



Cabinet
26 January 2015

**Report from the Strategic Director,
Environment and Neighbourhoods**

Wards affected:
ALL

Museum and Archives Strategy

1.0 Summary

- 1.1 This report asks members to consider Brent's Museum and Archives Strategy.
- 1.2 The strategy was produced following a comprehensive consultation process and sets out a framework and action plan for evolving the service to meet the needs of a wider audience

2.0 Recommendations

That Cabinet:

- 2.1 Note the findings of the Museum and Archives Strategy and agree its vision that: "Brent's museum and archives are here for everyone; a window into the history of Brent, its people and places. We will use these unique resources to create opportunities, improve lives and create stronger communities".
- 2.2 Agree the three interlinked objectives which have been formed to deliver the vision of the Strategy as set out in paragraph 3.15.
- 2.3 Agree the action plan to deliver the Museum and Archives Strategy as set out in Appendix 3 to this report;
- 2.4 Consider and note the content of the Equality Impact Assessment as set out in Appendix 4 to this report.

3.0 Detail

Background

- 3.1 Each of the 33 authorities in London has an archive service and many also run a local museum. The quality of the services and their fortunes are mixed, particularly in the present financial landscape. With the opening of the new Library at Willesden Green, the Council has a unique opportunity to showcase its history and demonstrate the value of its heritage. This report presents a strategy to improve museum and archives services in Brent, widen access to them and ensure a secure future for them.
- 3.2 Brent Museum and Archives exist to collect, preserve, and provide access to the borough's past, providing enjoyment, learning and inspiration for all. Heritage services face unprecedented challenges in today's economic climate. Maximising the accessibility of collections to demonstrate the value of museums and archives, challenging traditional ways of delivering services, and finding sustainable funding sources are unavoidable priorities. However, these challenges also present opportunities to re-evaluate and re-model services for the better. This strategy sets out a framework and action plan for evolving the service to meet the needs of a wider audience.

Current Position

- 3.3 Brent Archives holds diverse collections related to the borough, its residents and communities. This includes the administrative records of Brent Council and its predecessors. Material in the collection ranges from council minutes and building plans to school records and papers of individuals, as well as historical maps, street directories, electoral registers, local census returns and an extensive collection of old photographs and postcards. There is a comprehensive collection of books and pamphlets and the main local newspapers on microfilm dating back to 1870.
- 3.4 The museum tells the story of the area from early settlers by the River Brent during the Bronze Age, to the rich diversity that makes the borough special today. It tells unique stories of local people – heroes, entrepreneurs, refugees, inventors, athletes, campaigners: people with aspiration, vision and determination. The displays look at rural Brent, the coming of the railways and the growth of the suburbs, the two World Wars, industry and leisure. Throughout the emphasis is on the fact that, from the very start, Brent's story is about movement of people in and out of the area. The museum will have a focus on identified key audiences including school pupils, young families and people with English as a second or other language. The aim is to inspire and

engage visitors with the borough's diverse history through an accessible and enjoyable approach which also aids learning.

- 3.5 A new cultural centre, The Library at Willesden Green, is scheduled to open in the summer of 2015 and will house a redesigned museum space and new archives facilities. The previous location of the facilities within the building had a minimising impact on visitor access. Despite the challenges of the current economic climate Brent Council has invested in the opportunity to create a purpose built space and improve the borough's cultural and heritage offer.
- 3.6 The new design will maximise visibility and encourage visitor flow to the integrated museum and archives area on the second floor. This will be a secure and environmentally controlled space for the permanent museum; archives search room; exhibition gallery and education room. Clear signage and a heritage 'object trail' throughout the building will stimulate interest in the collections and exhibitions.
- 3.7 The archives search room and storage facilities will be complemented by a new comprehensive guide to the collections and increased access to digitised material. The focus for the service will be increasing access for physical and virtual visitors.
The museum and archives will share a joint collection policy and work together on exhibitions, projects and a range of learning programmes. The proximity to the library space in the centre presents a more cohesive heritage offer to visitors.

Development of the Strategy

- 3.8 The strategy was developed following a self assessment was completed against a framework of organisational characteristics at the outset of the strategy development process. The 'Survive and Thrive' framework is administered by the Museum of London to support museums and archives with organisational health in the current challenging climate. The following strengths and areas for development were identified:
Key strengths: Willesden Green redevelopment project, strong and varied programme of outreach work, service planning aligned to corporate priorities and the borough plan.
Key areas for improvement: communication and marketing, clear aspirations and vision, medium to long term planning, strategic approach to partnership working, clarifying alignment between the service offer and community needs.
- 3.9 A two stage consultation process was undertaken; a preliminary stage to gather feedback and data to inform the production of the draft strategy, followed by a full public and stakeholder consultation on the draft strategy and action plan.

Stage 1- Preliminary Consultation

- Internal stakeholders - Regeneration and Major Projects, Children and Families, ITU, BACES and Legal and Democratic Services
- Wembley History Society and Willesden Local History Society
- External stakeholder focus group
- Museum of London
- National Archives
- Mount Stewart Junior School and St Mary's Catholic Primary School
- Archives Visitor survey
- Best practice visits to other London boroughs

Stage Two: Formal Consultation

A three-month consultation period on the draft strategy was undertaken through:

- An online questionnaire with paper copies available on request
- Consultation documentation sent to the Brent Citizens Panel (approximately 1,000 people) and 500 stakeholders including individuals, volunteers and voluntary organisations and national agencies including the Museum of London and The National Archives
- Two informal drop-in sessions
- Officer attendance at three Brent Connects Forums
- Officer attendance at two stakeholder meetings, one of which was with Brent History Societies

3.10 The survey was available on the Council's Consultation Portal and 34 completed questionnaires were submitted. 86% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed with the vision of the draft strategy while agreement for each of the three draft objectives ranged from 82% to 85%. 73% and 68% of respondents agreed or strongly agreed that the draft strategy and action plan respectively covered the key issues relating to museum and archives provision in Brent. 140 additional individual comments were received from 34 respondents. Where relevant and appropriate the strategy and action plan have been revised to reflect the feedback received

3.11 Although the programme of consultation on the draft strategy was a comprehensive one, the level of feedback response was lower than anticipated. This can be partly attributed to the fact that the draft strategy broadly reflected the feedback received during the first stage of the consultation.

3.12 In order to glean more detailed feedback on future priorities for the service, particularly from identified target groups of residents, a series of focus groups/group interviews was commissioned in September 2014.

Four groups were set up with different target sample sectors of the population namely the Irish, Somali, Indian namely Gujarati and A subset of Brent's citizen's panel, containing a mix of demographics (but with a heavy bias to white European)

Some broad statements can be made about the data supplied by the 48 participants and these include:

- All of the groups were able to understand what a museum is, but the difference between a museum and an archive (and how an archive can help people to research history) needs perhaps more explanation, particularly for those whose first language is not English.
- On the whole, the white Europeans in the groups visited museums more than the people from other ethnic groups.
- The minority ethnic groups in the exercise (Indian and Somali) tended to see museums as somewhere they could enjoy their own culture, or demonstrate it to others; the white Europeans (these included the Irish group) in the exercise were more likely to see museums as a chance to view the culture of others
- Location plays a large part in whether people visit museums; there were those who would visit a museum out of curiosity wherever it was.

Key Findings

3.13 From the background research and two stage consultation process it has been possible to identify a number of headline findings which have influenced the vision, three objectives and action plan priorities. These include:

- A more proactive approach can be adopted for the acquisition and display of materials and objects from businesses, schools and community organisations
- Digitisation of Museum and Archives material, including oral history material, and the resulting widening of access to the rest of the UK and abroad should be a priority for the service. A cross London digitisation project is under way
- Capacity to deliver service improvements can be achieved by strengthening structured collaborative working with schools, local historians and volunteers. For example, volunteers could undertake a floor walking role in the museum
- Consideration should be given to renaming Brent Museum and Archives. For example, renaming the facility Brent Museum and Local History Centre may generate more interest amongst non users of the service, particularly younger people
- Workforce development is a priority for the Heritage sector as a whole in order for authorities to deliver seamless services to a diverse audience
- On the evidence of the Archives survey approximately 70% of visitors are Brent residents, the vast majority of whom live in the south of the borough and who declared their ethnicity as white

- Young people like creative and interactive ways of finding out information e.g. touch screens, arts and craft activities and competitions
- The challenges to the financial future of museum and archive services must be recognised and a sustainable and cost effective approach adopted. The options of devolving services to a trust status or adopting a shared service approach need to be given detailed consideration
- New audiences will engage with Brent Museum and Archives if improvements are made to the marketing of services and content of the online and digital offers
- The management and development of Brent's collections need to be reviewed and revised to make them more easily accessible to a wider range of people.

Vision and Objectives

- 3.14 The vision of the strategy is “Brent’s museum and archives are here for everyone; a window into the history of Brent, its people and places. We will use these unique resources to create opportunities, improve lives and create stronger communities”
- 3.15 Three key objectives have been identified in order to achieve the vision:
- Ensure that everyone has access to the diverse history of Brent by caring for the collections, telling their stories and making them available to all.
 - Increase the scope and use of the collections through wider community engagement and working with a broader range of partners.
 - Provide a financially and environmentally sustainable service which meets the needs of current and future users.
- 3.16 A detailed action plan accompanies the draft strategy with the actions collated under each objective. The key recommended actions are to
- Open the new museum space and archives search room at The Library at Willesden Green
 - Redevelop and implement a museum and archives collections policy to cover the acquisition, loan and disposal of materials
 - Participate in the London Archives Project and ensure that Brent is part of the shared service approach to digitisation, a London wide catalogue and joint programming
 - Produce an exhibitions and outreach programme, including alternative venues in the borough
 - Produce and implement an action plan to increase participation from a wider audience range
 - Develop a robust heritage volunteer policy and launch the heritage volunteer programme.
 - Establish a Friends of Brent Museum and Archives group to fundraise and act as advocates for the service.

- Produce an options paper that explores options for alternative governance arrangements.
- Review income generation opportunities: produce and implement an action plan.
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4.0 Financial Implications

- 4.1 The action plan will be delivered within existing revenue budgets. Actions requiring investment will be progressed as and when there is funding.
Officers will actively seek external funding where available.

5.0 Legal Implications

- 5.1 The Local Government (Records) Act 1962 (LGRA 1962) confers limited discretionary powers for local authorities to provide certain archives services. Section 1(1) of the LGRA 1962 says that ‘a local authority may do all such things as appear to it necessary or expedient for enabling adequate use to be made of records under its control’.
- 5.2 The LGRA 1962 also refers to allowing inspection and copying of records, preparing indexes and guides to them and publishing and exhibiting them. The LGRA 1962 refers solely to the service provision aspect of archive offices’ work and not to their stewardship obligations nor any wider responsibilities and functions. In addition the LGRA 1962 empowers local authorities to acquire records of local significance over and above their own administrative records, care for them and make them available for study by the public. The LGRA 1962 has been subsequently amended to cover all county councils, all London boroughs, metropolitan districts and unitary councils.
- 5.3 Some local authorities which are not covered by the LGRA 1962 hold collections of archives under the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964. Library authorities are empowered to hold collections of archives as long as this does not become their dominant function.
- 5.4 Under section 12(1) of the Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 (“the PLMA 1964”), a local authority may provide and maintain museums and art galleries within its administrative area or elsewhere in England or Wales, and may do all such things as may be necessary or expedient for or in connection with the provision or maintenance thereto.
- 5.5 Under section 13 of the PLMA 1964, a local authority may charge for admission to a museum or art gallery maintained by it under section 12 of the PLMA 1964 and in determining whether to exercise such powers to charge, a local authority shall take into account the need to secure that the museum or gallery in question plays its full part in the promotion of education in the area, and shall have particular regard to the interests of children and students.

- 5.6 Under section 14 of the PLMA 1964, a local authority make contributions towards expenses incurred by any person — (a) in providing or maintaining a museum or art gallery in any place within England or Wales, or (b) in providing advisory or other services or financial assistance for the benefit of a museum or art gallery within England or Wales.
- 5.7 The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the 1972 Local Government Act 1972 extended the powers of local authorities to provide museums. However, local authorities are not under a statutory duty to provide museums and this has never been a statutory service.
- 5.7 Section 224 of the Local Government Act 1972 requires local authorities to ‘make proper arrangements with respect to any documents that belong to or are in the custody of the council of any of their officers’. In 1999, the Department for the Environment, Transport and the Regions (which is now the Department for Communities and Local Government) issued guidance on the interpretation of the term ‘proper arrangements’. The guidance includes sections on the management of a local authority’s administrative records, whether kept on paper or in electronic form, and proper arrangements for those records which have enduring historical value and which should be kept by an established archive service.
- 5.8 The Local Government (Access to Information) Act 1985 provides that minutes, agendas reports and background papers of meetings of principal councils, which include London Boroughs that are open to the public, are made available for public inspection.
- 5.9 Detailed legal implications regarding information management are set out in Appendix 1 to this report.

6.0 Diversity Implications

- 6.1 Section 149 of The Equality Act 2010 requires the council to have due regard to the equalities duties when considering how to exercise its functions, which includes the exercise of its powers to provide and manage Museums and Archives. There is no evidence to suggest that the strategy itself will adversely affect specific groups.
- 6.2 Surveys indicate that approximately 75% of visitors to the museum and 70% of visitors to the archives are Brent residents. Further analysis showed that a large proportion of visitors live in the Willesden Green area or in the south of the borough, demonstrating that the facilities currently have a localised appeal. There are clear opportunities for increasing engagement amongst current users and attracting new visitors from the wider Brent area and outside the borough. Current demographic data indicates that the users of the museums are reflective of the borough while the archives profile portrays a different

picture with comparatively low representation from all strands of the Black community and an over representation from the White group.

- 6.3 These matters are set out in more detail in the attached Equality Impact Assessment which is set out in Appendix 4 to this report. The assessment did not identify any negative impacts of the strategy but did identify some underrepresentation by all strands of the Black community of the archives services. It also concluded that the equalities monitoring and recording systems need to be improved to ensure that we can accurately target any 'gaps'. These issues have been addressed in the strategy at Appendix 5 and the action plan which accompanies the strategy as Appendix 3 and relate mainly to ongoing community consultation and engagement.

Background Papers

- Appendix 1: Legislation and key policies
- Appendix 2: Consultation reports
- Appendix 3: Action plan
- Appendix 4: Equality analysis
- Appendix 5: Museum and Archives Strategy

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