

## **Vestry House Museum Revitalisation Project FAQs: updated November 2023**

The following answers to some frequently asked questions have been prepared to provide further information.

### **1. Is the council permanently closing Vestry House Museum?**

No. Vestry House Museum will not be permanently closed or sold. The council will need to close the museum temporarily to move the collections offsite safely to enable the capital refurbishment works. The museum will close on 23 December 2023 and the garden will close on 18 February 2024. Vestry House Museum will reopen to the public in early 2026.

### **2. Can I still access the archive?**

Yes. An important part of the project is to ensure that the archives and local studies collections are fully accessible. The borough's archives and local studies library searchroom, together with the museum's photographic collection, will be relocated to a new fully accessible site in 2024.

### **3. Will the project provide a long-term future for Vestry House Museum?**

Yes. Securing a long term, sustainable future for this important place is central to the Council's aims. Financial sustainability is one of the key considerations for the project. Vestry House Museum will remain open and owned by the council – it will not be closed or sold.

### **4. What is the Vestry House Museum revitalisation project?**

The council's mission is to revitalise Vestry House Museum as an accessible, diverse and inclusive heritage destination, that reflects the residents of Waltham Forest. Creating a multi-use site that increases access to culture, skills and education for young people and residents, we want Vestry House Museum to be more financially and environmentally sustainable, securing its impact for future generations.

### **5. Will Vestry House stop being a museum?**

No. The display and interpretation of the museum collections will remain at the heart of the site when it reopens.

### **6. What will happen to the museum collections? Are they being given to other museums?**

No. The museum collections that are currently displayed and stored on site at Vestry House will be moved offsite ahead of the capital works. Some will be stored temporarily. Some objects will be on temporary loan to other museums so they remain on public display whilst the museum is closed. We will also work to ensure that the collections and displays represent the full history of Waltham Forest, in particular the past 60 years and communities that are currently under-represented.

## **7. What will happen to the Bremer Car?**

We are hoping to lend this very important museum object to another museum so that it remains on public display whilst the museum is closed for the capital works. Due to its fragility we can only lend it to an accredited museum, or put it into storage. We are exploring the best options for this currently. Any loan will be temporary and the Bremer Car will be back in Waltham Forest once Vestry House Museum reopens.

## **8. Will the same displays come back to the museum when it reopens?**

We will be working with the museum and heritage experts in the design team, our curatorial teams and local residents on ideas for both temporary and permanent displays at Vestry House Museum. We don't know yet which objects will be included but these will be drawn from our collections both on display and in storage. We also want to work with local partners on heritage hubs that will show more of the Vestry House Collections in other locations across the borough.

## **9. Why are you working with Studio Weave on the project?**

Studio Weave were appointed through an open tender process. The panel took into account their approach to working with a Grade II listed building, how they proposed to improve environmental sustainability and accessibility, how they would combine the heritage, social value and income-generating functions and their budget. Studio Weave are an award-winning practice who previously worked on the extension to Lea Bridge Library for Waltham Forest Council.

## **10. What did Assemble do on the project?**

In June 2022, following a competitive process, Waltham Forest Council appointed a multi-disciplinary team, led by Assemble, an established architectural practice, to lead a team to research and consider a range of approaches for a revitalised Vestry House Museum. Assemble reviewed the current operation at Vestry House Museum and prepared various potential models which could be applied to revitalise the site. These took into account feedback from engagement with over 40 groups, individuals and stakeholders. The Assemble commission was completed prior to the outcome of Waltham Forest Council's application to the Government's Levelling Up fund. This work has helped to inform the current plans.

## **11. How does Levelling Up Funding affect the project?**

On 19 January 2023 £17million of Levelling Up Funding was awarded to Waltham Forest Council to deliver 'Culture for All' a programme of capital works to develop and improve a range of cultural sites and cultural spaces in Walthamstow. Within this wider bid, £4.5 million (including £800k match funding from the Council) has been allocated to the revitalisation of Vestry House Museum. This Levelling Up funding now enables the Council to realise a new approach for Vestry House Museum. This project will include capital improvements to the building, with ambitious goals for increasing the diversity and number of visitors to Vestry House Museum, an enhanced learning and schools' offer, training and employment opportunities for local young people and improvements to both the

museum and archive collections and service.

**12. Why is the council seeking partner organisations to operate Vestry House Museum?**

We believe that securing the right cultural partner to work with us to revitalise Vestry House Museum will ensure that we can achieve more in terms of public activities, engagement and appreciation of local history. The Council is adopting a partnership approach to several of its cultural sites, following a new approach outlined in the Destinations business plan, agreed in Cabinet on 22 November 2022. After a positive response from an Expressions of Interest process last year, we have advertised for a partner organisation to operate the site. The partner organisation will be selected by the beginning of 2024. We are confident that there are a range of organisations keen to work with us to help activate the Museum and develop a dynamic programme. A key aim is to diversify Vestry House Museum audiences and activate the heritage site to its full potential.

**13. Will accessibility to Vestry House Museum be improved?**

Yes. Currently Vestry House Museum is not fully accessible, with no lift access. We are working closely with the architects to establish a balance of improved accessibility for all whilst maintaining the unique character of the Grade II listed building.

**14. How will this project respond to the climate emergency and the current challenges around energy costs?**

The capital investment will enable improvements to building's environmental performance while at the same time maintaining the unique character of the Grade II listed building.

**15. How can I get involved?**

There will be a range of opportunities to get involved as the revitalisation project gains momentum, which will be updated here.

**16. What is the proposed timeline for the project?**

A partner organisation will be appointed in early 2024. The museum closes on 23 December 2023 in preparation for capital works beginning in April 2024. We anticipate the works to be completed in late 2025 with the Museum reopening in early 2026.

**11. How can I get involved, and how will you be engaging with local historical and heritage groups?**

There will be a range of opportunities to get involved as the revitalisation project gains momentum. We have set up regular meetings with local history and heritage groups alongside and established a Community Advisory Panel. If you are interested in receiving updates on the project you can [sign up for our newsletter here](#).

**13. How will you ensure the museum appeals to the widest audience and local history organisations to ensure visitor numbers increase?**

Bringing our local history up to date and including the past 60 years of life in Waltham Forest in the collection and displays is an essential part of this project.

**15. Will be there any offline engagement meetings and is there a way for people without access to a computer to stay up to date with the revitalisation process?**

We will be hosting a range of stakeholder and resident meetings both online and in person throughout the process For more information, please [sign up for our newsletter here](#). We will also include updates in Waltham Forest News, the council's newspaper, delivered directly to every household in the borough and available in libraries.