

OPTIONS FOR THE FUTURE OF THE MUSEUM

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Wards affected: (All Wards);

Urgent Decision? No

If yes, reason urgent decision required: N/A

Appendices (attached):

- 1. Summary of reviews**
- 2. Potential steps of investing in the museum**
- 3. Summary of advantages and disadvantages of the options**
- 4. 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.

This report does not seek to recommend a preferred option but presents the available options, informed by the findings of recent reviews, to support Member consideration of the future direction of the Museum.

Members are encouraged to consider both the strategic implications identified and the practical considerations when evaluating each option.

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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 from the following:**
 - a) Option 1: Do nothing and carry on with business as usual**
 - b) Option 2: Invest in improvement of the Museum (should option 2 be agreed a funding request and Business Case will be prepared to present to the Strategy and Resources Committee in July 2026 for consideration alongside the community asset review and future of Bourne Hall)**
 - 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 While this priority has been considered in isolation to inform the development of strategic options for service delivery, it is important to recognise that the Museum forms an integral part of the wider Bourne Hall offer.
- 2.2 This report therefore sets out, at a high level, the key interdependencies between the Museum and Bourne Hall to support informed decision-making.
- 2.3 Museums form part of the wider cultural infrastructure of an area, contributing to heritage preservation, learning, and community engagement.
- 2.4 Bourne Hall Museum currently contributes to this infrastructure at a local level through its collections, exhibitions, and activities. The nature and extent of this contribution would vary depending on the selected option.
- 2.5 Options that retain the service would maintain or change this contribution in line with the level of activity and investment. Options that involve closure would result in the cessation of public-facing provision, with any ongoing contribution limited to the management and stewardship of the collection.

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- 2.6 Future arrangements may also influence how the Museum contributes within a wider geographic context, including potential collaboration with other organisations. These factors should be considered alongside financial, operational, and governance implications. The future success of the Museum is closely linked to the overall success of Bourne Hall, particularly in relation to establishing a sustainable, long-term business model for the venue.
- 2.7 In this context, the Bourne Hall business plan is focused on protecting and enhancing Bourne Hall's role as a key community asset, taking account of the changing landscape arising from Local Government Reorganisation. This includes ensuring the venue remains attractive within any future East Surrey unitary authority and/or alternative governance arrangements.
- 2.8 Accordingly, the strategic options for Museum service delivery are directly connected to potential future stewardship and governance models for Bourne Hall as a whole.

2.9 **Service reviews**

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

- **Bourne Hall Museum Service Review** (May 2025)
- **Local Government Association Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Culture Peer Challenge** (Aug 2025)

The Service Review and Peer Challenge reports provide findings and recommendations relating to the current position and potential future development of the Museum. These findings are relevant to the consideration of all options, including the implications of maintaining, developing, or ceasing the service.

A summary of these reviews can be found in Appendix 1. Following the Committee's previous decision, the Proper Officer was invited to reconsider her decision regarding attaching the redacted service review. Following her reconsideration she has concluded that it would not be appropriate as to ensure the impartiality of information presented to members as the decision-making body.

2.10 **Strategic options**

All three options present fundamentally different strategic approaches to the future of the Museum. Each carries distinct implications for financial sustainability, community value and alignment with wider Council priorities. The purpose of this section is to set out these options in a balanced way to support Members in making an informed decision.

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The three strategic options considered for the future of the Museum are 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.

See Appendix 3 for summary of advantages and disadvantages of the options.

2.11 Option 1 – Do nothing

This option would involve:

- Maintaining the museum in its current form within existing resources
- Retaining the current use of the museum space and storage arrangements.
- Continuing to meet accreditation requirements.
- Implementing minor operational changes where these can be delivered within existing budgets and capacity.

This option would retain the current operating model and provide continuity, with no requirement for additional investment. It would maintain the existing level of service delivery, although changes would be limited to what can be delivered within existing resources.

Next Steps:

- No further action required.

2.12 Option 2 – Invest in the Museum

This option would involve targeted investment to implement recommendations from the Service Review and Peer Challenge. This would enable changes to the current service and require additional funding, organisational capacity, and a phased programme of delivery.

Next Steps:

Phase 1: 1-15 months

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- Report to the Strategy and Resources Committee (July 2026) for consideration of funding, supported by a full business case.
- Consider and prioritise recommendations from service reviews.
- Engage stakeholders and the public to inform future direction.
- Develop a museum change and implementation plan.
- Deliver initial operational changes, such as updating displays, improving accessibility, and establishing visitor data collection and evaluation processes.
- Inform the wider Bourne Hall Business Plan, **Phase 2**: 15+ months
 - Future stewardship models
 - In line with the wider asset review consideration of the role and the location of the Museum
 - Funding opportunities

As part of longer-term service development, this option allows for consideration of the Museum's role within a wider East Surrey context. This may include participation in partnership arrangements or contribution to wider sector activity, subject to further assessment of feasibility, resources, and governance arrangements.

2.13 Option 3 – Close the Museum

This option would involve closing the Museum and managing the future of the collection in line with legal and ethical requirement. It would remove the ongoing operational commitment to the Museum service, but would result in the cessation of current community, cultural and strategic functions delivered through the Museum.

Closure would involve a defined process with associated requirements and timescale.

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
- Develop and implement an appropriate communications plan.

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- **Options Appraisal Summary**

Criteria	Option 1 – Do nothing	Option 2 – Invest in the Museum	Option 3 – Close the Museum
Description	Continue operating the Museum within existing resources and current service model.	Provide targeted investment to implement service review recommendations and develop the Museum over time.	Cease Museum operations and make arrangements for the collection in line with legal and ethical requirements.
Service Impact	Maintains current level of provision and activities.	Enables changes to service offer, including improvements to displays, accessibility and audience engagement.	Ends public-facing Museum service; collection access subject to future arrangements.
Financial Implications	No additional investment required; operates within existing budget.	Requires additional capital and/or revenue funding, supported by a business case.	Potential reduction in ongoing service costs, with associated closure, transition, and collection management costs.
Deliverability	Immediately deliverable within existing resources.	Deliverable through a phased programme requiring additional capacity and project management.	Deliverable subject to legal, ethical and consultation requirements, which may extend delivery timescales.
Risks	Limited capacity to address issues identified in reviews; reliance on existing resources.	Delivery dependent on securing funding, capacity and stakeholder support.	Complex process; risks associated with implementation, stakeholder response, and collection management.

In summary, Option 1 prioritises continuity with limited change, Option 2 involves service development through additional investment and Option 3 represents withdrawal from service delivery. Each option presents different trade-offs between cost, risk, community value and long-term sustainability, which Members are invited to consider.

2.14 Lead Service Considerations

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The service review identifies that, under certain circumstances, there may be potential for Bourne Hall Museum to contribute to wider museum and heritage activity across an East Surrey geography.

This could include, for example, supporting partnership working, sharing professional expertise, or contributing to collaborative approaches to service delivery. The nature and extent of any such role would depend on a range of factors, including governance arrangements, available resources, and the outcome of Local Government Reorganisation.

This potential is most relevant to options that retain and develop the Museum service. Under other options, including closure, this type of role would not be applicable.

The development of any wider “lead service” or coordination function is not assumed within the options presented and would require separate consideration, including detailed business planning, stakeholder engagement, and formal decision-making.

Potential changes to governance or delivery model, including transfer to another organisation, are not presented as standalone options at this stage but may be considered as part of future development under relevant 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

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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

All options carry financial implications beyond immediate budget impacts. These should be considered alongside service, legal, and strategic factors as part of the overall decision-making process.

4.2 **Option 1: Do nothing** would continue delivery of the Museum service within existing approved budgets. No additional investment would be required. Any operational pressures, maintenance requirements, or service improvements would need to be managed within current resources.

4.3 **Option 2: Invest in the Museum** would require additional financial investment to support implementation of the proposed changes and recommendations arising from the service review. The level and profile of funding required would be subject to further development through a detailed business case and may include both capital and revenue funding. Opportunities for external funding may also be explored where appropriate.

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 fund the following:

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

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- 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 volunteers and increase diversity
- 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 may result in a reduction in ongoing operational expenditure associated with delivery of the public-facing service. However, this option would give rise to costs associated with closure, including legal and professional advice, consultation, and the management, storage, or disposal of the collection. Ongoing costs may also be incurred in relation to collection stewardship, depending on the arrangements put in place. This option would see most of the costs above maintained for several years during the transition phase, including staffing, accommodation and internal recharges. Income from museum activity would cease following closure.

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

All options carry financial implications beyond immediate budget impacts. These should be considered alongside service, legal, and strategic factors as part of the overall decision-making process.

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.

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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 assumes continuation of the current operating model within existing resources. Over time, operating costs may be subject to inflationary pressures and other external factors. Income levels may also fluctuate depending on visitor demand, service offer, and wider economic conditions. No specific growth or reduction in income has been assumed.

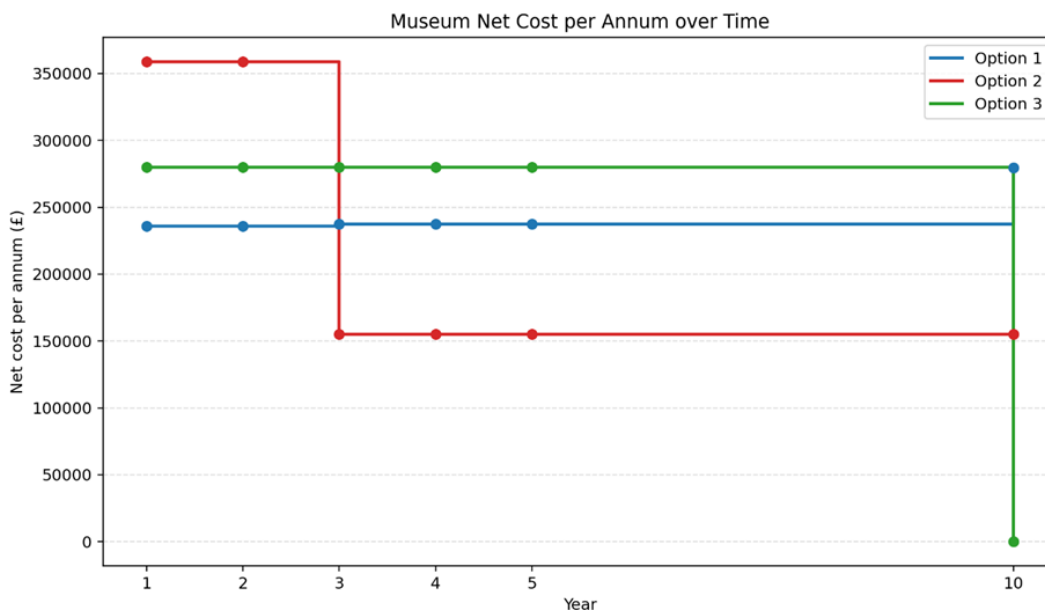
Option 2 assumes ongoing operating costs in addition to further investment to support service changes. Financial outcomes would depend on the scale and phasing of investment, delivery of efficiencies identified through the business plan, and the extent to which improved provision may influence income generation. Any assumptions regarding increased income or cost efficiencies would need to be evidenced through a detailed business case.

Option 3 assumes that closure would be implemented over a defined period in line with legal and ethical requirements. During this period, costs would be incurred in relation to closure activities, including consultation,

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professional advice, and collection management. Ongoing costs may continue beyond closure, depending on arrangements for the storage.



See Appendix 4 for comparative summary table

4.6 Governance Implications

The three options present different implications for the Museum's future governance and stewardship arrangements.

Each option would result in a distinct approach to how the Museum is managed and overseen. Options involving continued operation of the service would retain governance within a structured delivery model, while Option 2 may include consideration of alternative delivery or partnership arrangements as part of future development. Option 3 would require the establishment of appropriate arrangements for the governance and stewardship of the collection following closure.

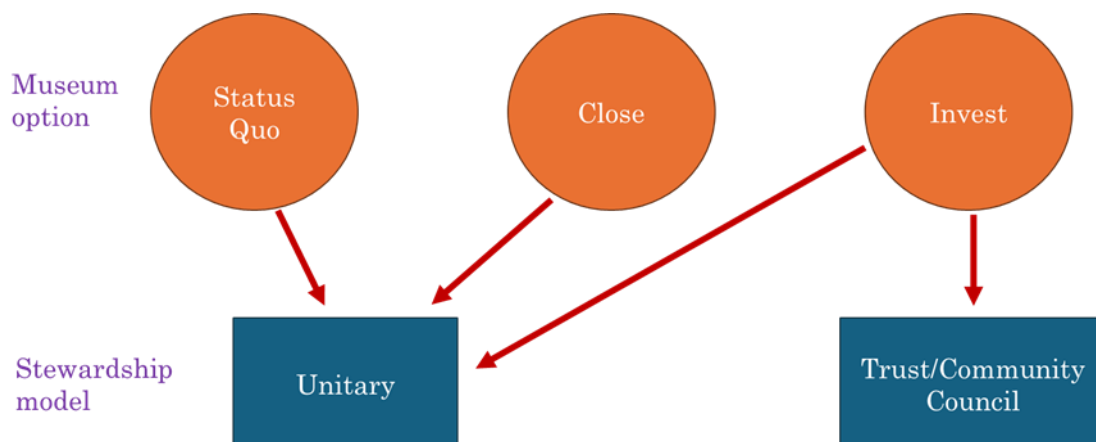
Option 2 includes the potential for changes to governance arrangements over the medium term, including consideration of transfer to another organisation or delivery model. This may provide access to a broader range of funding opportunities and operating approaches, subject to further detailed assessment and decision-making.

These considerations also apply to the wider financial sustainability of Bourne Hall. The Museum forms part of the wider community venue, and its future arrangements may need to be considered alongside a broader strategy and business plan for Bourne Hall.

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All options would require appropriate governance arrangements to ensure compliance with relevant legal, financial, and ethical responsibilities.



4.6.1.1 **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.

4.6.2 Legal Implications

- 4.6.2.1 **Employment Law:** Ensuring compliance with employment laws when making changes to staffing, whether investing in new roles or making redundancies.
- 4.6.2.2 **Contractual Obligations:** Reviewing and honouring any existing contracts with suppliers, donors, and other stakeholders.
- 4.6.2.3 **Intellectual Property:** Managing intellectual property rights related to the museum's collections and exhibitions.
- 4.6.2.4 **Health and Safety:** Ensuring that any changes comply with health and safety regulations to protect staff and visitors.
- 4.6.2.5 **Accessibility:** Adhering to accessibility laws to ensure the museum remains accessible to all members of the public.
- 4.6.2.6 **Legal Officer's comments:** A motion was passed at the special meeting held on 25th February 2026, following an agreed amendment to the report's recommendation, resolved the following:

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4.6.2.7 “Defer the decision subject to the publication in full of the report of the Chaplain review, to include all recommendations, and the consideration by the Committee of those recommendations.”

4.6.2.8 As confirmed to members of this committee by the Chair via email after that meeting, it is the Council’s ‘proper officer’ - for access to information for councillors- statutory role is to determine what members have a ‘need to know’ to have access to.

4.6.2.9 As noted in para 2.9 above, the ‘proper officer’ has stated that notwithstanding the motion passed, they have decided that this committee should have sight of some information but not all on ‘need to know’ grounds.

4.6.2.10 So, where a committee or full council are of the view that they are unable to make a decision without sight of any information that the ‘proper officer’ has precluded them from seeing on a ‘need to know’ basis, as noted above, they are entitled to resolve to defer that decision so as to invite the ‘proper officer’ to reconsider their decision.

4.6.3 Policies, Plans & Partnerships

4.6.3.1 **Council’s Key Priorities:** The following Key Priorities are engaged:

- Future of the Museum

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

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

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

4.6.3.5 **Partnerships:** Not applicable

4.6.3.6 **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

4.6.4 Background papers

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

Previous reports:

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- None

Other papers:

- [Local Government Association Epsom & Ewell Borough Council Culture Peer Challenge Feedback Report](#)