

# **Epsom and Ewell Borough Council Culture Peer Challenge – Bourne Hall Museum**

**4<sup>th</sup> – 6<sup>th</sup> August 2025**

**Feedback report**







## Contents

1.	Executive summary.....	4
2.	Key recommendations .....	6
3.	Summary of the peer challenge approach .....	8
4.	Feedback .....	10
5.	Signposting to additional LGA support.....	22
6.	Next Steps .....	24

## 1. Executive summary

Bourne Hall Museum is situated in an outstanding Grade II listed building with surrounding parkland. The overall setting is a strong advantage for finding future resilience and sustainability

However, a lack of investment has led to a situation whereby the museum display and interpretation is outdated and does not deliver on the Museum's ambitions to engage local communities. The layout and location does not appeal to audiences, and in particular, children/young people. It has a sense of nostalgia, but interactive exhibits, as well as contemporary, clear and accessible interpretation are all missing. When it has funding for specific projects, the Museum delivers a number of high-quality outreach and engagement activities that deliver for local communities; but this activity is not reflected in the permanent display at the Museum. Its proximity to the library, café and other community activities is a strength in terms of building audiences and this is not being used to its full potential currently.

The Council agreed some new priorities for 2025-2027, two of which are relevant to the museum. Priority 4 is to complete a major asset review which includes Bourne Hall and Priority 7 which looks at the future of the museum and what options are available for the delivery of the museum service.

A Community Asset Transfer Stewardship and Governance Options exercise has been commissioned by the council to look at Bourne Hall, The Playhouse and the Community and Wellbeing Centre. The outcome of this will have an impact on the museum depending on which governance and stewardship option is agreed.

The council commissioned a service review of the museum in May 2025 and the findings of that review, this peer challenge and other commissioned reviews will be taken into account when deciding the future of the museum.

It is important that communication around all these reviews and consultations is clear as misinformation or lack of information can cause mixed expectations and anxiety for both staff and the community.

Funding opportunities are currently limited for a number of reasons. There is limited audience data or analysis of future trends, although the new Museum

Curator has begun to address this ahead of an accreditation review that requires this, but more is needed in this area. Funders (individuals, trusts and foundations, public bodies) and corporate sponsors will not fund an organisation who does not have solid information on their audiences. Financial information relating to the museum is skewed due to the apportionment of costs for Bourne Hall, giving a false picture of the cost of running the Museum; this would be identified by potential funders. The Museum needs to work with the Finance staff to provide accurate and realistic information for potential funders. The council should also consider match funding projects.

Investment is needed for capital development for the redesign of the museum alongside revenue funding to enable future income generation opportunities.

The council can learn from a significant number of museums in the areas of shared space, visitor experience, co-creation with under-represented groups and volunteer management. Examples are included in the report.

The council is the custodian of the museum collection and there is a legal and ethical framework around the preservation of artifacts. This needs to be taken into account when making any decisions regarding the museum.

There are some highly skilled and committed volunteers, but the numbers are small and need to be increased to improve capacity, offer a wider range of activities in the museum, and to ensure that the volunteers better reflect the local community and hence can effectively shape Museum activity that is more relevant to those living locally. Working with other groups and partners in the area could also benefit the museum with their expertise and skills.

In the wider context, Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is part of Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) in Surrey and at this stage it is unclear whether there will be 2 or 3 unitary authorities. This provides both challenges and opportunities for the council in relation to Bourne Hall Museum.

The council has launched a Community Governance Review to look at the setting up of community councils in Epsom and Ewell with the consultation ending in October.

The development of Bourne Hall Museum is an opportunity for the council to leave a lasting legacy to the communities of Epsom and Ewell. The collection has some gems that reflect local history but the museum has to change to be more relevant for local communities and to ensure future sustainability. There is significant potential for a redesigned Museum to support the aims of local councils in relation to community, but it will require a clear vision and initial investment.

## 2. Key recommendations

There are a number of observations and suggestions within the main section of the report. The following are the peer team's key recommendations to the council. There are both high level strategic recommendations and operational recommendations:

### **Strategic Recommendations**

#### **2.1 Start with a blank sheet of paper**

The museum needs to have a unique identity and the council, together with stakeholders and the wider community needs to decide what you want the museum service to be. It needs to reflect and be relevant to local communities now and in the future.

#### **2.2 Consider a holistic approach to the building**

The museum cannot be treated in isolation from the rest of the building. By retaining the original aspirations for the building as a museum, library and social centre this will provide the most successful outcome for local communities.

#### **2.3 Use this period prior to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) for research and development**

There is an opportunity between now and LGR vesting day in April 2027 for the council to prepare a long term plan for the sustainability of the museum and secure a viable future for the collection e.g. audience development, pilot projects, community consultation. Project funding could be sought for these 'mini' projects which would



have the wider aim of providing a long-term strategic plan for the Museum that could be shared with the new organisation, evidencing how the Museum could be operated in the future. The Museum could transfer to the new organisation with a solid plan for its future, which would safeguard it for generations to come.

## **Short Term Operational Recommendations**

### **2.4 Remove all long form text and replace with no more than 50 word summaries for each case**

The current displays currently have a plethora of long form text to describe exhibits. If detailed descriptions are required, consider a case side book or QR code.

The same accessible font should be used on all interpretation in the museum, and should be written to target an average reading age of between 10-14yrs.

### **2.5 Take the new case with the coin collection downstairs, use it as a spotlight case and curate activities around it which can be both self-led and chargeable**

Currently, all the exhibits are located upstairs in the museum. The new case will give you the opportunity to showcase initially the coin collection (and signpost the Museum upstairs), but going forward other items can also be displayed in a more prominent place with a higher footfall. The high number of visitors to Bourne Hall for the Library, Café and other community activities are not effectively driven as audiences into the Museum currently; this would start to address this.

### **2.6 Create trails linked to the spotlight and the permanent collection upstairs with linkages to the library**

Aligned with recommendation 2.5, visitors to Bourne Hall can be encouraged to follow trails through to the library, the museum and gardens (in the warmer months). This will be an opportunity to not only showcase the exhibits in the museum and supporting material from the library but also the opportunity to explore the uniqueness of the building and its setting.

## 2.7 Consider funding applications for specific projects

Funding opportunities are available which will help in the delivery of future plans e.g. audiences and community led curation (see point 2.3 above). These funding opportunities should be explored and the council consider match funding projects.

Funding bids which combine multiple partners and are informed by community needs often have an increased chance of success. The variety of services and community groups already hosted by Bourne Hall will be a distinct advantage if appropriately combined.

## 3. Summary of the peer challenge approach

### 3.1 The peer team

Peer challenges are delivered by experienced elected members, officer peers and external culture professionals. The make-up of the peer team reflected the focus of the peer challenge and peers were selected on the basis of their relevant expertise. The peers were:

- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]
- [REDACTED]

### 3.2 Scope and focus

The purpose of the peer challenge was to support and enable Epsom and Ewell Borough Council to look at the future of Bourne Hall Museum and how it can develop to meet changing communities as well as preserving the heritage of Epsom and Ewell. The peer challenge was to examine the museum's current position, explore examples for best practice, and provide recommendations for long-term sustainability and value to the community.

In particular, the Council asked the peer team to focus on four key areas:

- Best Practice and Sector Excellence



- Stewardship Models and Governance
- Income Generation and Funding Opportunities
- Self-Sustainability and Future Resilience

Epsom and Ewell asked specific question around these areas:

- What local, regional, or national best practices could inform the museum's next phase, particularly around accessibility, community engagement, and partnership working?
- Which stewardship and governance models (e.g., transfer to successor unitary authority, new stewardship body, retained community ownership) would best position the museum for grant and subsidy access post-LGR?
- What income generation opportunities (commercial, grant, philanthropic, digital) could the museum develop to diversify funding streams?
- How can the museum's operating model (staffing, volunteer engagement, digital transformation) be optimised for resilience and sustainability?

### **3.3 The peer challenge process**

Peer challenges are improvement focused; it is important to stress that this was not an inspection. The process is not designed to provide an in-depth or technical assessment of plans and proposals. The peer team used their experience and knowledge of cultural services to reflect on the information presented to them by people they met, things they saw and material that they read.

The peer team prepared by reviewing a range of documents and information in order to ensure they were familiar with the council and the challenges it is facing. The team then spent 2.5 days on-site at Bourne Hall, during which they:

- Gathered information and views from more than 17 meetings, in addition to further research and reading.
- Spoke to more than 35 people including a range of council staff together with members, external stakeholders and museum visitors.

This report provides a summary of the peer team's findings. In presenting feedback, they have done so as fellow local government officers, culture professionals and

members.

## 4. Feedback

### 4.1 Context

Bourne Hall Museum is situated within the futuristic, Grade II listed building which opened in 1970. As well as the museum there are a range of other facilities and services delivered from the building. Surrey County Council operate a library from the building, there are rooms for private hire, which are well used including yoga, Pilates, mother and toddler groups, weddings, religious organisations and the University for the 3<sup>rd</sup> Age (U3A), as well as The Flying Saucer Cafe. The building is set in parkland with a lake, outdoor gym equipment and interactive musical sculptures.

There is also a lodge at one entrance and what was once caretaker's accommodation at another entrance. The grounds also include a secure enclosed courtyard with 3 garage units and a small staff office which is vacant.

The Museum is situated on the mezzanine floor of the building with access via a spiral staircase from the main entrance and a lift from along a corridor. The museum employs 1.5 members of staff and a small number of volunteers support the museum. There is extensive storage in the building as well as capacity for storage in other on-site buildings. There are active plans to review the collection against a new collection development policy and database.

The Museum has a number of exhibition cases covering a range of topics including the connection with Epsom Racecourse, the Suffragette movement, Epsom Salts, local people of note and examples of Roman and earlier time periods as well as social history artifacts.

The previous curator and museum assistant had both been in post for over 30 years. There are good links with local schools who visit the museum and use loan boxes relating to specific aspects of the National Curriculum. These services are currently provided free of charge. There were also talks and guided walks by the previous museum assistant which were popular. There is an active Museum Club and one parent commented that 'My kids loved the Museum Club'. The Museum also takes

part in Museum Takeover days. There are other outreach activities, such as a recent project with the local Ukrainian community.

The Council's strategic priorities for 2025-27 include looking at the future of the Museum (Priority 7). Priority 4 is to carry out and complete a major asset review which includes Bourne Hall. This peer challenge and other commissioned reviews will feed into any decisions about the museum's future. From the conversations the peer team had with a limited number of councillors there is support to retain the museum service but this may not be universal. However, communications around the future of the museum need to be carefully managed as it was apparent that there have been mixed messages about the museum's development, proposed closure and general confusion about previously shared information. A number of people interviewed were not clear what the purpose of this peer challenge or other reviews were for.

The Council's Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy covers 2023-2028 and the Museum was highlighted as needing investment. The Strategy states:

*'Bourne Hall and the Museum within it (which is Grade II listed) are all in need of modernisation and investment if they are to offer a wider programme of events and appeal to a wider range of exhibitors, performers, and audiences.'*

Major repairs and maintenance to the building have significant costs attached due to its listed status and unique construction. Recent major repairs have included replacement windows and solar panels but there is a backlog of maintenance for the building. Work has started to address this.

The Arts, Culture and Heritage Programme Officer post sits in a different part of the directorate although there are collaborations between the post holder and Museum Curator on projects. This separation of responsibilities is also mirrored in the wider venue team, which is managed alongside the Museum team but work relatively discretely. Separation of these staff teams adds to a feeling of disconnection in both overarching strategic vision and day to day experience. Examples of this can be seen in the inconsistent branding around the building, unclaimed wall space in common areas and temporary project collaborations that fail to leave a permanent impact on the museum display and collection.



Epsom and Ewell Borough Council is part of LGR in Surrey. There are currently two different structures for Surrey being proposed. The one supported by the council is for 3 unitary authorities with Epsom and Ewell combining with the other boroughs of Reigate and Banstead, Mole Valley and Tandridge District Council to form East Surrey. The alternative proposed by Surrey County Council and the remaining boroughs and districts of Surrey is for 2 unitary authorities – East and West Surrey with Epsom and Ewell Borough Council becoming part of East Surrey. The consultation on the different options closed on 5 August 2025. It is expected that a decision will be made by the Government in the Autumn. This provides both challenges and opportunities for the council in relation to the Bourne Hall Museum.

In terms of the challenges there is uncertainty on how the new authority will see the significance of cultural assets and how they will operate. In terms of opportunity, it is a chance for the council to define what the museum is together with a vision for what it can become under the new council or other stewardship and governance models.

As well as LGR, the council has embarked on a Community Governance Review which is currently seeking views on whether there should be parish councils, called community councils, covering Epsom and Ewell. There are currently no parish or town councils in Epsom and Ewell. The consultation for this ends in October 2025. More detailed information is available here:

[Community Governance Review - Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Consultations](#)

The council commissioned an independent consultant to review Bourne Hall Museum in May 2025 to look at both its strategic directions and its operations. The review involved a range of staff, some elected members and other stakeholders. The LGA had sight of this report in preparation for the peer challenge and the findings and recommendations in the report have been noted.

A Community Asset Transfer Stewardship & Governance Options exercise was also commissioned by the council. This was another key priority for the Council (Priority 4). This looks at Bourne Hall (including the Museum), The Playhouse and the Community and Wellbeing Centre. The review looked at 4 different options for the running of these buildings/services including the assets being managed by a community council, a new charitable body, Community Interest Company/Company by Guarantee or Company Limited by Shares. This work is on-going.

In light of this and in discussion with the council it was agreed that the peer challenge would not address the question around stewardship and governance models.

Instead, the peer challenge team looked at the future stewardship of the museum collection to put it in the best possible position for any new governance models and for future funding for grant and subsidy access post LGR.

The Museum has also had a recent Access Review (by Sunnybank Trust) and the final report is due imminently.

Marketing & Communications are key to promoting the museum. A review was undertaken in June 2023 which looked at Bourne Hall , including the museum and how a communications plan could be developed. It is understood that only some of the work suggested in the report has taken place. The marketing material seen by the team for both Bourne Hall and the Museum was uninspiring and dated. Once the museum has a clear identity and vision this can be incorporated into any new branding for the museum. It should be noted that a strong museum brand includes digital and promotional assets, as well as clear consideration of the museum design and interpretation, interactives and activities to create a cohesive experience that appeals to a primary target audience.

There is very limited audience data available. The new curator has started to collate data but there are no historical records of attendance etc. This is a major issue for any future funding applications where this information is vital. Based on the Peer team's observations, despite the outdated displays there is a strong multigenerational family audience for the museum. This appeared to be consistent with the wider users of the site.

It is inadvisable to look at the museum as a separate entity when it is part of Bourne Hall. The building was built as a museum, library and community space and it has all the ingredients for a destination of choice with good public transport links from London and within the local area.

#### **4.2 What local, regional, or national best practices could inform the museum's next phase, particularly around accessibility, community engagement, and partnership working?**



The peer team discussed a range of museums and other heritage spaces that could provide some best practice examples for Bourne Hall Museum to visit or make contact with. The team looked at the areas the council were particularly interested in and suggested the following:

### **Shared Space**

- [Welcome to The Amelia Scott - Amelia](#) – Tunbridge Wells – Library, Museum, Archive. A fantastic example of how a Museum and Library can work effectively together for local communities and to deliver local council ambitions for its residents.

### **Visitor Experience**

- [Unlock Your Imagination at the Roald Dahl Museum & Story Centre, Buckinghamshire](#) – this combines heritage with creativity
- [We The Curious | Home](#) – good examples of interactives
- [The Story Museum | Family Museum In Oxford](#) – visitor experience walk through
- [The Museum of English Rural Life](#) – links with University and digital interactions

### **Co-creation with under-represented groups**

- [Home - Colchester + Ipswich Museums](#) – developed existing and grew new channels by which local communities can shape museum activity. This included: working with Young Associates, residents panels and community panels.
- [The Historic Dockyard Chatham - Your Big Day Out in Kent](#) - The Ghost Ships Project at Chatham Historic Dockyard Trust saw the Trust work with local organisations and partners, creating a number of community exhibitions.
- [Communities in Residence | St Albans Museums](#) – this included community partnerships and exhibitions co-created with the community e.g. Catching the Chain, an exhibition on the history of criminal justice, incorporating multiple partners (including those directly involved in the justice system)

## **Volunteer Management & Workforce Development**

- [How To Volunteer At The Food Museum](#) – Stowmarket, Suffolk – introduced an inclusive volunteer management scheme

## **Networks & People to speak to for free advice and support:**

- [MuseumNext - Inspiring Online Learning for Museum Professionals](#) – ideas and best practice for digital and interpretation.
- <https://digitalculturenetwork.org.uk/> - Digital Culture Network – free advice on digital content and video, audience development, digital accessibility and websites.
- Surrey Cultural Partnership – group of local organisations and people involved in heritage working together to ensure that Surrey residents can engage in creative and cultural activity.
- [Group for Education in Museums \(GEM\)](#) – on education and learning in Museums
- [Kids in Museum](#) – continue to liaise with
- Awards e.g. [Family Friendly Awards](#), [Museum + Heritage Awards](#) – research award winners to become aware of best practice and great examples
- [Museums Association](#) – best practice examples and training
- [Museum Development South East](#) – continue to liaise with

## **Local Organisations to connect with:**

- Painshill Park
- West Horsley Place
- Lockwood Arts

## **4.3 Consideration for future stewardship of the museum collection to put it in the best position for any new governance models and for grant and subsidy access post-LGR?**

The museum collection needs to have a physical location in order to retain its

accreditation status. The location, either current or future, needs to be identified before any options for governance can be considered. It is currently located on the mezzanine floor of the building and consideration needs to be given to whether this is the most effective location for it. Recommendation 1 is to start with a blank sheet of paper and define what you want the museum to be. This should also include where you want the collection to be. The feedback we had was that the museum collection was not in the right place. Visitors didn't know it was there although this has improved since the pop-up banners were installed at the foot of the stairs. Signage both external and internal is poor. There is a lift to improve access but this is problematic for users of wheelchairs. Just moving the existing Museum collection to a new location would not solve all the challenges; as it would still need a redesign. This should include reducing the objects on display and creating clear key narratives that support entertaining and educational visits.

Accreditation is the national standard for Museums which unlocks funding e.g. DCMS, Arts Council England and partnership opportunities. The Museum is currently accredited. To retain this in 2026 it needs to submit various policies and documents to evidence appropriate stewardship of the public assets. Work has begun on developing the policies but this work needs to be done as a priority. This work needs resources and the council should consider whether the current resources are enough to ensure that the museum meets all the accreditation standards and makes progress in positioning it as an attractive visitor experience.

There has been limited external funding and this is an area to explore but this requires commitment, resources and the necessary data and financial information.

As part of the accreditation process the focus is on 3 key areas:

- Organisational Health;
- Managing Collections
- Users and their experiences

[Accreditation Standard Nov2018 0.pdf](#)

In terms of the collection, there is a legal and ethical framework for museums to ensure all public-owned collections are preserved for communities and future generations. If museums want to carry-out a deaccession of specific items that no

longer suit the museum's purpose, there is a set process for this and it must be followed.

Advice on this can be sought from Museums Association and from Museum Development South East. Information relating to this area can also be found here:

[Off the Shelf: a toolkit for ethical transfer, reuse and disposal - Museums Association](#)

Housing the museum at Bourne Hall offers a unique opportunity that is not being fully exploited currently. There is not only generous (and attractive) storage within the central building but there are opportunities within the grounds to redevelop buildings and structures, such as the garages to offer an onsite store.

Development of these facilities would support the museum to consider rotating displays which will drive footfall and support exploration of Epsom and Ewell's long history in more manageable exhibitions.

Once a strong vision for the site has been agreed on, a capital project that takes a holistic approach to the site would offer an exciting opportunity to reinvent the service as well as restoring this community asset.

#### **4.4 What income generation opportunities (commercial, grant, philanthropic, digital) could the museum develop to diversify funding streams?**

There are a range of traditional revenue strands for museums which include:

- Philanthropy – Individual Giving (includes Patrons, Memberships) – Legacies

This funding stream seeks to build meaningful relationships with individuals from small on site donations to large donors or legacies left in wills. Most commonly associated with registered charities, there can be some psychological barriers to access this as a local authority, however this can be overcome with clear communication and/or setting up a charitable organisation to ensure all funds given are ringfenced for the museum.

- Corporate – sponsorship, Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR), Gift in Kind, Volunteering

This funding stream seeks to building symbiotic relationships with local or relevant private sector companies. Larger companies might offer grant programmes as part of a Corporate Social Responsibility scheme, whereas



smaller companies may be willing to sponsor or gift time or products in exchange for positive publicity.

- Grants – Trusts, Foundations
- Public Bodies – ACE, Heritage Lottery Fund, DCMS

Both of the above streams offer thematic funding programmes, which are often run as open competition schemes. Researching programmes and finding suitable schemes to support strategic ambitions are common across the sector. However, it should be noted that these are usually project or capital programmes with relatively low limits on revenue funding for core costs e.g. permanent staffing, utilities etc. Therefore funding from these programmes should be considered restricted funds.

- Retail, Learning programmes, specialist activities and services, ticketed events, café and room hire where available

These programmes offer the opportunity to enhance the visitor experience whilst generating unrestricted income. A commercial approach to managing these areas is required with realistic expenditure and income expectations.

- Tax effective giving e.g. Gift Aid

The museum has as a number of challenges that will need to be overcome to make applications for funding more appealing to funders and to ensure the future viability of the museum.

There is no clear vision for the museum and this lack of identity limits the ability to attract funders and investors. The peer challenge team heard that the museum has many artifacts which have been donated or collected over the years. The original intention was to preserve the history of Epsom and Ewell but the Museum display and collection contains many items of social history which have no significance or link to Epsom and Ewell. The current Support Us page on the website does not contain the facility to give financially but does include a request for objects.

The current museum display and branding is unappealing, outdated and lacks specificity. We were told by one individual that it was a good example of 'a museum of museums'. It does have a sense of nostalgia and when the peer team spoke to visitors to the museum they recalled coming as a child and were now sharing the



experience with their own children or grandchildren. There is a lack of interactive displays for children which makes it less appealing and this was confirmed by talking to visitors in the museum. The soundtrack attached to the Epsom Racecourse model was hard to hear due to the noise from the space below with no alternative means to listen such as headphones. The display cases are close together which limits movement around the museum. The museum is clearly inaccessible e.g. the exit from the lift requires wheelchair users to pull a heavy door towards them to gain access to the Museum, the channels between cabinets are too narrow, changes of levels are not marked visibly. The pending access review report will provide further guidance.

The layout of the museum and the display cases is random with no 'story telling' that leads visitors from one display to another. The museum lacks flow and purpose. The new curator has made some significant progress since joining, but is limited by capacity and lack of funding. The exhibits have long form text and this needs to change to make the information more accessible.

The museum has recently been awarded funding (applied for by the new curator) for the purchase of a new display cabinet. It is planned to showcase the museum's coin collection. It is recommended that this is placed downstairs where the footfall is higher and it can be used as a catalyst to signpost visitors to the museum. It can also offer opportunities to have activities related to the display that can be chargeable. The display case can be used in the future for displaying other items with a different theme, also housed downstairs. The library can also be involved as part of the changing displays.

There is significant wall space downstairs that could be utilised to showcase items from the collection. A carefully curated, constantly changing display will enhance the museum and engage a wider audience. However, the light conditions would need to be monitored and if artwork from the museum collection were to be displayed it would need to be on a careful rotation to avoid damage.

This space could also be useful for other forms of interpretation, educational displays or linked to trail activities.

We also heard that the building has a unique construction method and that the architectural plans are held in storage. These would be a highly relevant asset to

display either on the ground floor or upstairs.

There is no customer data to support projections, attract funders and identify new target markets. Collection of data has started and the museum would benefit from tools to support this such as [Illuminate](#) and the [Impact and Insight](#) tool.

Clear financial information to support business case and funding proposals will be required going forward. Staff need to work with Finance to ensure that the financial information reflects the true running costs of the museum. The current arrangements where there is a recharge based on the floor area gives a disproportionate cost to the museum. The peer challenge team were unable to access more detailed income/expenditure relating to Bourne Hall.

There are displays of artifacts at The Playhouse and a number of people mentioned the opportunity for pop-up exhibitions in different parts of the borough. Working with other museums and arts centres could also be explored e.g. The Horton.

The Museum does have many passionate supporters, some of whom are both engaged with the Museum and are likely to have the capacity to also give financially (they have probably not been asked to give to the Museum before). If a strong identity for the Museum was determined (through good community consultation), in tandem with a strong redesign plan focussed on securing the future of the Museum then a solid fundraising strategy could be developed for the delivery of the new Museum which would have a good chance of success. The initial phase to establish the project would need internal investment, while the second stage could be fundraised for.

#### **4.5 How can the museum's operating model (staffing, volunteer engagement, digital transformation) be optimised for resilience and sustainability?**

Although there is a small, highly skilled and dedicated number of volunteers who support the museum this needs to be expanded to increase capacity within the museum. This can be done by providing the volunteer workforce with clearly defined role profiles and benefits which reflects the community e.g. age, disability, ethnicity to ensure that the museum reflects diverse and lived experience. It is unfortunate that The Friends of Bourne Hall Museum is no longer operating and this might be an area the council could look at with the community to have this group revived. The Friends

could also act as a fundraising vehicle.

There are active groups in the area who can support and complement the work of the museum e.g. Epsom and Ewell Archaeology Society, Friends of Nonsuch, Friends of Stoneleigh Library. The establishment of long term partnerships with local, cultural, and educational organisations will be paramount.

The PR, marketing and communications for the museum needs significant work. There needs to be investment in modern communication strategies including website redesign, social media, online ticketing, interactive displays and enabling remote engagement. The website for Bourne Hall has only a minimal amount of information about the museum, similarly the council's website also has limited information. One visitor to the museum said 'It was difficult to tell from the website what my visit would be like'. Thought needs to be given once the purpose and vision for the museum is agreed for the museum to having a standalone website.

The team were told on a number of occasions that booking events had to be done by e-mailing someone. Children (and adults) want to experience interactive displays and the museum offer in this regard is extremely limited. Online ticketing is available via Sessami which is a specific site for local events. Free events can be booked by emailing someone at the Museum, but we heard that this got confusing for those booking. By organising booking in this way, the Museum also fails to build visitor information and data on its audiences. Adopting Eventbrite would be a quick and immediate way to start building audience data. There is also no facility to sign-up for a newsletter on the website.

The retail offering is poor and limited to publications and a few other items. There is nothing to attract children and young people. The retail items are housed in a display case with no actual retail space in the building despite a sign in the museum directing visitors to the Museum Shop which is misleading.

A successful museum shop should present items for clearly defined target markets, that reflect the content of the museum/exhibition, unique location and organisations core values. Realistic profit margins should be set and income and expenditure budgets allocated to deliver a healthy return on investment.

Remote engagement is not currently available at the Museum. Remote engagement strategies enable Museums to reach wider audiences and to enhance the general



visitor experience. It can include virtual tours, online exhibitions, volunteering opportunities, and exploration of the collections. Many Museums use this to good effect to increase the impact of their Museum activity, and bring other benefits to the Museum, including raising funds. The Food Museum used remote audiences to help catalogue its vast collection working with volunteers from around the world.

Finally, the Peer Review team noted that the fragmentation in staffing structures may be contributing to gaps in communication, information sharing and maximising potential opportunities. The small size of the museum team and the single Arts, Culture and Heritage post managed separately may benefit from consolidation with the venues team to create a more coherent vision for the future and effective delivery of the Arts, Culture and Heritage Strategy.

## 5. Signposting to additional LGA support

- [Making the most of your museums: a handbook for councillors | Local Government Association](#)
- LGA Culture Hub: <https://www.local.gov.uk/topics/culture-tourism-leisure-and-sport/good-practice-culture>
- [Arts, culture and libraries 2025 | Local Government Association](#)
- [Cornerstones of Culture](#)
- **Similar venues to Bourne Hall Museum in England**
- [Tunbridge Wells Borough Council: The Amelia Scott, Collecting Tomorrow](#)
- [Sheffield Museum's volunteering programme](#)
- [Creating sustainable heritage partnerships in Sunderland](#)
- **Examples of best practice, particularly in terms of community engagement**
- ['Experience Barnsley' - a museum and archives discovery centre](#)
- [New Conversations: LGA guide to engagement](#)

- **Leadership Essentials: Culture programme: (7pm) 21<sup>st</sup> Oc22<sup>nd</sup> October 2025 (Coventry)**

Beginning with a dinner and speaker at 7pm on 21<sup>st</sup> October, the LGA and Arts Council England are running a free-to-attend face-to-face event, for elected members with the responsibility for culture.

This programme supports portfolio holders to lead cultural activity to leverage the benefits for cross-cutting priorities, in the current contexts of devolution, economic growth, supporting health and wellbeing, community engagement, reducing social and health inequalities and increased financial pressures. Featuring council case studies and updates from the LGA and Arts Council England, attendees will have the opportunity to hear and share good practice and network, helping to support them to work with communities to co-create activity. For further information email:

██████████@local.gov.uk

- Stay up to date with the support to officer, councillors and the council, visit: [Arts, culture and libraries 2025 | Local Government Association](#)

- **Arts Council England Funding**

- **Arts Council England Funding e.g., [Museum Estate and Development Fund \(MEND\) Round 5 | Arts Council England](#). Future funding opportunities via ACE can be found here: [Our open funds | Arts Council England](#)**

- **LGA 'Transformation Action Learning Workshops' in October, November and December 2025**

- One-off virtual half-day development opportunities for councillors and officers, to explore possible solutions in an action learning based environment, working through shared obstacles in their transformation programmes.
- To find out more and book your place visit: the LGA's [Transformation Programme](#) web page



## 6. Next Steps

We appreciate you will want to reflect on these findings and suggestions with your senior managerial and political leadership and partners in order to determine how the Council wishes to take things forward.

As part of the peer challenge, there is an offer of further activity and signposting to support you in taking forward the findings of the peer challenge. The regional Principal Adviser, [REDACTED], is the main contact between your authority and the LGA. His contact details are [REDACTED]@local.gov.uk or tel [REDACTED]. [REDACTED], Adviser, is the specific point of contact in respect of the culture and libraries peer challenge programme. Her contact details are [REDACTED]@local.gov.uk or tel [REDACTED].

In the meantime, we are keen to continue the relationship we have formed with you and colleagues through the peer challenge. We will endeavour to provide additional information and signposting about the issues we have raised in this report to help inform your ongoing consideration.