

BROOMFIELD HOUSE

PRESENTING AND INTERPRETING BROOMFIELD HOUSE FOR LOCAL PEOPLE

DRAFT

The Vision

A much-loved but sadly derelict historic building standing in a fine public park is to be restored to put it again at the heart of its park and its local community. The restored building will meet the needs of local people by providing meeting rooms for community activities, educational and other events to involve children and adults in learning about their heritage, historical displays, and a much-needed café for park users. Managed by a Trust drawn from local people, it will also be used for social functions such as weddings and parties and business meetings that will enable the House to be financially self-supporting in the long-term. With a fully restored interior combining historical features with new building standards, and a new organery, the house will bring together the best of old and new

Telling Broomfield's Story

The story of Broomfield House will be presented through the exploration of the two themes, which have run through Broomfield's four hundred-year life.

These themes,
of

Continuity and Change

&

Opportunity and Problem

provide a perspective through which to interpret the House's history and make it relevant and accessible to the diverse local population.

The theme of '**Continuity and Change**' provides a perspective through which to interpret and explain the way the House has endured but changed over the centuries as its ownership and usage have changed and what it represented changed. The impact of wider social, economic and political change on the built environment will be explored through Broomfield's journey from modest farmhouse to gentleman's residence, from family home to a publicly owned building serving community needs. The ways in which succeeding generations have adapted the buildings structure and functions will be used to show that 'the heritage' is not something that is given or fixed, but something which changes over time.

The second theme of '*Opportunity and Problem*' has dominated Broomfield's existence throughout the twentieth century. There were uncertainties around how to use the building from the outset, when the Council acquired it in 1903. It has been used as a public building in a number of ways such as a clinic, offices for park keepers, and a museum, until it was reduced to its current state of near dereliction by a series of fires between 1984 and 1993. Broomfield's heyday was between the 1950's and the 1980's, when it was very much at the heart of the park and the local community. The House is still much loved by many in the local community, and the question of what should be done with it remains hotly contested.

In a climate of limited financial resources, Enfield Council has not considered it possible to provide all the finance needed to restore the House. Many people in the local community do not think it this an acceptable stance: others, however, have argued that the House should simply be demolished, and that it is a waste of money to try to bring it back into use.

A range of solutions have been explored over the years, but all have failed to materialise. In recent years a number of local people have been active in working to bring the House back into use as a community building. They have been working in partnership with the Council and the local M.P. to develop a plan to use the building for a range of uses – meeting space for community organisations, educational activities for school-children and adults, historical displays, a café, and at times its rooms will be hired out for activities such as weddings, parties and social celebrations, and business meetings and conferences. This blend of uses will generate sufficient income to allow the House to be financially self-supporting in the longer term.

The cost of restoring the house is very high, into the millions. Where the money should come from is highly problematic. The Council has not felt able to provide the full amount, but some local residents think they should: others disagree, and want to see any money that might be available going on different services, (e.g. schools.) Two possible solutions, by which Brewery companies would have restored the House at no cost to the Council in exchange for using it as a family restaurant (with some meeting rooms available for free community use) were routed by local residents, who objected passionately to what they termed 'the pub in the park', and the schemes were aborted. Restoration will now only be possible if large grants from organisations such as the Heritage Lottery Fund can be obtained.

Neither is the issue of how the running costs of the restored House should be met uncontentious. On the one hand, there is pressure from some quarters for the Council to meet any shortfall between income and expenditure each year, and strong resistance to those who, on the other hand, argue that the House has to be self-sustaining. Those who do not believe the house should have to be self-sustaining are against the House being hired for social and business uses at the level judged necessary for the for the building to generate enough income to cover its running costs, and the new orangery extension that is a key element in this approach.

This debate, which arouses strong feelings on all sides, crystallises many important issues about life in Britain today and decision taking in a mature democracy: questions of how public money should be spent, how are decisions taken, what is the value of the heritage, and who should decide what happens to it?

Possible Activities

The following ideas are outlines of the types of activities that could be developed to illuminate how the complex and interesting story of Broomfield House, told through the themes of '**Continuity & Change**' and '**Opportunity & Problem**', could be used educationally, in the broadest sense. These activities will be designed to encourage people of all ages and from all sections of the community, including those not currently involved with heritage matters, to learn about the forces and events that have shaped, and are shaping, the society and the environment in which they live.

Continuity & Change

- Why a house was built there / what it might have looked like / how the household lived – when the house first got chimney's, w.c.'s etc. This could be done in part through a 'horrible history' type approach concentrating on the grosser aspects, to appeal to children in the 8 – 12 year age group, especially boys who are often 'switching off' from education at this stage. (links to curriculum theme of Tudors – part of house is of Tudor origin.)
- How the House got grander – what social processes were going on – the rise of the merchant class. Enclosure of the common lands in 1801 – who got what, and who lost out? The then owner of Broomfield owned 582 acres of land in the parish after the enclosures, making him the second largest landowner. What happened to the poor people who were dispossessed of the common lands? Industrialisation and the growth of the cities in general and London in particular. Broomfield's relationship to London – other houses / settlements around and about. (These issues could be linked to the curriculum theme of the making of Britain)
- The Mural – why Flemish painters were over here carrying out commissions / interpreting mythic and symbolic paintings / the symbols in the mural that relate to the family who owned the house.
- The growth of London – suburbanisation; how the house became surrounded by Edwardian suburbia / why did the house and park not get re-developed as well? The impact of the railways / Why did the owners sell to the Council in 1903. Attitudes to leisure/recreation/public space at the start of the last century and now – what changes?
- Journals and Diaries as sources - A member of the family who owned the House during the 19th century was a noted diarist. Mrs. Philip Lybbe Powys's diary is quoted in social histories of England (e.g. Hibbert's?) and is kept in the British Museum. Will seek to present extracts and facsimiles of interesting parts of the diaries, particular parts that relate to life in London. Will explore use of diaries and journals as records of how people lived, how they felt and thought about things. Possible seminars looking at other notable diarists through the ages (e.g. Pepys, Virginia Woolf, Anais Ninn, earlier diarists such as Pliny, etc).
- Workshops on journal writing, in which people will be encouraged to start and keep a diary, leading to an annual event where a cross section of people from a wide range of communities are encouraged to keep a diary (in a number of formats) over (say) the same month, with the diaries being kept at Broomfield to form a growing record of peoples' lives at the start of the 21st century.

- Notable residents of Broomfield – e.g. the Jackson family, who commissioned the mural and transformed the House internally during the early 18th century (links to India and the Empire and army reform); Ralph Littler who was active in the campaign to acquire Alexandra Park and Palace for public ownership.

Opportunity & Problem

Material could be designed and offered to schools, especially secondary school, relating to citizenship studies, addressing issues such as:

- Who should decide how public money is spent? How should the Council and other public bodies prioritise the different calls on their financial resources?
- Does 'heritage' matter, and if so, how much? What is 'heritage', and whose heritage is it anyway? If different sorts of people value different things, who decides? Who should decide what happens to the heritage? Should the Council have had to renovate Broomfield? Should people be prevented from doing what they want with their property (e.g. through controls on historic buildings and conservation areas?) Is it different whether the property is publicly or privately owned?
- How are decisions arrived at by public bodies such as a Council? What is the process? How much do the views of different groups of people get taken into account? Do different sorts of people have different amounts of influence on the decision-taking process? How can matters be resolved when there are competing views? As well as exploring the political aspects of the process this topic could be used to explain to pupils the nature of central and local government and the relationship between them. They could attend a Council meeting. They could also learn how the Council's budget is set, where its money comes from and the constraints on spending. The function of legislation could be demonstrated through their studying the Act of Parliament that prevents the owner of a listed building from demolishing it (or at least punishes them if they do.)

This is a draft for consultants to use as a base for expounding an exciting education theme for the house and park environs