrews Business Park, NR7 0HR

Bankers Lloyds Bank plc, 16 Gentleman's Walk, NR2 1LZ

Solicitors Mills & Reeve LLP, 1 St James Court, Whitefriars, NR3 1RU

Chair John Fry

Chief Executive Christopher Gribble

Company Secretary Catherine Maliphant