

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MUSEUM

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Wards affected:	(All Wards);
Urgent Decision?	No
If yes, reason urgent decision required:	
Appendices (attached):	<ol style="list-style-type: none">1. Summary of reviews2. Potential steps of investing in the museum3. Summary of advantages and disadvantages of the options4. Comparative summary table

Summary

This report presents an appraisal of three strategic options for the future of Bourne Hall museum, drawing on findings from the Bourne Hall museum service review and the culture peer challenge report. The museum is a valued cultural asset with significant potential, but faces challenges in relevance, accessibility, and sustainability.

Recommendation (s)

The Committee is asked to:

- (1) Evaluate the available options and agree the most appropriate course of action for the museum's future:
 - a) Option 1: Do nothing and carry on with business as usual
or;
 - b) Option 2: Invest in improvement of the Museum (should option 2 be agreed a funding request will go to Strategy and Resources Committee March 2026 for consideration)
or;
 - c) Option 3: Close the museum

1 Reason for Recommendation

1.1 The future of the Museum is identified as Priority 7 within the Council's Strategic Priorities. This requires the development of a proposed set of options for the future delivery of Museum services, which forms the basis for the recommendations set out in this report.

2 Background

2.1 Although this priority has been looked at in isolation for defining the strategic options for service delivery it must be noted that the Museum is an integral part of Bourne Hall.

This paper therefore aims to set out these connections at a high level to inform decision-making.

The success of the Museum has significant links to the future success of Bourne Hall in terms of developing a long-term sustainable business plan for the venue.

The wider Bourne Hall business plan concerns itself with seeking to protect the future of Bourne Hall as a key community asset in the changing context of Local Government Reorganisation, to ensure its attractiveness to the new East Surrey unitary authority or another local governance entity and/or trust.

The strategic options for service delivery all directly link to possible future stewardship models for the wider Bourne Hall.

2.2 Service reviews

Two major reviews were conducted in 2025 to assess the future direction, operations, and sustainability of Bourne Hall Museum:

- **Bourne Hall Museum Service Review (May 2025)**
- **Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Culture Peer Challenge (August 2025)**

Both reviews provide valuable insights and recommendations for the museum's development, with notable areas of alignment and distinction. Both reviews concern themselves with the museum being a success and only therefore link to option 2 regarding investing in the museum. A summary of these reviews can be found in appendix 1.

2.3 Strategic options

Three strategic options for future service delivery have been considered as follows:

Options	Description
1. Do Nothing	Maintain current operations, with only minor changes within existing resources.
2. Invest in Improvement	Implement recommendations from recent reviews to transform and sustain the museum.
3. Close the Museum	Close to the public, dispose of the collection, and manage transition.

2.4 Option 1 – Do nothing

This would involve:

- Maintaining the museum as it is, with no additional investment of time, effort, or money.
- Keeping the Museum and its storage unchanged.
- Maintaining compliance with accreditation requirements
- Making small operational changes which address recommendations from the service reviews, but only those that can be delivered within existing budget and resources

This option would not incur additional financial cost but would undermine the wider Bourne Hall business plan. It risks the museum's future under Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and would diminish its community value.

Next Steps:

- No further action required.

2.5 Option 2 – Invest in the Museum

Together, the Service Review and Peer Challenge offer a comprehensive blueprint for the future of Bourne Hall Museum. The Service Review delivers a practical roadmap for immediate and medium-term improvements, while the Peer Challenge sets the strategic direction and highlights opportunities for transformation. Their combined recommendations would help ensure the museum is resilient, relevant, and sustainable in the face of organisational and community changes.

Next Steps:

Phase 1: 1-15 months

- March 2026 Strategy and Resources committee for consideration for funding
- Consider recommendations from Service reviews
- Engage stakeholders and the public in shaping the vision.
- Develop a Museum change implementation plan
- Make smaller immediate operational changes such as update displays, improve accessibility and implement visitor data collection and evaluation.
- Feed into a wider Bourne Hall Business Plan regarding the role of the Museum and Consider the museum's location.

Phase 2: 15+ months

- Future stewardship models
- Funding opportunities

2.6 Option 3 – Close the Museum

This option would see the Museum close its doors to the public, following a public consultation.

Once the doors are closed to the public the process of disposing of the collection would begin. This will take a period of up to 10 years.

Next Steps:

- Conduct a legal and ethical review in line with the Museums Association guidance.
- Undertake public and stakeholder consultation.
- Plan for collection disposal and/or storage.
- Manage communications to mitigate reputational damage.

See appendix 3 for summary of advantages and disadvantages of the options

3 Risk Assessment

Legal or other duties

3.1 Equality Impact Assessment

3.1.1 All options would require an equality impact assessment

3.2 Crime & Disorder

3.2.1 Not applicable for this report

3.3 Safeguarding

3.3.1 Not applicable for this report

3.4 Dependencies

3.4.1 Not applicable for this report

3.5 Other

3.5.1 Not applicable for this report

4 Financial Implications

4.1 The current annual budget is around £232,168 which encompasses:

- Employee costs: £65,785 (1.5 FTE staff)
- Accommodation: £123,840 (central recharge for use of the space)
- Central services charges: £32,110
- Insurance recharges: £2,292
- Other costs: £12,180
- Income from museum activities: £4,039

4.2 Option 1: Do nothing

This option would see the budget remaining as set out above with only inflationary and staff cost increases annually. No additional costs would be incurred but no additional income would be generated either. Over time income may deteriorate due to the poor-quality offer. This would be a status quo scenario.

4.3 Option 2 : Invest in the Museum

This option takes the form of two phases. The first phase is about developing a long-term plan for the future of the Museum and making smaller operational changes over the course of the coming months in line with the Service Review Recommendations to position the Museum to be in a stronger position in the context of LGR.

The second phase would be what happens to the Museum after vesting day in terms of its stewardship model, operating costs and funding opportunities. The costings below therefore relate to phase 1 only.

Phase 1 investment would need to fund the following:

- Additional activities
 - Facilitate and manage stakeholder engagement
 - Draft an implementation plan

- Develop a shared strategic plan for programming, staffing, and budgeting.
- Enhance Visibility and Community Reach
 - develop a brand/comms and marketing strategy
 - develop a bespoke website and social media presence
- Implement visitor data collection and evaluation.
- Recruit and diversify volunteers

- Operational changes
 - Update displays, improve accessibility and marketing.
 - Strengthen partnerships with local groups and schools.
 - Replace long-form text in displays with concise, accessible summaries.
 - Create trails linking museum, libraries, and gardens to encourage exploration

Appendix 2 sets out potential short-term steps in terms of investing in the museum based on the findings of the service reviews.

4.4 Option 3: Close the Museum

This option would see the majority of the costs above maintained for a number of years during the transition phase, including staffing, accommodation and internal recharges. However, there would be no income generated from museum activity.

There is likely to be additional costs incurred around specialist advice on disposing of the collection. This option could also incur additional costs depending on the speed at which action to close the museum is to be undertaken. It is assumed for the purposes of this option that the Museum would be closed to the public and the resources shifted to handling the collection to transfer or dispose of all the assets.

Should any items be retained, although not envisaged, there would be an ongoing storage cost.

The process can take several years, especially for legal collection disposal, which must comply with Arts Council and Museums Association ethical guidelines.

4.5 Overview of estimated costs

The table below aims to estimate costs and savings over the short, medium and long term. It should be noted that these figures are based on the 'as is' scenario of the Museum being operated directly by the Council.

Years 1-2 are the focus of this paper with years 3-5 and 10+ used to depict how the options would evolve over time. Caution should be added to these costs and are for illustrative purposes only.

Years 1-2 costs

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Running cost pa	£240,000	£240,000	£280,000
Investment pa	0	£125,000	0
Savings/income	£4,000	£6,000	0
Net cost pa	236,000	£359,000	280,000

Years 3-5

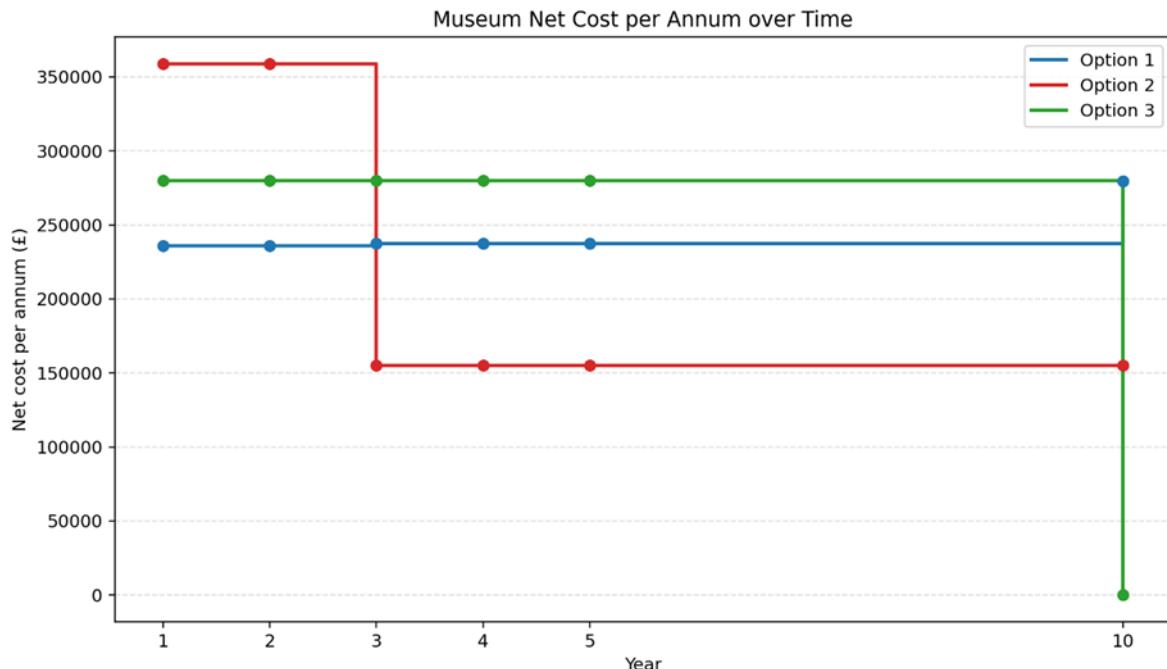
	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Running cost pa	£240,000	£175,000	£280,000
Investment pa	0	0	0
Savings/income	£2,500	£20,000	0
Net cost pa	237,500	£155,000	280,000

Year 10+

	Option 1	Option 2	Option 3
Running cost pa	£280,000	£175,000	0
Investment pa	0	0	0
Savings/income	£500	£20,000	0
Net cost pa	£279,500	£155,000	0

The above demonstrates that:

- **Option 1** over time increases in running costs due to inflation and income slowly drops away as the Museum offer deteriorates.
- **Option 2**, whilst operating as part of a council will have ongoing running costs but the business plan has been bedded in which has reduced the operating costs. The investment also sees additional income generated from the added community value.
- **Option 3** closing the museum is a lengthy process that incurs on going costs for many years post the decision to close. During this time there is no scope to generate income.



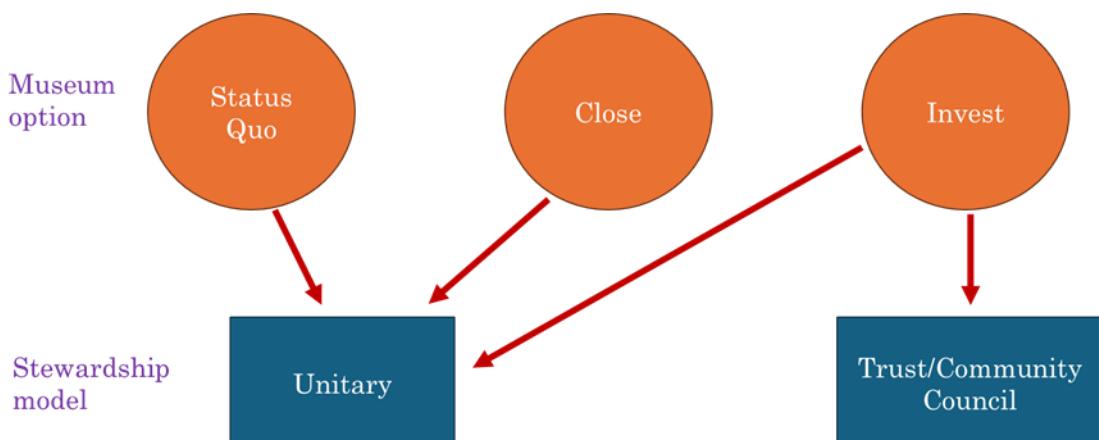
The option 2 costs could be reduced further should the Museum and wider Bourne Hall transfer to a different stewardship model.

See appendix 4 for comparative summary table

4.6 Governance Implications

The three options have different implications in terms of the Museum's future and different governance/stewardship models.

Only one of the three options seeks to secure the Museum's future. It is this option that would enable a medium-term decision for the Museum to be transferred to another entity opening up funding opportunities and different operating models which reduce costs further.



The above is also true for wider Bourne Hall long-term financial sustainability. The Museum is an integral part of the community venue and should form part of a wider strategy and business plan for Bourne Hall.

4.6 **Section 151 Officer's comments:** Option 1 is already provided for within this Committee's approved revenue budget and requires no additional resources. Options 2 and 3 would require additional corporate funding; if either is preferred, a further report should be submitted to S&R to secure the necessary funding.

5 Legal Implications

5.1 **Employment Law:** Ensuring compliance with employment laws when making changes to staffing, whether investing in new roles or making redundancies.

5.2 **Contractual Obligations:** Reviewing and honouring any existing contracts with suppliers, donors, and other stakeholders.

5.3 **Intellectual Property:** Managing intellectual property rights related to the museum's collections and exhibitions.

5.4 **Health and Safety:** Ensuring that any changes comply with health and safety regulations to protect staff and visitors.

5.5 **Accessibility:** Adhering to accessibility laws to ensure the museum remains accessible to all members of the public.

5.6 **Legal Officer's comments:** None other than as stated above.

6 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

6.1 **Council's Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Future of the Museum

6.2 **Service Plans:** The matter is included within the current Service Delivery Plan.

6.3 **Climate & Environmental Impact of recommendations:** Not relevant.

6.4 **Sustainability Policy & Community Safety Implications:** Not applicable

6.5 **Partnerships:** Not applicable

6.6 **Local Government Reorganisation Implications:** The Council is mindful of a potential transfer to a new governance model as part of Epsom Ewell Borough Councils Local Government Reorganising

7 Background papers

7.1 The documents referred to in compiling this report are as follows:

Previous reports:

- None

Other papers:

- None

Appendix 1- Service reviews – the findings

Areas of Alignment

- **Strategic Vision:** Both reviews emphasise the need for a refreshed, clear vision and purpose for Bourne Hall Museum, ensuring relevance to local communities and alignment with council priorities.
- **Accreditation & Compliance:** Maintaining national museum accreditation and updating policies and procedures are highlighted as essential for credibility and future funding.
- **Governance & Future Planning:** Each review recommends reviewing governance models and preparing for local government reorganisation, with a focus on stewardship and long-term sustainability.
- **Financial Sustainability:** Both advocate for diversifying funding sources, improving financial transparency, and actively seeking external grants and partnerships.
- **Visitor Experience:** There is consensus on the need to enhance visitor engagement, make displays more interactive and accessible, and systematically collect audience data.
- **Community Engagement:** Stronger partnerships, community involvement, and inclusive practices are recommended to ensure the museum reflects and serves its diverse population.
- **Environmental Sustainability:** Both reviews encourage embedding sustainability into museum operations and strategic planning.

Key Differences

- **Depth and Detail:**
 - The **Service Review** provides a detailed operational action plan, with specific recommendations, timelines, and benchmarking against sector standards.
 - The **Peer Challenge** adopts a broader strategic perspective, focusing on high-level options, best practice examples, and the wider context of local government change.
- **Communication & Change Management:**
 - The **Peer Challenge** places greater emphasis on clear communication with staff and the public, especially during periods of uncertainty and transition.
- **Operational Focus:**
 - The **Service Review** delves deeper into internal processes, collections management, documentation, and succession planning for staff and volunteers.
- **Best Practice & External Learning:**
 - The **Peer Challenge** provides more examples of sector best practice and encourages learning from other institutions, particularly in areas such as shared spaces, co-creation, and volunteer management.
- **Inclusivity & Accessibility:**
 - The **Service Review** offers more detailed recommendations for tackling inequality and improving accessibility, including specific policies and research actions.

Conclusion

Together, the **Service Review** and **Peer Challenge** offer a comprehensive blueprint for the future of Bourne Hall Museum. The Service Review delivers a practical roadmap for immediate and medium-term improvements, while the Peer Challenge sets the strategic direction and highlights opportunities for transformation. Their combined recommendations will help ensure the museum is resilient, relevant, and sustainable in the face of organisational and community change.

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Appendix 2 – Potential steps for investing in the Museum

Phase 1: Vision & Governance (Months 1–3)

- **Define museum vision and purpose**

Action: Conduct stakeholder workshops and community consultations.

Timeline: Month 1–3

Phase 2: Financial & Strategic Planning (Months 3–6)

- **Develop business plan**

Action: Include revenue streams, grant targets, and reserves policy.

Timeline: Month 3–6

Phase 3: Infrastructure & Design (Months 6–12)

- **Commission building design and accessibility improvements**

Action: Appoint architects and designers; integrate flexible layouts and digital features.

Timeline: Month 6–9

- **Install interactive displays and digital systems**

Action: Implement QR codes, touchscreen exhibits, and online ticketing.

Timeline: Month 9–12

Phase 4: Collection (Months 6–18)

- **Update collections policies and documentation**

Action: Align with Arts Council Accreditation standards.

Timeline: Month 6–12

Phase 5: Audience Development & Marketing (Months 9–18)

- **Launch brand refresh and marketing campaign**

Action: New website, social media strategy, and signage.

Timeline: Month 9–12

- **Develop education and outreach programmes**
Action: Partner with schools and community groups.
Timeline: Month 12–18

Phase 6: Workforce & Volunteer Programme (Months 12–18)

- **Recruit and train volunteers**
Action: Create inclusive volunteer roles and training plans.
Timeline: Month 12–15
- **Upskill staff in digital engagement and fundraising**
Timeline: Month 15–18

Phase 7: Launch & Evaluation (Months 18–24)

- **Soft launch of redesigned museum**
Action: Host community preview events.
Timeline: Month 18–20
- **Monitor KPIs and review progress**
Action: Quarterly reporting on audience, financials, and impact.

Appendix 3 - Summary of advantages and disadvantages of the options

Option	Advantages	Disadvantages
Option 1: Do Nothing	No immediate additional costs Maintains current service and compliance	Risks decline in quality and relevance Undermines wider Bourne Hall business plan Vulnerable to Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) and funding pressures Community value likely to diminish
Option 2: Invest in Improvement	Enhances community value and engagement Potential for increased income and reduced costs over time Positions museum for sustainable future and alternative stewardship models	Requires upfront investment (£125,000/year in Years 1–2) – Funding source to be identified – S&R Committee March 26 Ongoing operational costs Success depends on effective implementation and stakeholder buy-in
Option 3: Close the Museum	Potential to reduce long-term costs (after transition) Removes ongoing operational burden	High transition costs and ongoing expenses for several years Loss of community asset and cultural value No income generation during transition Significant reputational risk

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Appendix 4 - Comparative Summary Table

Criteria	Option 1: Do Nothing	Option 2: Invest	Option 3: Close
Strategic alignment	Weak	Strong	None
Financial impact (Y1–2)	£236k/year	£359k/year	£280k/year
Long-term cost (Y3–5)	£237.5k/year	£155k/year	£280k/year
Community value	Declines	Enhanced	Lost
Risks	High (status quo)	Medium (change)	High (closure)
Sustainability	Poor	Strong	None

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