

Merton Heritage Strategy 2020 – 2025



DRAFT STRATEGY

Merton Heritage Strategy: 2015 – 2020

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1. Introduction

Heritage defines who we are, gives us a sense of belonging and an understanding of our place in the world. It encompasses everything from architecture and cultural traditions, to religious beliefs, the arts, sport and industry. This complex blend not only influences our development as individuals but also shapes our environment and the society in which we live.

Heritage is constantly changing and evolving. We have a duty to preserve our heritage and to learn from the past, whilst balancing the needs of present and future generations. In doing so, we must consider public need, economic necessity, historical, cultural and artistic integrity, in addition to the happiness and wellbeing of Merton residents. No single factor is necessarily more important than any other when planning and promoting our heritage.

Merton's heritage is valuable not only for the story it tells but also for the contribution it makes to the quality of life and the economic prosperity of local residents and businesses. The Merton Heritage Strategy was devised to assess local service provision, to identify challenges facing the sector and key objectives for development.



In addition to giving an overview of current heritage activity within the borough, the Merton Heritage Strategy 2020-25 provides a framework for further collaboration between the Council and the wider community. Strategic objectives recognise the need to increase participation and public engagement with local heritage. The associated delivery plan will be established separately and will be community-led, following consultation with heritage providers and external stakeholders including the general public. Responsibility for the delivery of key actions will be shared between council services, heritage partners and

the wider community.

The coronavirus pandemic and its economic effects poses a particular threat to heritage providers. The impact on public access, staffing and budgets not only makes it difficult for the local authority to maintain service provision in its current form, but also affects its ability to provide ongoing financial support to community-based services.

Heritage providers across Merton face the same challenges of how to maintain public engagement, retain premises, deliver and promote services and keep abreast of modern technology, whilst also improving standards using increasingly limited resources. The Merton Heritage Strategy offers an important means for responding to these challenges, setting a framework for partnership work, resource sharing and investment that will be vital to safeguarding local heritage for future generations.

Note:

In the context of this document, the term “heritage” will refer to archaeological remains, historic buildings and structures, cultural artefacts and local history collections including documents, photographic and oral history material within the London Borough of Merton.

2. The Merton Context

Merton has a rich and varied history, with many heritage providers and visitor attractions. The borough holds 3 scheduled ancient monuments and 20 archaeological priority zones; 4 historic parks and gardens; 260 statutorily listed buildings; 28 conservation areas, plus over 3,000 locally listed buildings and structures of historical interest.



The London Borough of Merton is the author of this Heritage Strategy but shares the responsibility for its delivery with heritage organisations and the wider community. Heritage falls under the portfolio of the Cabinet Member for Community & Commerce and reports to the Sustainable Communities Overview & Scrutiny Panel. In addition to regular Panel updates, an annual report on heritage services is produced. This includes an overview on the delivery of the Heritage Strategy.

In order to successfully achieve the strategic objectives outlined in this document, a key focus must be increasing public engagement with local heritage – offering services in varied formats and using different platforms for awareness raising. It will be important to actively involve people of all ages and diverse backgrounds, in addition to broadening participation from the voluntary and business communities.

Heritage has a role to play in fulfilling the objectives of documents such as the National Planning Policy Framework 2012, the Merton Sites and Policies Plan 2014, the Merton Business Plan 2015-19 and the Merton Community Plan 2013. Amongst the key themes for development are improving access to education and jobs, conserving and enhancing the historic environment; community cohesion and promoting cultural / heritage activities.

The local authority has limited resources with which to support heritage providers. There is a need to prioritise key tasks and initiatives in order to maintain public safety and balance capacity against community expectation. External funding, sponsorship, multi-agency partnerships and resource-sharing are vital if Merton's heritage is to be given greater

prominence and safeguarded for future generations. Increasing the borough's virtual heritage offer, including the range of services / digitised collections made available online by council and community heritage providers, will also be important if we are to continue to engage existing and new audiences, during the current pandemic and beyond.

3. Merton Heritage: An Overview

The heritage of Merton can be traced back over 10,000 years, including evidence of Neolithic hunter-gatherers, Iron Age defences and surviving sections of the Roman road, Stane Street.

Before the dissolution of the monasteries, Merton Priory was one of the most powerful religious institutions in the south. The martyred archbishop, Thomas Becket, was educated there and during the reign of Henry III, the Priory hosted the signing of one of the earliest statutes on which English law is based. The remains of the Priory chapter house are preserved under Merantun Way and are the focus of an initiative to interpret and reveal their historic significance, supported by the National Heritage Lottery Fund and the Community Infrastructure Levy.

The pure waters of the River Wandle were once prized by the British textile printing industry and led famous exponents, William Morris and Arthur Liberty, to establish thriving craft works in the Colliers Wood area. Merton's numerous watermills also produced diverse goods from flour and snuff, to leather, copper products and dyestuffs.



Merton has strong links to the development of British horticulture from the cultivation of Mitcham lavender and watercress, to the pioneering work of the John Innes Horticultural Institution and Carter's Tested Seeds. At one time the borough held the world's largest toy factory - Lines Brothers Tri-ang works on Morden Road. Merton is also associated with major landmarks in transport history including the world's first public railway – the Surrey Iron Railway, authorised in 1803 and the successful Croydon Tramlink, opened in 2000.

Merton has a number of sporting accolades. Wimbledon Football Club is the only team in modern times to have enjoyed F.A. Cup glory at both amateur and professional level. Mitcham has one of the oldest surviving cricket grounds and the borough continues to host the world-famous Wimbledon Lawn Tennis Championship.

Linking the capital with leafy Surrey, Merton has been home to many famous names, from naval hero Lord Nelson, to anti-slavery campaigner William Wilberforce; suffragette Rose Lamartine Yates and the eminent engineer Joseph Bazalgette. The borough has also fostered a host of creative talent including the poet, John Donne, author Edna O'Brien; actor, George Cole and pioneering silent filmmakers, George Cricks, Henry Sharp and John Martin.



The London Borough of Merton was formed in 1965 from the former boroughs of Mitcham, Wimbledon and the Urban District of Merton & Morden. The nature of Merton as a unified authority is reflected in the borough coat of arms, which features emblems linked to the heritage of its predecessor authorities. These include lavender sprigs associated with the famous Mitcham crop; a fret taken from the crest of Merton Priory; the black lion emblem used by the Garth family, lords of the manor of Morden and the Cornish chough, once the heraldic symbol of Thomas Cromwell, who was awarded the manor of Wimbledon by Henry VIII.

As a London Borough, Merton has a significant range of historic parks, gardens and common land. It also boasts many sites and buildings of architectural interest.

In the modern era growth and expansion has focussed around the borough's five town centres. These each have their own character and historic associations:

Colliers Wood: This area once lay at the heart of Merton's industrial heritage, from calico bleaching and paper production, to precision engineering, paint and varnish manufacture.

Morden: The site of the vast St. Helier estate, one of the first major housing developments designed as a garden suburb using Sir Ebenezer Howard's "garden city" principles

Mitcham: Boasts Mitcham Status Fair - one of the oldest surviving fairs in the country, this is said to date from the reign of Elizabeth I.

Raynes Park: Holds the largest proportion of green space in south west London, including Cannon Hill Common which has Grade 1 listing for nature conservation.

Wimbledon: Linked to famous names from social reformer Josephine Butler and astronomer Norman Lockyer, to writer Robert Graves and actress Margaret Rutherford.



4. Current Provision

Merton can boast many heritage attractions, services and organisations dedicated to preserving and raising awareness of the borough's colourful past. Service provision is divided between the local authority and an impressive list of heritage organisations and community groups.

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:

- a) protection of the built and natural environment including policy development;
- b) collecting and recording material associated with Merton's past and provision of a skilled information service
- c) promoting and increasing access to Merton's diverse cultural heritage through exhibitions, publications, the arts and education.

The local authority is responsible for preserving the character of the borough by ensuring that development of historic buildings or areas is sympathetic and makes a positive contribution to Merton's environmental heritage. This work is guided by the council's Core Planning Strategy 2011-26 and the National Planning Policy Framework 2019 (NPPF), which set out Government policy on planning matters in England and Wales, including the need to understand the significance of the borough's built heritage.

The Council recognises its responsibilities as the owner of land and historic buildings within Merton and will ensure the appropriate use of resources and skills, when maintaining the borough's heritage. The local authority has an important role in the management of conservation areas, the care and public awareness of statutory / locally listed buildings, historic parks and open spaces (the latter are maintained in accordance with the Merton Open Space Strategy, 2011-19.)

Part of this work involves liaison with Historic England and the Royal Commission for Ancient & Historical Monuments. It includes the monitoring of 3 ancient monuments within the borough (Caesar's Camp on Wimbledon Common; the medieval remains of Merton Priory and the ancient mound in Morden Park.)



Council services have a role in preserving and interpreting historic material (objects, illustrations and documents) for the benefit of future generations.

They have responsibility for the care and expansion of existing collections, the creation of educational resources and a local history enquiry service.

Merton Council has a responsibility for cultural heritage both practically and in an advisory capacity. By hosting exhibitions and events the authority promotes cultural diversity and extends public access both to the arts and social history. The Council also has a role in the development of new artistic work and initiatives increasing public engagement with heritage. This involves advising community groups and individuals on funding sources and supporting them through bidding processes.

Merton's heritage provision is further represented by a number of passionate individuals and organisations that work tirelessly to promote, research, champion, inspire and support the borough's heritage in both formal and informal ways.

There are 4 registered museums in the borough, including:

Case Study: Wandle Industrial Museum

The museum focus is raising public awareness of the rich industrial heritage of the River Wandle. In addition to housing unique displays, it stores and preserves relevant artefacts and offers an enquiry service supported by a small research collection.

The museum is currently based in the Vestry Hall Annexe, pending the availability of premises at Ravensbury Mill. Its profile and outreach programme have been greatly expanded over the past five years by a team of experienced volunteers who deliver walks, talks and printing workshops, both in-house and to community groups over a wide area.

- All England Lawn Tennis Museum
- Wimbledon Society Museum of Local History
- Wimbledon Windmill

Along with 3 historic sites:

- Southside House, Grade II* visitor attraction **
- National Trust, Morden Hall / Watermeads
- Merton Abbey Mills

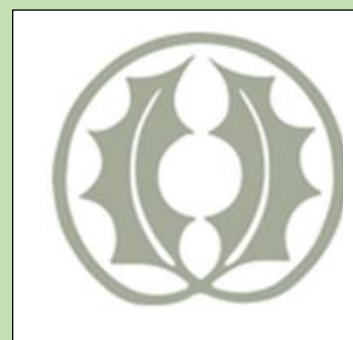
** The status of this property, as a publicly accessible visitor attraction, is now under review following the coronavirus pandemic

Local history societies, Heritage Trusts and organisations with heritage responsibilities / advocacy roles in the borough include:

Case Study: The John Innes Society

Dedicated to conservation and area enhancement, the Society reflects the vision of John Innes, the benefactor and property developer responsible for the Merton Park Estate. It encourages and monitors a high standard of building design and refurbishment, befitting one of the first garden suburbs in London.

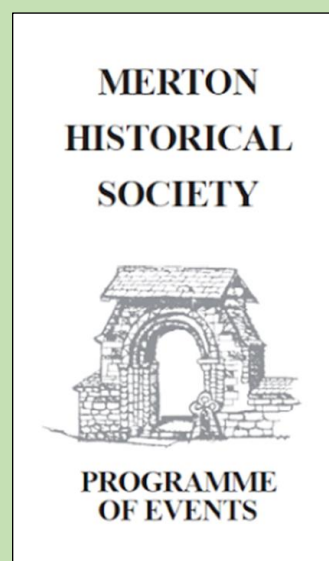
The Society is particularly keen to preserve the listed buildings and original Arts & Crafts features within the John Innes conservation area. It supports strong environmental awareness and aims to foster vital community and social values.



Case Study: Merton Historical Society

Founded in 1951, the Society was originally focused on Merton and Morden, but expanded its area of interest in 1965 following the formation of the current London Borough. Greatly respected for its wide-ranging publications on Merton's history, the Society also responds to public enquiries, making local history resources including research articles and photographic collections available via its website.

The Society offers monthly lectures in winter, plus regular visits and local guided walks during the summer months. It has some 120 members, several of whom actively research and publish on aspects of the Borough's history. Regular workshops are held to report and discuss their findings. The Society also seeks the preservation and protection of buildings, monuments and other items of local historical or architectural importance.



- The Capability Brown Society
- Merton Priory Trust
- Mitcham Common Conservators
- Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage
- The Mitcham Society
- Wandle Heritage Ltd
- Wimbledon in Sporting Heritage (AFC Wimbledon)
- The Wimbledon Society
- Wimbledon & Putney Common Conservators



A number of Friends Groups make a significant contribution to Merton's cultural, social and environmental heritage.

Faith organisations also contribute collectively to our shared heritage. Local examples include:

- Al-Ahmadiyya mosque
- Durnsford Road mosque
- Bhuddapadipa Thai Temple
- Shree Ganapathy Hindu Temple
- Wimbledon Synagogue
- Anglican Churches: notably the parish churches (St. Lawrence's, Morden; St. Mary's, Wimbledon; St. Mary the Virgin, Merton and St. Peter & St. Paul's, Mitcham.) These have a rich and varied history, in addition to architectural status as listed buildings.
- Roman Catholic Churches: notably S.S.Peter & Paul, Mitcham; Sacred Heart, Wimbledon



5. Success stories

There have been a number of positive outcomes with regard to the objectives set in the Merton Heritage Strategy 2015-20. These are testament to the hard work of local heritage organisations, the voluntary sector and the local authority working together. Achievements include:

5.1 Raising Merton's profile:

Merton's online profile has been boosted by increasing development of the successful Merton Memories website and a new linked site capturing the borough's First World War heritage. Both have enjoyed considerable local, national and international interest. Heritage organisations including Merton Historical Society, Wandle Industrial Museum, the Museum of Wimbledon and Cricket Green Community & Heritage have also greatly expanded their online presence, providing digital resources to increase public awareness of / access to local heritage. MCGC&H has also used social media to highlight heritage initiatives and concerns.

Participation in nationwide events, notably the unveiling of commemorative plaques to two Merton V.C.s (First World War centenary) and the presence of key suffragette descendants at library-based events (Women's suffrage centenary) has focussed media attention on the borough. Merton's annual Heritage Discovery Day now attracts 1,500 visitors and events such as London Open House and Mitcham Heritage Day help to showcase the borough's diverse culture

Merton heritage providers and initiatives have also received a number of accolades, including a Cipfa award for the Local Studies service; shortlisting for a GLA Team London award (Carved in Stone project;) nomination for a national research award (Wandle Vistas project) and numerous awards for heritage volunteering (MVSC and Merton Excellence Awards.) In 2018, the strength of Merton's heritage offer achieved further recognition, when the borough won a Cultural Impact Award in the Mayor of London's Borough of Culture initiative.

5.2 Safeguarding local heritage sites and resources.

Council officers and local organisations including the Wimbledon Society, the John Innes Society and Cricket Green Community & Heritage have worked hard to ensure that heritage is considered and represented within local authority service plans and projects, such as the Merton Local Plan.



Council staff, community groups and heritage stakeholders have worked together to preserve a range of historic sites and structures across the borough. This has included monitoring and treatment work to stabilise and protect the historic remains of the Merton Priory Chapter House and surviving portions of precinct wall; the restoration of Mitcham clock tower and the waterwheel at Merton Abbey Mills, repairs to the sails and upper fabric of Wimbledon's historic windmill and treatment of the Canons Dovecote, Mitcham. Specialist restoration of an historic horse trough and cricket memorial was also undertaken as part of a lottery funded

initiative by Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage.

Thanks to the efforts of local residents and community groups, four of the borough's war memorials (3 in Wimbledon, 1 in Mitcham) have now been statutorily listed. The council's Future Merton team has reviewed and extended the range of buildings and structures locally listed as historically significant. The compilation of appraisals, design guides and management plans has ensured greater awareness and safeguarding of the borough's conservation areas. Projects such as Carved in Stone have led to the conservation repair and digitisation of important First World War documents. Extensive photographic digitisation has also preserved and increased the accessibility of collections held by Merton Historical Society and Wandle Industrial Museum.

5.3 Working together to make heritage more inclusive and increase public engagement

Widespread participation and partnership work during major public events such as the annual Merton Heritage Discovery Day, Mitcham Heritage Day and Wandle Fortnight have increased public engagement with local heritage, from footfall at heritage sites, to volunteering and

membership of local societies. Open events, bringing together schools, churches, community groups and businesses to celebrate the history of a particular locality, have also helped to foster community pride and interest in Merton's heritage. (Examples include the community arts and sporting heritage event staged by the Capability Brown Society/Friends of Wimbledon Park; a Merton Park open day coordinated by the John Innes Society and Merton Park Residents Association; and the annual Community on the Green event organised by Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage.)

Working in partnership with Merton museums, historical societies and community groups, the council's Heritage Service has staged a varied programme of exhibitions and events, helping to raise awareness of the borough's colourful past. Specialist programmes were staged to mark the First World War centenary, the centenary of women's suffrage, the Silver Jubilee of Merton Heritage Centre and Windrush Day.

In recent months the Heritage team has also worked with Public Health representatives to devise a unique range of sensory displays, activities and reminiscence materials to support people living with dementia (Merton Memory Bank project) and residents with sight/ hearing loss and autism (Common Sense project.)



The Canons project has staged a successful engagement programme, using open days, community archaeology and oral history; bringing together Mitcham residents, school and community groups to capture the story of the historic house, its grounds and the surrounding area.

The 28 projects organised by the Living Wandle Partnership (2013-18) were particularly successful at increasing public engagement and inclusivity. Over 39,000 people took part in activities ranging from river clearance and improvement works, to class sessions, guided walks, historic research and film-making. Participants not only helped to preserve and celebrate a key feature of Merton's heritage, they also achieved qualifications and acquired transferable skills.

5.4 Securing funding and investment.



educational programmes, to the celebration of landscape, film making and creation of the Merton Priory Chapter House Visitor Centre.

Over the past five years the local authority, commercial partners, community and voluntary organisations across the borough have worked together to secure several million pounds worth of investment for local heritage. The majority of this is Heritage Lottery and Big Lottery funding. It includes £4.4 million, secured by the council and Mitcham Cricket Green Community & Heritage, to transform Canons House and the surrounding parkland into a heritage and community hub. Part of a £2.7 million award enabled the Living Wandle partnership to support 28 different projects, from environmental conservation and



A further £81,000 funded the Carved in Stone project, enabling Merton Heritage Service to highlight the borough's First World War heritage through a specially designed website featuring unique family war stories, historic documents and the life stories of 800 local combatants. The Heritage Service has also helped organisations to secure lottery funding for diverse projects covering everything from women's suffrage and Bangladeshi culture, to combat stress, industrial history and life during World War II.

6. Issues

A number of issues affect the safeguarding of Merton's heritage and the provision of associated services. These are as follows:

Covid-19

The Covid-19 pandemic presents a significant challenge to the borough and in particular to Merton's heritage. It impacts on all aspects of service provision from public engagement and access to museums, historic sites and collections; to income generation and financial resilience amongst heritage providers; and service capacity, notably the ability to maintain staffing and volunteer support. Merton museums, heritage attractions, local history societies and community organisations must all face the challenge of running and maintaining services in a Covid-safe, sustainable manner, whilst also addressing the economic pressures of a pandemic related recession.

Information, innovation and collaboration will be key to the recovery and durability of the borough's heritage sector.

By digitising collections and making greater use of technology, heritage providers have opportunities to increase public engagement, communicate more effectively with the wider Merton community and to make their services and collections more accessible. Web-based resources, social media initiatives and conferencing software have already been trialled by a number of local organisations and could be used to stage virtual exhibitions, guided tours of heritage sites and talks. Local organisations can maximise resources by sharing expertise and equipment to stage joint activities from public events, to training sessions for volunteers. There is potential to finance such work (including equipment purchase) through joint funding bids, particularly if they promote the sharing of best practice and increase engagement with young people, BAME groups and people with additional needs.

Technology can also be used to develop financial resilience, enabling heritage organisations to seek additional funding through online sales, merchandising opportunities, sponsorship, donation/ subscription schemes or crowdfunding initiatives.

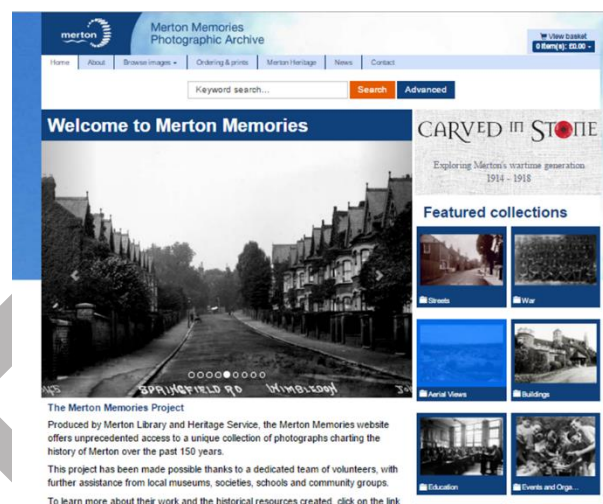
Merton's heritage organisations can achieve more and command greater attention if they work together. Every effort should be made to encourage local organisations to work collaboratively to galvanise public support, generate income and maximise resources. The efficacy of this approach can be seen from the success of partnership events such as the Merton Heritage Discovery Day, Mitcham Heritage Day and Wandle Fortnight. These not only showcase the

borough's heritage, they also generate income, boost membership, footfall and volunteer recruitment for participating organisations. Ensuring the ongoing delivery of such events, whether through shared online programmes, or Covid-safe activities will be key to the strengthening of Merton's heritage provision.

6.2: Raising the profile of heritage in the borough

There is a public perception that the borough's heritage and tourism focus is Wimbledon and more needs to be done to generate interest and attract visitors to all parts of the borough.

Initiatives such as the Merton Memories digitisation project and the Living Wandle project have enabled heritage organisations, schools and the wider community to work together successfully to share resources, good practice, marketing and outreach opportunities. It is important to keep this impetus going and to increase the range of collaborative work undertaken in order to maximise resources, develop relevant skill sets and promote the borough's heritage attractions and collections effectively.



Continuing to expand and deliver collaborative events such as the Merton Heritage Discovery Day, Mitcham Heritage Day and Wandle Fortnight will also be key to raising awareness of the borough's heritage offer.

6.3: Funding and investment

Merton's heritage providers face a challenging future, particularly in the current economic climate where funding constraints may hinder service provision, capital development and investment in conservation or new technology. Service providers need to generate income in order to maintain and develop services but need to carefully consider whether charges may impact on public access to resources.

Capacity constraints not only provide challenges for the local authority but also for heritage organisations across the borough. Increasing external funding and generating sponsorship are key to promoting our heritage. There has been an increase in the number of external grants awarded by funding bodies such as the National Heritage Lottery Fund; however the number of funding applications submitted by local museums and community groups is still fairly low and should be increased. More needs to be done to identify and raise awareness of funding streams to encourage new bids.



6.4: Public engagement and participation

Heritage is unsustainable if it is kept for the pleasure of a small minority. Heritage properly shared, enjoyed and exploited is a source of prosperity and growth. We want our heritage, past and present, to be properly identified, made accessible and comprehensible to the widest possible audience.

If Merton's heritage is to be protected and the range of services expanded, provision must be more inclusive. This is important if local heritage attractions and collections are to be relevant and appealing to the wider community and in particular within underrepresented groups such as young people and those from BAME backgrounds.

There is a particular need to broaden public engagement with local heritage whether as service users / visitors, staff (paid and voluntary), through community forums, or as donors of historic objects / documents. Linked to this is the need to increase the range and opportunities for collaborative work between different heritage providers and community groups in order to maximise resources, share expertise and increase the profile of Merton's heritage. This may be key to the survival of individual heritage attractions and services during the current pandemic when resources are severely stretched.

6.5: Safeguarding local heritage

Merton has a number of properties on the Historic England Buildings at Risk register. In the current economic climate there is a growing threat that important artwork, historic documents, objects and structures may be taken out of the borough; or left to deteriorate due to lack of resources (staff and funding) for appropriate conservation work. It is important to have a clear strategy for protecting vulnerable and significant aspects of local heritage, from important documentary collections, to the historic environment and buildings of local interest. We will continue to improve the monitoring and reporting of heritage at risk; opportunities for challenging unsympathetic development; funding streams for conservation / emergency protection and work to maintain the integrity of local conservation areas.



In order to ensure that Merton's heritage providers are meeting standards regarding customer care, equalities and collections management, it is important to ensure ongoing access to professional development opportunities. (In the current climate this may necessitate online programmes and support, in addition to / instead of attendance at designated training venues.)

It is also vital to ensure that local museums and heritage attractions can engage staff and volunteers with appropriate skills to maintain service continuity (particularly if social distancing and shift work prove a necessary response to the coronavirus pandemic.) Linking with bodies such as the Museums Association, the Arts Council or National Archives and closer regional work will also help to improve access to our resources.

7. Objectives: 2020 - 25

Objective 1: Raise Merton's profile by increasing public access to the borough's unique and diverse cultural heritage

To be delivered by:

- Expanding the borough's digital heritage offer to increase the range of historic documents, activities and resources available online
- Getting underrepresented groups more involved in heritage projects and championing their own heritage.
- Developing the borough's visitor potential and the investment that this can bring.
- Contributing to the quality of life for residents and the community.
- Promoting Merton's heritage to our residents, visitors and tourists.

Objective 2: Safeguard the borough's varied heritage sites and resources, protecting and conserving them for the benefit of future generations

To be delivered by:

- Enhancing the borough's public realm.
- Influencing design of new developments so that they enhance our shared heritage.
- Initiating heritage-led regeneration to maintain geographical and historical character.
- Restoring original and sentimental character to heritage assets.
- Developing our collections, museums, sites and landscapes and improve accessibility.

Objective 3: Ensure that Merton's heritage provision is inclusive by working collaboratively to widen public engagement and participation

To be delivered by:

- A more diverse and stronger network of volunteer led organisations and groups.
- An increase in the number of people volunteering for the benefit of Merton's heritage.
- Strengthening partnership work across the heritage network and beyond.
- Developing use of Merton's heritage as an educational resource.
- Enabling everyone, alone or collectively, to benefit from Merton's cultural heritage, contribute towards its enrichment, and participate in decisions about its future.

Objective 4: To recognise the important contribution of social enterprise and secure ongoing funding and investment in Merton's heritage through partnership work, external funding and sponsorship

To be delivered by:

Continuing to increase the level of external funding to support our heritage from a range of sources.

- Pursuing sponsorship opportunities and draw input into ongoing heritage projects from the business community.
- Encouraging the expansion of the tourist economy.
- Working in partnership with local, regional and national organisations and agencies in understanding and caring for Merton's heritage.

8. Key Actions:

Changes are inevitable in a modern borough, from the size and diversity of the population, to fluctuating prosperity and transformations in our working patterns, travel arrangements, leisure habits and social needs. This is particularly true at the current time, as the coronavirus pandemic impacts on every aspect of life in Merton.

A good heritage strategy works with, rather than against change. Through the 2020-25 strategy Merton Council and heritage stakeholders will work collaboratively to make a positive contribution to local heritage. They will strive to engage with and involve the wider community, maintaining important historical sites and resources. Where this proves challenging, they will ensure that material is properly recorded, offer varied display formats and embrace new technology, wherever possible, to make local heritage accessible to current and future generations.

For the Heritage Strategy to succeed it must involve and integrate the passion of local interest groups, the enthusiasm of present and future volunteers, plus the acumen, technological expertise and risk-taking of the commercial sector. We want Merton to become a major heritage destination for local residents, our London neighbours and visitors from further afield.

The following are just some of the key actions proposed by local heritage providers (prior to March 2020) in order to develop their services, so helping to fulfil the objectives set out in the Merton Heritage Strategy:

Canons Project:

- To deliver an ongoing programme of activities and events engaging local communities with the heritage of Canons House & Grounds
- To commence building / refurbishment work at The Canons to form a heritage and cultural hub for the community

John Innes Society:

- Will promote and exhibit archival material about the area, including a collection relating to suffragette Rose Lamartine Yates.
- Plan to stage an exhibition to mark the Society's 50th anniversary.

Merton Heritage Centre:

- Will seek funding to digitise and make publicly accessible key sections of its collection including maps, directories and photographs (expanding the existing Merton Memories collection)
- Will expand on the success of the Carved in Stone (WW1) project, to capture and increase physical / online access to Merton's Second World War history, including the war stories of local people, historic documents and period memorabilia
- Will devise systems to make the heritage collections more accessible to people with additional needs and learning difficulties using sensory displays, digital resources and activities for care home and day centres
- Will seek funding to redevelop Merton Heritage & Local Studies Centre, to improve collections care / storage, expand the range of display formats and make the service more relevant, accessible and user-friendly for the wider community.

Merton Historical Society:

- Will continue to publish work of local historical interest and increase access to its image collection
- Will investigate methods of reaching new audiences, possibly in a joint approach with other heritage organisations.

Merton Priory Trust:

- Ensure public opening of the chapter house (April – October) with incremental improvements to the museum display and publicity
- Complete phase 1 the chapter house development (utility connections, paving)
- Complete phase 3 of the chapter house development by creating a physic garden as a public amenity
- On completion of development work, stage a programme of theatrical and religious events.

Wandle Industrial Museum:

- Aims to build on existing presentations to/work with special needs groups in conjunction with other organisations
- Plans to make its extensive photographic collection available to the public following a recent digitisation project

The uncertainty surrounding the coronavirus pandemic makes it difficult for heritage providers to make firm commitments regarding service development at the current time. All plans will need to evolve in order to provide an appropriate response to the crisis and the conditions at any given time. With this in mind, a delivery plan will be established separately from the Heritage Strategy itself – this will be informed by Government policy, future stakeholder meetings and community consultation.