

Committee: Cabinet

Date: 18 January 2021

Wards: All

Subject: Heritage Strategy 2021 - 2025

Lead officer: Anthony Hopkins; Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Lead member: Councillor Caroline Cooper Marbiah; Cabinet Member for Commerce, Leisure and Culture

Contact officer: Anthony Hopkins; Head of Library, Heritage & Adult Education Service

Recommendations:

1. That Cabinet review the Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025.
 2. That Cabinet approve the Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 for adoption by the Council.
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1 PURPOSE OF REPORT AND EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1. The Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 sets out the borough's commitment to promoting and enhancing its rich heritage. Underpinning the Strategy are four key themes:
 1. Increasing the profile and public access to the borough's unique and diverse cultural heritage;
 2. Safeguarding the borough's varied heritage sites and resources;
 3. Making Merton's heritage provision more inclusive and working collaboratively to widen public engagement and participation;
 4. Increasing funding and investment in Merton's heritage through partnership work, external funding and sponsorship.
- 1.2. The Strategy summarises the achievements of the previous Heritage Strategy and outlines the objectives and key priorities of the Council and its partners over the next 5 years.
- 1.3. Underpinning the Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 will be a work plan that will be drawn up in collaboration with heritage organisations and community organisations and will monitor the key projects highlighted in the strategy.
- 1.4. The Heritage Strategy seeks to strengthen collaborative work further and has been devised with heritage stakeholders and in consultation with the voluntary and business sectors. A public consultation was also undertaken to gather wider views.
- 1.5. The Strategy seeks to address funding challenges by creating a more robust network of heritage enthusiasts and organisations.

2 DETAILS

- 2.1. Merton can boast many heritage attractions, services and organisations dedicated to preserving and raising awareness of the borough's past. Service provision is divided between the local authority and a number of heritage organisations and community groups.
- 2.2. The local authority plays a key part in safeguarding and raising awareness of the rich heritage of Merton. Roles and responsibilities can be divided into three areas:
 1. Protection of the built and natural environment including policy development;
 2. Collecting and recording material associated with Merton's past and provision of a skilled information service;
 3. Promoting and increasing access to Merton's diverse cultural heritage through exhibitions, publications, the arts and education.
- 2.3. The local authority is responsible for preserving the historic character of the borough by ensuring that development of historic buildings or areas is sympathetic and makes a positive contribution to the borough's historic environment. This work is guided by the borough's Core Planning Strategy and the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF), which sets out government's policy on planning matters in England and Wales and highlights the need to understand the significance of the borough's built heritage.
- 2.4. The Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 will be used as a supplementary document for the Local Development Framework for harnessing development and ensuring that it is sympathetic towards historic sites.
- 2.5. Key to the success of the new Heritage Strategy is increased collaborative working with the view to enhancing external investment into heritage to support economic development and to preserve our collective heritage. In a period when local authority spending continues to reduce, we need to increase the way we work across the different sectors in the borough to deliver a shared, inclusive and cohesive plan that maximises external investment.

3 ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS

- 3.1. **Do nothing**
- 3.2. This would lead to no new Heritage Strategy being devised and adopted. Heritage stakeholders and community organisations would continue to deliver heritage projects in an ad hoc manner, which could lead to duplication and within a limited strategic context.
- 3.3. **Devise a local authority specific Heritage Strategy**
- 3.4. The first Heritage Strategy (2010 – 2014) was devised in this manner and whilst a useful catalyst to reflect key local authority objectives and outputs, it was less representative of the work delivered by community organisations. Current economic pressures make it extremely challenging for the local

authority to provide resources to support heritage work. Greater collaboration with the community will enable engagement and participation, in addition to opportunities for sourcing external funding.

4 CONSULTATION UNDERTAKEN OR PROPOSED

- 4.1. Consultation has taken place with heritage organisations through physical meetings and online conversations.
- 4.2. A public consultation on the new Heritage Strategy was run from 3 June to 1 July 2020. Due to Covid-19 restrictions the consultation was run online.
- 4.3. The consultation offered the chance to view and comment on the draft Heritage Strategy and to respond to three key questions regarding the major issues affecting local heritage, how to enhance public engagement and key objectives for local heritage.
- 4.4. There were 113 respondents to the online survey and a further six written responses submitted by Wimbledon Society Planning & Environment Committee, Friends of Wimbledon Town Centre, Museum of Wimbledon, Mitcham Cricket Green Conservation and Heritage (MCGC&H), Conservative Group (LBM) and a local resident.
- 4.5. For the first question in the consultation, respondents were asked to rank what they felt were the biggest challenges to Merton's heritage. The top 3 results were:
 1. Safeguarding local heritage / collections – 44%
 2. Funding and investment – 32%
 3. Covid-19 – 15%
- 4.6. In terms of how best you think we can enhance Merton's heritage and increase public engagement, respondents ranked these as their top 3 challenges:
 1. Sympathetic development and regeneration, to raise awareness of local heritage and maintain the historical character of a property / area where possible – 32%
 2. Enable people of all ages, backgrounds and abilities to participate in local projects, learn new skills and champion their own heritage – 26%
 3. Greater use of technology to make collections, resources and activities accessible online – 17%
- 4.7. In terms of key objectives for Merton's heritage over the next five years respondents ranked these as the top 3:
 1. It represents the borough's diverse population, enabling a wide range of people to engage in recording, presenting and safeguarding their history and culture – 30%
 2. There is a clear approach to safeguarding Merton's heritage collections and the historic character of the borough wherever possible – 27%

3. Local heritage is more publicly accessible thanks to use of new technology and outreach (public events, social media, online activities, new display formats) – 17%
- 4.8. Comments and feedback have been considered and the Heritage Strategy has been amended where practical and possible to take on board the views of the respondents.

5 TIMETABLE

- 5.1. The work plan included in the Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 details the key projects to be undertaken. A work plan will be devised, monitored and updated to track the progress of the projects highlighted.
- 5.2. The new Heritage Strategy is proposed to be submitted to Cabinet on 18 January 2020.

6 FINANCIAL, RESOURCE AND PROPERTY IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1. There are no specific budgets assigned towards the delivery and implementation of the Heritage Strategy. All activities will either be delivered within existing resources or, where identified, will seek to obtain external funding.
- 6.2. The London Borough of Merton has a finite amount of money to spend on heritage and this will reduce. Increasing participation in our heritage would increase community awareness and ownership of our shared heritage. The Heritage Strategy will act as strategic guidance for future heritage projects and it seeks to bring in significant amounts of external investment.
- 6.3. Current heritage resource is limited to 1 FTE post of Heritage & Local Studies Centre Manager, a 0.5 FTE Conservation Officer and the use of the second floor of Morden Library for the Heritage & Local Studies Centre.
- 6.4. The London Borough of Merton has no local authority run museums and operates a small archive service via the Heritage & Local Studies Centre. The main bulk of the borough's archive material is stored at the Surrey History Centre in Woking.

7 LEGAL AND STATUTORY IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1. There are no legal implications at this stage. In due course the Council will need to follow the statutory procedure in Part 5 of The Town and Country Planning (Local Planning)(England) Regulations 2012 including further public participation before the Strategy is formally adopted as a supplementary planning document under Regulation 14 of the 2012 Regulations.

8 HUMAN RIGHTS, EQUALITIES AND COMMUNITY COHESION IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1. One of the key objectives in the Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025 is to increase participation and attendance in heritage activities amongst underrepresented groups. Underrepresentation is particularly prevalent amongst young people and BAME communities.

9 CRIME AND DISORDER IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. None identified.

10 RISK MANAGEMENT AND HEALTH AND SAFETY IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. None identified.

10.2.

11 APPENDICES – THE FOLLOWING DOCUMENTS ARE TO BE PUBLISHED WITH THIS REPORT AND FORM PART OF THE REPORT

- Appendix 1 – Heritage Strategy 2021 – 2025

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