

Appendix C: The Future of the Priory and Bromley Museum 2015 consultation meetings

Consultation meetings were conducted between February and May 2015 on the future of the Priory and Bromley Museum.

The purpose of the meetings was to:

Firstly, listen to stakeholder views and ideas on the future of the Priory and Bromley Museum, chiefly:

- i. How best to operate the museum if the exhibitions are moved to Bromley Central Library. How existing staff in Local Studies can contribute, and how volunteers can assist both with the educational element of the displays and the setting up of new displays on a twice a year basis.
- ii. If it is decided to move the museum from the Priory, what uses might be appropriate for the building bearing in mind its importance to the town centre economy and the future upkeep of this very important listed building.
- iii. How the Priory can contribute to the health of the local economy bearing in mind current development and plans for Orpington town centre, for example the new cinema, health centre and public realm improvements scheduled.

Secondly, provide interested individuals and groups with further information as requested, including sharing documentation such as the Historic England/Fourth Street report produced in May 2015.

The dates and attendees of the 16 consultation meetings were as follows:

25 th February	English Heritage/ Historic England
17 th March	Former Cllr Anne Manning, former LBB Heritage Champion
17 th March	Orpington First
19 th March	Friends of the Priory and local community group
24 th March	Volunteers at Bromley Museum
24 th March	Bromley Heritage and Arts Group
25 th March	School teachers
31 st March	Aynscombe Angle residents
10 th April	Lord Avebury and Lyulph Lubbock
28 th April	Arts Council
30 th April	Young People at the Link Youth Centre, Orpington
6 th May	Volunteers at Bromley Museum
6 th May	Bromley Heritage and Arts Group
8 th May	Orpington First
14 th May	Friends of the Priory and local community group
14 th May	Trevor Johnson

English Heritage/ Historic England

Historic England's primary concern is the care of the historic building. Therefore following a meeting with officers Historic England commissioned and paid for a report to review all the work officers had done to date, and to provide information for prospective owners. This report can be found in appendix B. Additionally Historic England advised that their guidance on disposing of historic buildings should be followed as part of any future disposal process, and that if the building was empty for any period of time their guidance on protecting empty historic buildings should be followed.

Former Cllr Anne Manning

Anne Manning said that the need for the Council to continue making large-scale cuts to its annual budgets is recognised, yet it is very sad if it is no longer possible for the Grade II* listed Priory to be used in the future, particularly by the Museum. A possible move to Bromley Central Library may have some merit, housing as it does the Borough's Local Studies Department. Anne hopes that there is sufficient space for the Museum's extensive archives. Accessibility of those archives is of major importance, particularly when bearing in mind the loans that are made to schools and other organisations. The quality of any new archive provision will of course also be of relevance to those who may wish to donate items in the future. Bromley Museum enjoys a high profile, as evidenced by the excellent exhibition held not so very long ago within the Wellington Arch by Green Park. Anne said she is sure that the Council will want this to continue to be the case, wherever the Museum is sited. A well-qualified Curator is an essential element of any good museum.

Orpington First

The Orpington BID (business improvement district) would like the Priory to be an asset that enhances the local economy. The Orpington BID feel that the area lacks cultural opportunities for local residents and therefore would favour a cultural use for the building. There is already a lot of residential development in the area and therefore they do not think residential use would be appropriate. They see the Priory as a potentially important part of the High Street, and have approached Orpington College as a potential user for the site.

Friends of the Priory and local community group

An organised community group, along with the Friends of the Priory and Gardens, want the building to remain in public ownership or to be taken in to community ownership. They initially wanted to resurrect the HLF bid and/or see the Priory continue as a home for the museum, however they are now developing a proposal and business plan for the building as a commercial arts/heritage venue. The group is exploring whether, if a large restaurant (possibly themed restaurant), rather than a café, was part of a scheme at the Priory, and lots of other commercial spaces for hire were created, if a heritage and arts centre could be developed there. They feel passionately that a cultural use for the building is the best option. This group has led the petition which has received over 2000 signatures in support of the Priory not being sold. Although their preference is cultural use they are not opposed to another Council service using the building, and are positive about the idea of Registrars using the building for wedding ceremonies.

Volunteers at Bromley Museum

Current museum volunteers would prefer the museum to stay at the Priory and the site developed as a cultural destination. If the museum exhibitions are moved to Central Library they would like volunteering opportunities to continue, for collection care to continue and for there to be learning and participation opportunities available to a wide range of audiences. The group thinks it is vital that experts are involved in the rationalisation of the collection, and have seen first-hand the positive impact the education sessions can have on not just school groups but adults with learning disabilities too. They are very keen to find a way for learning and participation activity to continue. Croydon Clocktower was given as an example of a vibrant cultural destination that could be learnt from if the new exhibitions at Central Library are implemented. The group think that it is important that a digitised catalogue of the collection is available from home computers as well as in the library.

Bromley Heritage and Arts Group

The borough's heritage and arts organisations, and other consultees wish the future security of the collection and Priory building to be assured. Specifically the group want assurance that the building will be cared for properly during a disposal process, and for curatorial expertise and collection care to be prioritised as part of any new museum offer. If the building is purchased by a private owner they would like there to be an agreement for a certain number of days public access each year. This group is very disappointed that the HLF bid was not realised, and think more could have been done to bridge the revenue funding gap. They feel strongly that other options for a cultural use for the Priory building should have been explored, however if the decision is taken to move the exhibitions to Central Library they would like to contribute to and be involved in that process.

School teachers

The schools consulted want a museum education offer to continue, and continued access to the handling boxes. Their preference is for the museum to stay at the Priory and for education sessions to continue from this location. However, they acknowledge that they would not be prepared to pay the real cost of the education service as it stands, which would be over £300 per visit. They said their pupils really benefit from visits to the museum, it is an inspiring building that enhances their learning. They said that many children do not have the opportunity to visit historic buildings outside of school hours and that many parents will not allow their children to attend school visits to places in central London.

Aynscombe Angle residents

Aynscombe Angle residents enjoy the peaceful atmosphere of the area. They would prefer the building to continue as a museum, however if that is not possible their preference is for the site to become residential. They are anti a use related to the night time economy or that generates noise. They would also not support an educational use for the building as they consider this would likely create noise and additional traffic. They really liked it when the library was on site and were disappointed when it moved up the High Street, although they recognise it is more accessible for the majority in its new location.

Lord Avebury and Lyulph Lubbock

Lord Avebury and Lyulph Lubbock's main concern is that the integrity of the Lubbock collection remains intact and is accessible to the public. Lyulph Lubbock has collected an extensive electronic archive related to the Lubbock collection which could be linked to and promoted for public access as part of a scheme to move the exhibitions to Central Library.

Arts Council

The Arts Council said that the Priory was a matter for the Council to discuss with Historic England, and that the Arts Council had no part to play in those discussions. The Arts Council understand the reasons for the relocation of the collections currently housed in the Priory, and are not opposed to the idea of making them more accessible through a new exhibition space at Central Library Bromley. The increased visitor numbers projected indicate the opportunity offered by this relocation. However they are disappointed that there are no firm plans in place to provide a professional curator to support and facilitate access to the collections, and urged the Council to consider making available a small amount of revenue to facilitate access to the collection. They suggested that consortia models should be explored, where expert resources are shared with other sites.

Young people at the Link Youth Centre, Orpington

The young people thought the library was a good place for the collection to move to. They said having the exhibitions at Central Library would mean more people would visit because of its central location. Comments included "it's a good idea, no one I know visits the museum in Orpington". The majority said the concept design proposals looked good as they were modern and they liked the layout. Others said that it looked too small and that it might reduce important space for library users. Generally they thought that caring for and conserving Bromley's local history collection was the most important thing. Feelings were mixed about the use of volunteers for the exhibitions, as they were unsure if volunteers would have the skills to support the exhibitions. The group felt Bromley's paintings should be displayed in either libraries or leisure centres. The majority of the group preferred the option that the Priory building is purchased by a commercial business owner who refurbishes the building and changes its use. Ideas of new uses for the building included housing, restaurant, gym, something to do with the park, and shops.

Trevor Johnson

Trevor is keen for the museum to continue at the Priory, and believes a museum is the best use for the building. He said that the Priory is in a good location for receiving footfall. For example there is a footbridge which connects the area with the site of the new hotel. Once the hotel opens it will raise the possibility of bringing new visitors to the museum. Trevor says there is no encouragement for schools to come to the building and the current museum is badly advertised and not welcoming.