

## ORAL QUESTIONS TO THE RENEWAL AND RECREATION PORTFOLIO HOLDER

### Questions from Ms Gillian Hughes, lead petitioner

*Q1. What provision are you making for continuing the education and outreach services currently offered to the young people of Bromley by Bromley Museum?*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

Considerable thought has been given to how the Council can best provide access to the museum collections without a revenue budget to support them, which is why the recommendation includes the allocation of £395k of capital receipts which will pay for the installation of two high quality exhibitions in Central Library, the digitisation of the collection, a refurbished community exhibition space, online independent learning material, and promotional material for the borough's whole heritage offer. It is anticipated that by moving the museum exhibitions to central library, visits will increase from 19k per annum to over 200k per annum. School parties will be welcome to visit the new exhibitions in the Central library, although, it will not be possible to provide a dedicated member of staff to support visits to the exhibitions. The Central Library and Local Studies have a schools programme in place, so the exhibitions will become part of this offer.

#### Supplementary Question

*Many schools benefit from a service which sees museum artefacts brought into schools for educational purposes. Will the educational aspect be taken into consideration?*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

Unfortunately, the Council's present budgetary position does not allow for such a service in the future. Maybe this is something which could be undertaken by volunteers.

*Q2. If the Council had pursued the HLF funding, would the criticisms referred to in 3.5 of the Report (Report No DRR14/116) have been addressed?'*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

Yes, if funding had been pursued.

### Supplementary Question

*Raising the lack of HLF funding as an argument to close the museum is rather disingenuous wouldn't you agree?*

### Portfolio Holder's Response

Yes.

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### **Questions from Mr Phil Waller, Orpington History Organisation and Chair of the Bromley Heritage and Arts Forum**

*Q1. Does the Council consider that every avenue has been explored and exhausted in providing a credible Museum Service, potentially reduced but not shoehorned into the Central Library with no Curator or Museum Specialist to look after what is an extensive and important large collection of important artefacts?*

### Portfolio Holder's Response

Yes the Council has explored all avenues for keeping a museum service at the Priory with a reduced revenue budget. The business planning work carried out as part of the HLF bid showed that even if the Priory is refurbished and additional income streams are created, such as a café, the revenue costs of managing and maintaining the museum in the Priory building cannot be covered. Additionally a successful community interest company who declared an interest in the Priory during the recent stakeholder consultation determined after scrutinising the figures, that the cost of the capital works required to bring the Priory to a standard that allowed a range of activity to take place and increased access, prohibited the development of a community facility in this building. Central Library has been identified as the best place for the museum exhibitions given it is the home of Local Studies and Archives and the museum exhibitions can benefit from the library's resources without ongoing costs.

*Q2. It is all of our duty, residents and Authority alike, to protect the Priory Buildings. What could happen now will be irreversible. Can the Council absolutely ensure that the Priory as a building will be protected in transition IF the plans proposed are taken ahead?*

### Portfolio Holder's Response

Part of the reason that only a part year revenue saving will be achieved in 2015/16 is because there will be security costs incurred to protect the building in the interim period, until the building is sold. Additionally staff from the Leisure and Culture team will regularly visit the Priory and the store, and there will be other activity on site such as contractors digitising the collection which will contribute to its security. The Council recognises the importance

of keeping the building secure and protected during the transition period and has allowed for this in its budgets. The Property team would use English Heritage's best practice guidance for safeguarding vacant buildings to inform how this transition is managed.

#### Supplementary Question

*Does the Council have a preference or criteria as to who could buy the Priory?*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

The Priority will not necessarily be offered to the highest bidder. All bids would be considered on their own individual merits.

*Q3. If proposals proceed could I have some assurance that a conversation will be had with BHAF in considering resourcing some of the activities within the constitution of the Forum because without BHAF you will have no formal Heritage and Arts Network in the Borough.*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

BHAF is recognised by the Council as an important representative body. A member of staff from the Leisure and Culture team would like to attend your meetings going forward if BHAF is amenable to this. Monies have been allowed in the £395 capital budget requested to promote and publicise BHAF, local interest groups and other heritage activity in the borough, so that more residents access heritage events and are aware of the groups they can become a part of. The Council anticipates working with BHAF to ensure the publicity produced best achieves these aims.

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#### **Question from Ms Christine Hellicar, Bromley Borough Local History Society**

*Q. What assurances can the Council give that it values Bromley's rich heritage and will provide funding for a museum service of 21st century standard that does not consist merely of unchanging displays but is professionally curated, properly managed and engaged with the community to benefit present and future generations?*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

The Council recognises Bromley's rich heritage and that it is valued by residents. This is why the recommendation includes the allocation of £395 capital receipts which will largely pay for the installation of two high quality exhibitions in Central Library. These new exhibitions will be professionally

designed and curated, with the exhibition artefacts chosen and themes developed with input from local interest groups and residents. The results will be exhibitions of a far higher standard than currently exist at Bromley Museum for the benefit of all. These exhibitions will be permanent. The whole collection will be digitised so that the public can access information about the wider collection which will not be on display. If possible we would like to enable special interest groups to access the store based collection if they wish to put temporary exhibitions on for example in the community exhibition space at Central Library which will be refurbished as part of this project. This will only be able to happen if these groups work with us.

#### Supplementary Question

*Will the Council consider providing sufficient funds to enable the museum service to continue for one year thus retaining its officially recognised status and set up a working group of Councillors, officials and members of the Bromley heritage and arts voluntary sector to explore ways and means of maintaining a viable, cost-effective service including investigating the imaginative solutions implemented by other councils facing similar problems.*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

We will look at that.

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#### **Questions from Claire Madge**

*Q1. Who will rationalise the Bromley Museum Collection if you make all staff redundant (point 3.21)?*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

The report sets out the approach to rationalising the current collection, and in doing so identifies as part of the capital costs the costs of achieving this. Rationalisation is required to make space to properly store the rest of the collection. There are artefacts within the collection that are not relevant to Bromley and should not have been acquisitioned.

*Q2. Who will carry out environmental monitoring of the store which houses the collection?*

#### Portfolio Holder's Response

The store will be monitored by staff from the Local Studies and Archives.

#### Supplementary Statement

*Skills and expertise for dealing with paper archives are not the same as those needed for handling artefacts.*

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**Questions from Ms Janet Clayton, Chairman, Orpington and District Archaeological Society**

*Q1. Following any closure of the Priory, the museum store - in an isolated building which has already experienced water leaks - will not be monitored by curatorial staff; how will the Council ensure that the collection is not damaged or vandalised, and is accessible in future to researchers/the public?*

**Portfolio Holder's Response**

The museum store will be monitored by the Head of Local Studies and Archives, liaison over access will be via the Local Studies and Archives team and will be dependent on available resources at a given time.

**Supplementary Question**

*Will the Council ensure that sufficient resources are available to keep the building safe and secure?*

**Portfolio Holder's Response**

Yes.

*Q2. The Grade-2\* Priory building is of national significance; it has already suffered vandalism (lead stripped from roof, water leaks); if closed, how will the Council ensure it is protected so that key features (including irreplaceable timber-framing, ornamental plasterwork, parquet flooring, fireplaces etc) are not damaged or destroyed?*

**Portfolio Holder's Response**

Consideration has already been given to protection of the building when the museum closes. There will be activity for a period of time as the museum is emptied, but the Council's Property Team are aware of the issues and will take steps to protect the building during the same period. English Heritage guidance on safeguarding historic buildings when not in use will be followed.

**Supplementary Question**

*Is the Council satisfied that sufficient resources are available?*

**Portfolio Holder's Response**

Yes.

*Q3. Why not retain at least one curatorial post to provide professional care and interpretation of both displayed and stored items, including the important Lubbock collection, since without such input the benefits of Bromley's rich heritage cannot be maximised and is at risk for the future?'*

Given the continuing economic pressure placed on the Council and the requirement to reduce expenditure by around £60m over the next four years, the Council is faced with taking a significant number of difficult decisions, as such and the Council is unable to commit revenue budgets going forward to support this service area.

Supplementary Question

*Is this something that can be considered again in the future?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

Yes, if the Council's financial position improves.

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**Questions from Mr Michael Meekums, Volunteer Co-ordinator for Bromley Museum**

*Q1. Will there be the opportunity for volunteers to help out at the new museum?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

The Council recognises the importance and the role that volunteers play and is keen to utilise volunteers across a broad range of services and the use in this particular area is something that will be taken up with the Head of Local Studies and Archives and new volunteering opportunities explored further.

Supplementary Question

*Would it be possible to design exhibitions to enable them to be changed?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

Part of the Lubbock exhibitions will be changed twice a year. With advice from historic organisations and the use of volunteers, it may be possible to change other parts of the exhibitions however, the narrative for the local history exhibition will limit the extent to which artefacts can be rotated. The temporary exhibition space will allow more objects to be displayed.

*Q2. How will the children of the borough be able to undertake the national and local History curriculum if there is no museum education officer?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

The current service has not provided a local history curriculum service to all schools in the borough and it may be that by having a more central location that the museum exhibitions and local history collection is utilised by more schools in the future.

*Q3. Will the Council consider keeping the museum at the Priory until a purchaser has been found to take on the Priory building?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

No.

Supplementary Question

*Who will be responsible for maintaining the building once the exhibits have been moved?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

This is the duty of the Council and we will do whatever is necessary.

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**Questions from Ms Juliet Wood**

*Q1. Has the Council sought professional guidance from those with experience in selling unusual, listed buildings as regards the time it will take to sell and the likely price?*

Portfolio Holder's Response

The Council has provided professional advice to Members on the implications of disposing of the Priory on the open market and has provided a range of indicative values. This is set out in the Part 2 paper on the agenda as it is deemed to be commercially sensitive. English Heritage guidance on selling historic buildings will be utilised by the Property team.

*Q2. Have the school teachers who petitioned and wrote letters expressing concern over access to an ongoing education service been consulted as to whether the proposed museum facility will adequately replace the interactive and tailored education service currently offered?*

### Portfolio Holder's Response

No they have not been consulted, but we are aware from correspondence that they do not believe that the proposals will adequately replace the current service they receive. However, it is not all schools that benefit from this service.

### Supplementary Question

*Two exhibitions per year will not reflect the current school curriculum. How will the new offer bring more educational value?*

### Portfolio Holder's Response

It won't be any worse, in fact there will be better temporary exhibition space available which could be used for education purposes.

*Q3. Has an opinion been sought from practicing museum professionals (who are independent of the proposal before Council) as to the impact on engagement levels of an online collection and a static '10 star object display?*

### Portfolio Holder's Response

The proposals arise out of the original museum design and exhibition work that was undertaken by an independent museum exhibition specialist to support the original lottery application. There will be far more than 10 artefacts on display. The Lubbock Gallery will display more Lubbock collection artefacts than are currently on display at the Priory. The specialists contracted to develop the new exhibitions will work with the community to ensure the chosen objects and the exhibition interpretation attracts a wide audience. In addition to the two permanent exhibitions monies from the £395k will be used to create a new refurbished community exhibition space which will hold temporary exhibitions at Central Library.

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