

ENFIELD 229

UNOFFICIAL FRIENDS OF MUSEUM & ARCHIVE SERVICES

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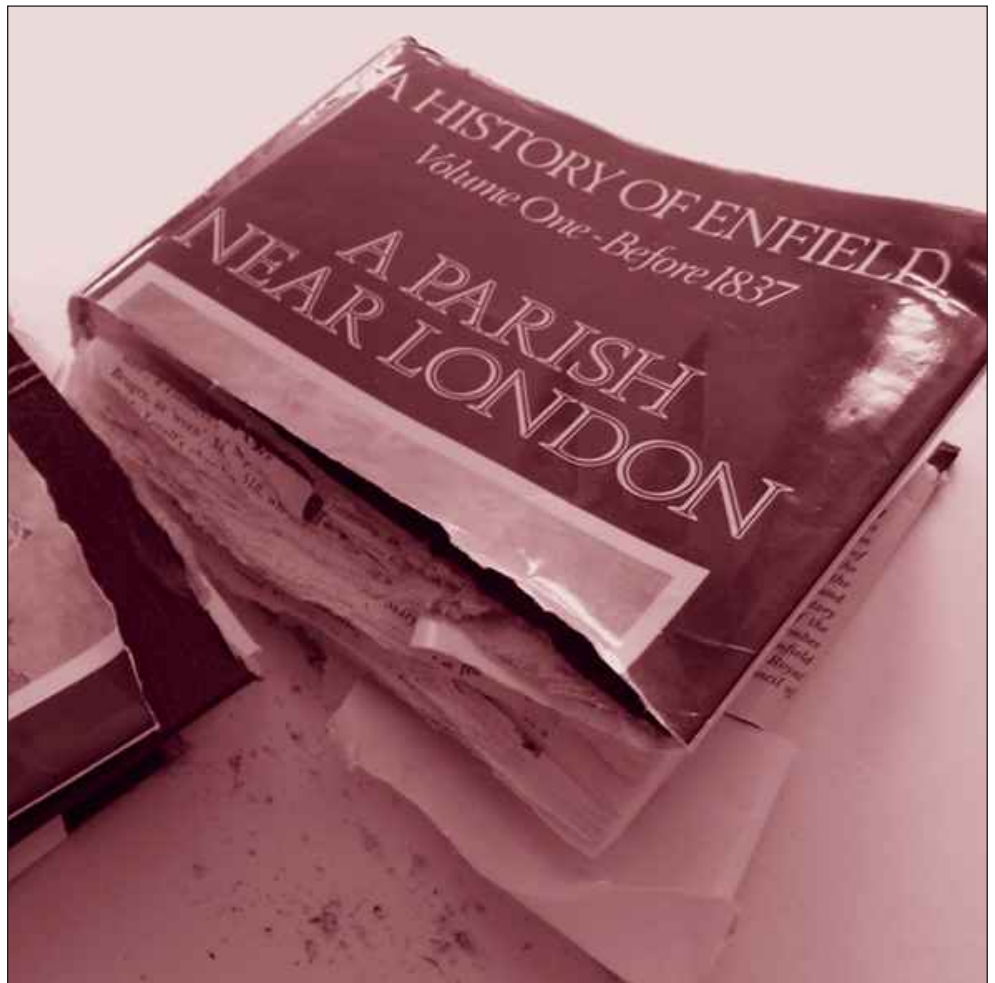
THREAT TO RIP APART MUSEUM & ARCHIVES!

Senior councillors at Enfield Council have set a course to cut our Museums and our Archives services to the point of termination. Quietly announced as 'operational changes' the cuts will result in losing all meaningful function of the Museum and the Archives services. This in the year where the Council is celebrating its heritage and 50th Birthday.

The general outline of the proposal is to somehow digitalise all the archives, lock the door to physical material and grant access via limited appointment. With museums the proposal is to shut the primary exhibition space. None of the public information given mentions other decisions being proposed - the removal of four and a half experienced staff to be replaced by two junior posts.

Neither are the inevitable consequences of these actions being discussed. There is a point below which a public service is not a viable service. In this instance a couple of glass cabinets is certainly not a museum and a locked cupboard is not an archive.

To add insult to injury the news of this potential calamity has been silently announced through a public 'consultation' process so limited and full of manipulative communication that it is almost insulting.



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Like this standard volume on Enfield's local history our small museum and archives services are about to be ripped into shreds. (with apologies to the author).

What are the proposals?

One; Complete digitalisation of the archives service, closing all public access except via appointment, cutting staff.

What we say: Complete digitalisation is practically, legally and technically impossible to achieve. Even partial digitalisation would take years and huge financial cost to do. Removing open access misses the key need to easily inspect real documents and material. The proposal ignores the essential contribution that a professional staff team provide with research. It appears that all staff will be cut to be replaced by a junior post. We doubt this single post can maintain the archive, digitalise everything and cope with the current eighty plus weekly appointments and enquiries.

Second; Closing the museums main exhibition space, cutting staff.

What we say: Dupliciously calling it 'moving' the proposal is to close the main museum exhibition space on the ground floor of the Dugdale Centre. This means the end of the museums main programme of public exhibitions. It will result in the loss of any public face to the museum and reduce the quality of the Dugdale Centre experience. It also ignores throwing away the £187,000 of public money spent on creating the exhibition space less than five years ago! Replacing all staff with another junior post seems likely to cripple any meaningful future service.

None of the open consultation mentions the staff cuts or the consequences of this. It is our understanding that all museum and archive staff will be cut and two junior posts will replace them all.

This may be the crux of the matter - by reducing the service to an administrative function they can quietly lose all the current staff and so make savings. We do understand the current financial and political climate. However while a service with one hundred staff can afford to lose three people, a service with only four and half posts cannot afford to lose the same number without catastrophic results.



The 'Remembering Star Wars' museum exhibition in 2011 / 2012 when the museum saw over 15,000 visitors.

The cuts also seem to ignore the fact that the museum and the archives have seen a percentage increase in users. The success of Enfield's museum service has seen a 57% increase in visitors since 2011,

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with a contribution to the Dugdale experience and a growing ability to reach the community with great exhibitions. Exhibitions that consistently punch above their weight in terms of what such a small museum can do - something for the Council to be very proud of.

The archive has seen a similar percentage increase in users of 49% since 2010. This points to an increasing user need for archive material - both professionally as well as privately - and not a move to a locked room and appointments via a junior member of staff.

To imagine the cuts will leave a reasonable basic service is absurdity. We sincerely wonder if anyone involved in making the proposals actually understands what a museums and an archives service does or what they require to function.

To some extent understanding doesn't matter. Even if you don't use the museum or archive services, even if you don't know what a museum or an archive is, trust some of 91,000 people that have used them over the last four years. Trust us when we say it's worth the average fifty six pence per person it costs to run the services for a year.



Students doing research at Enfield archives services.

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Questions on 'consultation'

For professionals who do consultation work with the public there are a number of 'levels' of public engagement in local decisions. Good consultation endeavors to fully explain issues and then engage opinions in order to meaningfully shape the nature of a decision.

When a decision has been made and consultation is done to ask meaningless follow up questions then it becomes 'manipulation' not consultation. The purpose then is to be seen to talk to the public so councillors and officers can say they did so when questions are later asked. It is disingenuous to do this and, in the long term, undermines trust and credibility.

Making tough decisions is not at question. Being open, honest and engaging the public with respect is in question. This consultation has made a bad situation worse.

People now question the motivation, skills and, inevitably, the electability of those involved.

We were slightly shocked to discover that many councillors are not even aware of the proposal to cut the current museum and archives services. We discussed the issue directly with three councillors - one Labour, one Conservative, and the Mayor - at the Enfield Town Show in early September. None of them were aware of the proposed cuts to the museum or the archive services.

Many councillors are not even aware of the proposal to cut the current museum and archives services

MUSEUMS & ARCHIVES

So what costs are being saved?

The budget for running the Museum service and Archive service currently stands at about £182,000. The cost was a little higher last year but the Museum has already had a part-time post cut earlier this year.

The population of Enfield is over 322,400 so the total cost of both the Museum and the Archive services to each person in our Borough is 56p a year! Yes, that is fifty six pence - the same price of a doughnut at Greggs' bakeries.

In the last four years the Museum and the Archives have provided direct service to over **91,000** users. These are only the recorded numbers; they don't take into account the thousands that see and use these services on the first floor of the Dugdale, local libraries, Civic centre or online.

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We didn't imagine it would need to be said but for a proud Borough of over 300,000 people not to have a reasonable functioning museum and archives is pretty disgraceful. The people and heritage of a place is like the soul of a Borough. Even in the most difficult of times people want to hold onto their history - it's what makes us people, a community, a place.

If it wasn't for our museum and our archives we would not know that mammoths once walked over Palmers Green or that Joseph Swan co-invented the lightbulb at Ponders End. We wouldn't know that the Enfield 'Beast' on our council's coat of arms first raised its claws in 1946. We could do little in the way of celebrating 50 years of our Borough, as the Council has done this year.

We would not know that, seventy five years ago to this month, local lad and Battle of Britain pilot John Curchin flew his Spitfire in a low victory roll over his mum's house, near Enfield Town - and that someone wrote a letter

of complaint in the local paper! This just a few short months before he gave his life for his country.

And without both museum and archives we would not know of all those who fell in love and got married in Enfield.

You can see a mammoths tooth and a Swan lightbulb in the museum. At the Archive you can trace the local history of John Curchin. You can today go and see a score of wedding dresses in the current exhibition at the museum on the ground floor of the Dugdale Centre. All these and a thousand other things are reliant on the Museum and the Archive functioning properly.

'Enfield 229' comes from the reference number for one of the oldest objects in the museum's collection Bd.229; a mammoth tooth from 10,000 years ago. Found in 1909 it was displayed at Southgate town hall in 1914 and was so popular that it inspired the creation of our Borough's first Museum.

The Archives service had to wait 9000 years until it gained the first human document; a deed from 1271 where Simon Magna Benfleet rented out some land to Thomas Dewodehon at the cost of two pence.

These and thousands more objects and documents are owned by you the public and cared for by two small Council teams of experienced professionals.

Only
56p
per person

WHAT WE WOULD LIKE TO SEE

We would like the cabinet of the Council to review the proposals to close the open archives and the main museum exhibition area. In particular to reconsider the vast % cut on staff teams currently standing at four and a half posts.

We would like the councillors in charge to invest in more open discussions with its stakeholders, public and supporters in order to consider new ways in which the museum and archives might draw in additional support through other means. We have some suggestions and will be happy to discuss them.

If necessary we would like to see an increase in the council tax by 56p per citizen. Yes, even in the current climate we would campaign to see a rise in tax by 56p rather than lose these small but vital services.

We'd like to avoid the national embarrassment of such irreversible cuts to two small services. This specific consultation is already being used as an example of bad practice at a seminar on public services in Liverpool. We would like to avoid Enfield's name being dragged through any more mud.



WHAT YOU CAN DO...

- For the greatest impact write to Councillor Doug Taylor, leader of the Council or to Councillor Ayfer Orhan whose cabinet roll covers the museum and the archive services.
- Ask them to copy your letter to the Council's Consultation & Resident Engagement team.
- Write to the other cabinet members or your own local councillor.
- If you respond to the actual consultation document we would recommend ignoring the questions about your 'enjoyment' and 'preferences' and jump straight to the other 'comments' section to give your views on the real issues at hand.
- Use social media to let others know what's happening and encourage them to express their concerns.
- Other groups and individuals are taking action, such as a petition online at home.38degrees.org.uk.
- To avoid embarrassment we are suggesting holding off from national media and organisations unless it becomes clear that the Council will not consider amendments to their proposals. If that becomes the case we know of others already waiting to take action in that direction.
- And finally... visit the museum or archives and tell them how much you appreciate their services.

Fantastic Mr Fox (and pigeon) a long term favourite of people who have visited Enfield museum over the decades - you can still him (for now) at the Museum on the ground floor of the Dugdale Centre.

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View the consultation document online

www.enfield.gov.uk

Scroll down to 'Enfield Local Studies Centre and Museum' in the list at bottom right hand of the home page.

You can write to all these other names at the same address or email them.

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Your individual councillors can be found at www.enfield.gov.uk under 'councillors and elections' and then 'ward councillors'.

With councillors our experience has been that, due to their workload, they do not always respond to emails so a printed letter may prove more useful.



This newsletter has been put together by a number of concerned Enfieldians to highlight the proposals to extinguish the local Museums and the Archives services. The information and details contained within this newsletter is, to the best of our knowledge, correct. The majority of figures were gained through freedom of information requests. Thanks to the Councillors and residents who have helped with further details. To avoid question all financial costs are rounded up and all user numbers rounded down, thus giving the harshest interpretation of any figures. We are happy for this newsletter to be copied as part of any related discussion.

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