

The amateur astronomer's forum

# FIELD OF VIEW

## *Turning a reservoir into a planetarium*

One astronomy society has ambitious plans to build a science discovery centre and planetarium in a derelict reservoir next to their observatory



Today, the Society has ambitions every bit as big as those of its founders. In 2014 we bought the land adjacent to the observatory, the site of a redundant underground reservoir constructed in the 1880s. This 23m-diameter circular structure has a 5.5m-high, vaulted brick, arch roof supported by brick pillars and is an impressive example of Victorian industrial engineering.

After some consultation with society members and the public, we decided to set about turning the reservoir into a science discovery centre and planetarium and in 2018 we secured funding from the National Lottery Heritage Fund, the Architectural Heritage Fund and Ashfield District Council for a feasibility study. Surveys demonstrated that it was possible to repurpose the structure for its new use. Then during the summer just past, the University of Nottingham funded two architecture student interns to develop the designs.

The reservoir will contain a multi-purpose exhibition area and teaching space, designed to preserve the existing architectural heritage features. A 10m-diameter planetarium will sit on the roof of the reservoir and, as well as showing pre-prepared content, will have the capability to live stream the view from our observatory telescope. Making the site accessible to people with disabilities was a key part of the design brief and the students came up with an innovative proposal that uses ramps as the main access route, taking their design cue from the rings of Saturn. Our business plan shows that the new facility can be operated on a sustainable long-term basis, attracting around 20,000 visitors a year.

So far we've been fortunate enough to receive the support of several local companies and business groups for our venture. We will be applying for some significant blocks of funding during 2020 in order to progress our designs and to start the significant task of raising the capital required for the construction phase. If anyone is interesting in knowing more about the project or helping us in any way through donations or work in kind it would be great to hear from you! 📧



**Dr Steve Wallace** is the project manager of the Sherwood Observatory's Planetarium Project. To get in touch with him email [projectmanager@sherwood-observatory.org.uk](mailto:projectmanager@sherwood-observatory.org.uk)

**M**ansfield and Sutton Astronomical Society (MSAS) was established in 1970 when Dave Collins, a member to this day, placed an advert for like-minded people in the local newspaper. The founding members were ambitious and decided to build an observatory, and over the next decade the Sherwood Observatory was built on a shoestring budget. In an era when recycling did not have the profile that it has today, the demolition of a local coal mine provided many of the materials used to construct the building. The frame of our 61cm (24-inch) Newtonian refracting telescope was built from scaffolding poles and the equatorial axis from the rear axle of a truck. Even the main mirror was made by the members. MSAS is still a thriving society and we pride ourselves on our outreach projects, attracting nearly 3,000 visitors a year. We are a particular favourite with the Scouts and Girlguiding associations, and have helped over 50 groups attain their astronomy badge in the last year alone.