

## Case study for Heritage Counts 2015

Theme demonstrated by case study:	Local Management and Repair
Name of project/group:	Copped Hall Trust
Location:	Epping Forest
Duration (if applicable):	1986 on-going

### Short description of project:

The project aims to save and protect the Copped Hall, listed Grade II in 1984, from vandalism and development proposals and to restore it for use as a study centre and a cultural events and community venue.

The participants of the initial campaign to save the Copped Hall from development (1986-1995) were representatives of the local conservation societies who set up an organisation called 'Friends of Copped Hall'. The Copped Hall Trust, a charitable trust, was set up in 1993 with members of the Friends of Copped Hall, CPRE Essex and the Epping Society. The campaign was unfunded and the lawyers' fee for setting up of the Trust was funded via small fund raising activities.

The purchase of the freehold of Copped Hall in 1995 was funded entirely from two low-interest loans; one private and one from the Architectural Heritage Fund. These loans were repaid within three years by the sale of six leasehold and covenanted apartments within some of the service buildings.

Following the purchase, income and funding came from grants, donations and educational tours. The campaign started 29 years ago and the project has been running on site for 20 years.

### What would have happened without this project/group?

An 'enabling development' scheme in 1986 proposed to enlarge Copped Hall by six times its original size, with metal and glass wings as an office block, despite the creation of a conservation area two years earlier in 1984.

The Friends of Copped Hall campaigned to protect the Copped Hall in order to ensure its original integrity and the future of the Conservation Area through the restoration of the Copped Hall and by creating an education centre dedicated to the Hall and its conservation and the Conservation Area.

How did the project achieve its objectives?

The Friends of Copped Hall's first act was to say publically what it wanted, which included: no new buildings, careful reconstruction of the inside to its mid-18<sup>th</sup> century form, and the establishment of a study centre. The Friends persuaded heritage campaigning groups to oppose the enabling development scheme. The first enabling development scheme did not proceed.

The Friends wrote to numerous prominent people seeking support by explaining and championing the excellence of the architecture, gardens and landscape, both in concept and detail. This stance would later form the basis of the educational programmes. It has also helped that the Conservators of Epping Forest (City of London), owners of the adjacent Epping Forest, opposed development at Copped Hall and The Friends gained the support of Conservation Officers at the District Council.



The Copped Hall (Photo: Peter Gamble)

What difference has it made? Main outcomes and outputs.

Copped Hall was once the centre of a rural community, and after years of dereliction, is now the centre of a community again. Copped Hall is now visited by a large number of individuals and groups. The Trust has over 1300 Friends and some 65 volunteers. The study days and courses serve to illuminate many aspects of the local area. They also have their own choir - formed from volunteers and other members of the community.

The mansion is a significant historic building and is an example of an English Palladian mansion with an original principal floor plan. The careful restoration of the mansion and gardens, and the educational activities related to this, has created a much greater understanding and appreciation for the surrounding conservation area and historic environment. The Trust encourages meetings of conservation bodies at Copped Hall - for example, Essex Gardens Trust, Essex Heritage Trust, and Friends of Historic Essex. Students have come from SPAB and as far away as USA and Canada.

What were the main lessons learnt or challenges would anything be done differently?

The Trust was initially in a weak financial position. There was a lot of unpaid work but slow, steady and eventually successful progress was made, against overwhelming odds.

There were no changes in direction from the original intentions of the campaign to what is currently being achieved. However, the challenges to those intentions were very substantial indeed. The first main challenge was to persuade people that the concept of 'enabling development' would negatively impact Copped Hall and its landscape. The second challenge was a lack of money to run the campaign or purchase Copped Hall, restore it and establish the educational, cultural and community uses.

These challenges were overcome through the launch of a campaign to explain the excellent architectural, garden and landscape qualities of the Hall and to make clear it that by embarking on an enabling development solution these qualities would be lost. The Trust also conveyed the concept that the repair could be carried out in stages, as work in progress, which in itself, would be an educational conservation exercise.

What is the future for the case study?

Copped Hall, its ancillary buildings and gardens are to be owned and protected by the Copped Hall Trust for all time. The Trust would like to acquire other related parts if that were possible, such as the lake, to bring them under permanent protection. The future of the project is to carry on with research and restoration, and the assembly of the educational objectives - which are inter-related. All is a work in progress. One of the reasons given by visitors for repeated visits is to see the stages of restoration. The story of the Copped Hall is like a novel, with each chapter valid in its own right.

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