

# Connecting Communities

## Southwark Libraries and Heritage Strategy 2019-2022

**“A library is not a luxury but one of the necessities of life”**

**Henry Ward Beecher**

# Foreword

*Libraries are truly magical places.*

*No other place allows you to come through its doors, without asking why you are there, what you are doing and what entitles you to be there. There is a great sense of freedom in being able to enter and explore your local library.*

*In their most traditional sense, our libraries are continuing to provide borrowing services. Through borrowing these books, there are endless opportunities to grow your imagination, explore new worlds and realities, delve into history, learn about new things and create new experiences.*

*But our libraries are now so much more than just about books. They also provide a vital resource for so many of our residents by allowing them access to the internet, to computers, and to quiet spaces to work and study.*

*We want libraries to be spaces for the whole community to use, whether that be through baby sensory sessions, community group activities, or accessing local council services.*

**Councillor Rebecca Lury,  
Cabinet Member for Culture, Leisure, Equalities and Communities**



*“...The reference library, where my thoughts were to rage.  
I ate book after book, page after page.  
I scoffed poetry for breakfast and novels for tea.  
And plays for my supper. No more poverty.  
Welcome young poet, in here you are free  
to follow your star to where you should be.”*

**From: Whitechapel Library by Bernard Kops**

We see the huge value that our libraries bring to our Borough, and that is why we have set out a new library and heritage strategy. This provides a fresh look at the challenges that we are facing, whilst looking for solutions that mean we can keep these spaces open when people want them to be. There is a reason why communities love their libraries. They are the democratic spaces in our communities. No other place allows you to come through its doors without asking you why you are there, what you are doing and what entitles you to be there. Everyone from the smallest baby to the oldest community elder enjoy the freedom that is going to their local library.

Your library card is your first badge of citizenship when you have the thrill of presenting it to the librarian to borrow your own books all for free.

Going to the library can be part of your daily routine to read the newspaper, a haven in which to study for exams, a place to learn new skills or find that one bit of information you cannot find anywhere else.

It is a place where you can celebrate the history of your community, its distinctive and unique character, spaces, places and stories. It can open up new worlds through reading as one book leads to another or enable you to expand your horizons through the discovery of knowledge you never knew existed.

Libraries bring people together providing space to join together to participate whether it is in community activities, hobbies and recreation groups or to access local council services.

The library embodies the notion of society, and remains a place where you can go for free, whether to increase your understanding and knowledge, borrow the latest popular fiction bestseller, access the internet or simply just relax, think and dream.



# About this strategy

Southwark has a network of modern libraries located across the borough in which we continue to invest and develop. We have great physical and digital spaces, extensive resources and passionate, skilled staff.

We want all residents to be proud of their libraries, to think of them as the first place they go for information, access to council services, for reading, learning and cultural enrichment. Events and activities in all our libraries such as children's storytimes, reading groups, literary talks and local history workshops play a crucial role in contributing to this.

Through our library services we want to inspire reading and lifelong learning, help people live healthy and happy lives and strengthen our communities. As a physical entity the library also acts as a meeting place for the local community to share interests, ideas, and aspirations. We need to ensure that the services are relevant and provide what our communities want and need. We also have to make sure that resources are used efficiently and effectively.

To that end Southwark's library service contributes to a number of strategic priorities, such as economic development, the national skills agenda, and health and well-being initiatives. The library service is also ideally suited to work in partnership with others to deliver these priorities.

In order to ensure that library and heritage services are relevant and provide what our communities want and need we launched the 'Let's talk about libraries' consultation in September 2018 which ran for eight weeks. 1,782 responses to the consultation were received. A separate shorter consultation was carried out with children, with 345 responses received. We also carried out focus groups with library staff. Results from the consultation have been used to inform this strategy.

## Making connections

We believe that libraries make connections with people and learning: people and culture: people and information and people and their communities.

We want this strategy to deliver these connections by:

1. Becoming a leader in digital access and usage for residents
2. Supporting the health and well-being of residents
3. Supporting educational achievement of residents through engagement with reading, literacy and learning
4. Improving access to the cultural riches that Southwark has to offer
5. Delivering social inclusion, economic development & libraries as community spaces
6. Celebrating Southwark as a place through engagement with its local history and rich heritage

# Fairer Future Promises

There is always a need to review, consider and make changes to the services we deliver, ensuring that they are relevant to the needs of the local community. This is what we aim to do through this strategy.

The objectives for Southwark's library service are informed by the council's Fairer Future promises specifically in relation to:

- Providing the best start in life
- Promoting healthy and active lives
- Revitalised neighbourhoods
- Investment in libraries

## Council Plan Objectives

The Council Plan 2018-22 presents a set of commitments which will help us achieve our vision of a fairer future for all. Libraries & Heritage have a key role to play in helping to deliver these. The Council Plan sets out these commitments across eight themes:

- A place to call home
- A place to belong
- A greener borough
- A full employment borough
- A healthier life
- A great start in life
- A safer community
- A vibrant Southwark

The Council Plan sets out the following specific commitments for libraries:

- Build a new library on the Aylesbury estate (as part of Regeneration project)
- Build a new library on the Walworth Road (as part of Regeneration project)
- Open a new library at Grove Vale
- Ensure Kingswood House remains an asset for the local community and improve facilities on the Kingswood estate
- Keep libraries open, keep investing and ensure they are open when people need them

# Where we are now

The library and heritage services of the London Borough of Southwark are at the forefront of innovative and customer focused services for our residents.

Southwark provides a high quality library, heritage and archives service including a wide range of book stock, which caters for the borough's diverse population, a full range of events and activities for children and adults, internet and wi-fi facilities in all libraries, and an expanding e-books and e-magazines service.

There is a comprehensive range of online resources enabling access to newspaper archives, providing reference and information services and access to community information. All our libraries boast a wide range of books and there are specific book collections catering for the diverse needs of the local community including Black writing, LGBT collections and Books on Prescription. To promote social inclusion the library service also provides a home delivery service catering for the reading needs of all in the community who are unable to visit the library.

Children and young people will always be a key priority for consideration in our provision of library services. Each library has a dedicated children's area with high quality, up-to-date materials to support reading and learning. We run regular activities for all ages including baby rhyme times, homework clubs, reading groups and coding clubs. Each library provides a range of facilities for young people in need of a quiet space to study and prepare for exams.

The library service also has a key role to play in promoting social regeneration. Through the range of services offered from IT sessions, reading groups, events and activities, and use of libraries as meeting spaces they are able to help create new opportunities, promote wellbeing and reduce inequalities so that people have better lives, in stronger communities, and are well placed to achieve their potential.

There are 12 libraries spread across the borough. There is also a borough archive, local history library, heritage collections including the Cuming collections and the service is the custodian of the borough art collection.

The library service has some of the highest performance indicators across libraries in London including:

- 2.1m annual visits
- 1.5m annual book issues
- 309,000 books in stock
- Resident satisfaction with the service is 91%

The service has been implementing a modernisation programme with new and refurbished libraries, ICT improvements and digital developments such as our online heritage website, e-books and e-magazines.

In this administration we have already delivered:

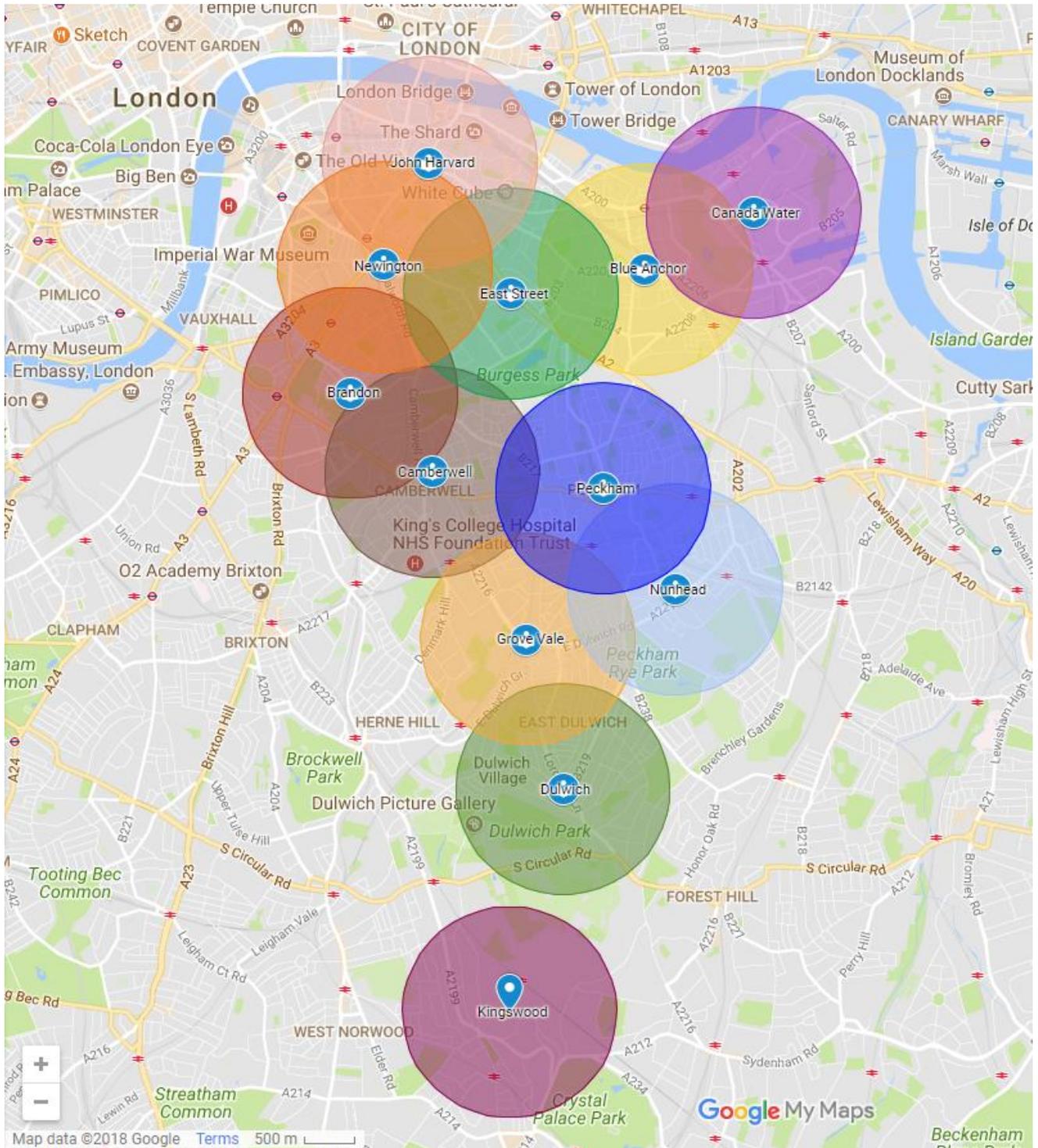
- Improvements to East Street library
- A new library at Grove Vale

There are plans for further development in the coming years, including:

- A new library on the Aylesbury Estate
- Investment into Kingswood library
- New ICT strategy and projects – procurement for new Library Management System, self-service kiosks and refresh of public PCs to enhance service delivery, maximise efficiency and enable best value
- New Newington library and heritage facility
- New ways of managing libraries using technology based solutions for maximising library opening hours



# Libraries in Southwark



# 1. Digital Connections



## The challenge

As the world becomes ever more digital, access to technology and the ability to operate confidently and safely are increasingly important. Being digitally capable can make the difference between success and failure, being healthy or unhealthy and being engaged or isolated in your community. Approximately 11% of the UK population still lack internet access at home. 9% of adults and 22% of disabled adults have never used the internet. (From Office For National Statistics). It is becoming increasingly difficult to access day-to-day services without a basic level of digital literacy. The ability to confidently use the internet for information seeking, managing household finances or simply to be socially connected is an important life skill - now as vital as being skilled in basic literacy and numeracy.

## What we want to achieve

We want all residents to have free access to the highest quality, modern and innovative digital and online services. We want to enable our residents to maximise their use, understanding and navigation of digital technology. The library is well placed to deliver digital literacy and provide access to the internet in a safe environment to those in need of developing their online skills thus enabling them to participate fully and confidently in the modern world. The library service strives to achieve this through our developing programme of IT skills sessions, coding clubs and expanding range of e-resources. It also provides a vital service for those who do not have access to digital services in their own homes.

We want to make sure that children and young people are equipped to make the best use of digital technology to support their education and learning.

The recent consultation survey results indicate that digital services are clearly important to library users. 58% of survey respondents said that using the internet in the library was important to them, and 61% identified wi-fi provision as important. 61% said using a computer, printer or scanner was important to them. 42% of survey respondents said that borrowing e-books or e-audio was important to them, and there has been an increase of 70% in loans of these materials in 2018. Expansion of the existing coding clubs programme was a key theme to come out of both the adults and children's consultation comments.

## Our commitments

Our commitments are to:

- Provide and promote access to online council services
- Improve and expand digital access (public PCs & wi-fi) in all libraries
- Promote and encourage increased take up of e-books, audio & magazines, and establish loans of tablets
- Develop and embed IT learning programmes for the local community
- Review and promote a range of up to date online resources
- To implement a new library management system and the next generation of self-service technologies to enhance the customer experience
- To provide easy and supported access for children and young people to a wide range of digital resources for education and learning
- To provide coding clubs for children and young people
- To provide assistance for users to access council services including help with filling in online housing forms and renewal of Freedom Passes
- Participation in the Brexit Assisted Digital Support programme for EU citizens in the UK
- To provide digital labs, makerspaces, and virtual reality experiences including a "virtual museum" to showcase library and heritage resources

***"I have often used the library IT services. They are a CRUCIAL part of keeping life together if you need a bit of help at some stage. A lifeline when there are few others".***

**Let's Talk About Libraries respondent**

## 2. Health and Wellbeing Connections



### The challenge

Health inequality in Southwark is considerable. We know that life expectancy is less than the national average. Alcohol/substance misuse, smoking, unhealthy diet (e.g. child obesity) and unprotected sex continue to be major risks to good health in our population. There are high numbers of undetected cases of diabetes, hypertension and heart disease in Southwark population. Socio-economic challenges such as unemployment and poor housing result in a relatively higher rate of child poverty and social exclusion which subsequently contribute to poor physical and mental health manifesting in health inequalities (from Southwark Health and Wellbeing Strategy 2015 – 2020)

## What we want to achieve

Supporting strategies to improve the health of our population and reduce health inequalities is a key priority for the library service. Our libraries play an important role in boosting health literacy: a person's skills, knowledge and understanding about how to find and use information so they can act to support and improve their own health and wellbeing. We want residents to have access to quality assured health information in a variety of formats. We want our libraries to be used as spaces where health and wellbeing groups can work with the community in a trusted and non-threatening venue. We want them to be seen as places of welcome, safety, access to information and support, and gateways to contact and interact with others. We want to support young people in making healthy life style choices and improving their wellbeing by access to accurate and up-to-date resources and information.

Results from the consultation survey show that health and wellbeing services in libraries are becoming increasingly popular. 51% of respondents said they were interested in borrowing health related books from libraries, 32% were interested in counselling sessions in libraries, and 31% were interested in health check clinics run by health professionals.

## Our commitments

Our commitments are to:

- Ensure that libraries spaces are made available for use by partners providing health and wellbeing services
- Work in partnership with Public Health to promote health improvements
- Provide specialist book collections, promotions and events focusing on health and wellbeing
- Promote initiatives to support children and families with autism and learning disabilities
- Develop services to help meet the needs of an aging population
- Ensure library spaces are designed as “dementia friendly” environments and use our resources for reminiscence sessions and other activities aimed at supporting people and families living with dementia
- Work with partners such as Brook and support initiatives to provide sexual health and wellbeing services for young people
- Work with health partners to provide a range of resources designed to equip young people to make healthy lifestyle choices
- To provide specialist “Shelf Help” book collections and work with organisations such as Young Minds to support mental health and wellbeing for young people

***“The library placed in the community for people to use is itself fundamental to health and sense of community and therefore wellbeing”***

**Let's Talk About Libraries Respondent**

# 3. Reading and Learning Connections



## The challenge

Reading and literacy are two of the most fundamental skills in life. Increasing literacy is vital to increase people's chances in the job market, reducing dependence on benefits and improving quality of life. Reading is also a great source of enjoyment and pleasure. It can be an individual passion or a shared experience. Learning equips people for life with the development of life and employment skills. Around 15% or 5.1 million adults in England have literacy levels at or below those expected of an 11-year-old (from National Literacy Trust). Libraries are well placed to support adults with low literacy levels which helps to increase their self-esteem and persuade them of the benefits of improving their reading and writing. Libraries already support adult literacy through a range of reading promotions and in partnerships with adult learning providers. Libraries also have a key role to play in enhancing the literacy and reading skills of children and young people, supporting children's education and providing a rich variety of reading opportunities.

## What we want to achieve

We want libraries in Southwark to provide everyone with free access to books and literature regardless of age, disability, wealth or education. We want to extend the range of online reading material and activity available.

We want to ensure that our libraries offer free resources for study and learning, including online resources, and quiet spaces for study and reflection that people may not have at home.

We will continue to purchase a wide range of new book stock to encourage users to read, borrow and share their reading experiences with others.

In particular we will focus on supporting the needs of children and young people through our proactive approaches to encouraging reading and learning with a wide range of quality activities run for all ages and abilities throughout the year. We will ensure a comprehensive range of book stock for enjoyment, learning and information to suit all ages including collections for teenagers and books available in multiple formats and languages to cater for the borough's diverse communities.

Reading and learning were identified by consultation respondents as being two of the key library activities. 90% of survey respondents said that borrowing books from the library was important to them. 61% of survey respondents said that study space in libraries was important to them. 37% of respondents were interested in library reading groups and 187 people said they would be willing to volunteer to run reading groups.

## Our commitments

Our commitments are to:

- Ensure best use of book stock and increased supplier selection to meet need
- Provide reading promotions around national campaigns
- Run Bookstart, storytimes, Baby Rhyme-times
- Run a Literature Festival for emerging & local authors
- Organise annual Summer and Winter Reading Challenge programmes for children and young people
- Ensure study space for students & learners
- We will support adult literacy by working in partnership with the adult and family learning and skills service to promote basic skills, literacy and ESOL sessions in libraries.
- Recommend and advise customers on new reading choices and experiences to enrich their enjoyment of reading
- Provide specialist book collections for teenagers and young adults
- Host and promote reading groups in libraries catering for a wide range of readers including adults and children

***“The existence of the library opens up cultural activities, ensuring that the books I wish to read are there and introducing me to books I did not know I wanted to read until I saw them in the library!”***

**Let's Talk About Libraries Respondent**

## 4. Cultural Connections



### The challenge

Cultural and creative opportunities enrich lives. They are important in developing local quality of life, sense of place and individual wellbeing. They also help to build skills and reduce social isolation by encouraging participation in shared activities. Libraries can offer spaces and opportunities for people to create and explore. They can introduce people to the world of arts and culture, provide access to arts experiences and help foster ideas and imagination.

## What we want to achieve

Libraries in Southwark contribute to and are well placed to extend cultural enrichment because of their use by all social groups and their role as inclusive community spaces. Our libraries provide a range of cultural activities both run by the service and in partnership with other cultural organisations. We want to expand the library cultural offer through development of events and activities aimed at those who have had limited or no access to cultural events. This will be achieved through the Southwark Presents culture access scheme, the newly established Festival of Words in libraries showcasing the work of new and emerging writers and poets, and through open mic participatory events and creative writing workshops enabling the community to actively take part in the creative process. We will also work with external creative partners to deliver cultural experiences aimed at under-represented audiences such as those for Black History Month and LGBT month and establish events to promote health and wellbeing to inspire increased confidence and self esteem. We know that barriers exist that prevent some children and young people accessing and participating in cultural activities. We want to break down these barriers by the provision of a wide range of cultural activities designed to engage and inspire.

There was significant interest among consultation survey respondents in the provision of cultural arts, music and literature events and activities in libraries. 59% of survey respondents said that attending a cultural event in libraries was important to them. 65% of respondents would be interested in attending talks or lectures in libraries, 63% in film screenings, 52% in literature or poetry events and 50% in theatrical events.

## Our commitments

Our commitments are to:

- Promote the Southwark Presents culture access scheme and Southwark Pioneers initiatives.
- Contribute to the Cultural Strategy & promotion of Creative Southwark
- Provide cultural arts, music and literature events and activities in libraries
- Work with local cultural organisations to promote cultural events and offers to local residents
- Organise an annual Festival of Words literary events programme including participatory events providing the local community with a platform for expression
- Work with cultural partners to extend the range of activities available for children and young people utilising library spaces to expand access to cultural experiences

***“Libraries have always played a vital role in my life from when I was a child exploring literature to an adult increasing my knowledge of the world and its people. When I couldn’t afford to buy a book libraries were my life line. I’ve attended poetry readings, music events, art exhibitions and have done research in local history. They are places for quiet, down time, researching topics and inspiring me and friends”***

**Let’s Talk About Libraries Respondent**

# 5. Community Connections



## The challenge

It is estimated that there are around 3.9 million workless households and 120,000 families in the UK experiencing multiple problems related to social exclusion. (From Department for Work & Pensions). Research shows that children from poorer economic backgrounds and troubled families experience the very worst outcomes and make significant demands on a wide range of local services. Through its range of services the library can do much to improve the life chances of young people, support adults in improving their skills and enabling them to find work. The library also acts as a place to meet others thus helping to tackle isolation and loneliness.

## What we want to achieve

We want our libraries in Southwark to be open to everyone and be places where people can come to meet others. We want our staff to understand their community's needs and be trusted to provide reliable guidance and support on a wide range of issues when people need help.

Our libraries can support businesses to start up and grow by providing information, working spaces and sources of support and advice. They can also help attract businesses into an area and keep them there, by contributing to 'place-making' and overall quality of life.

We want to promote libraries as safe, welcome spaces for children and young people to meet, share ideas and participate in activities for education and enjoyment.

We will provide access to meeting rooms for hire in our libraries including concessionary rates of hire for community organisations.

From the recent consultation many survey respondents identified the library as a key community space- welcoming and inclusive, a place where people from all areas of the community can meet. 47% of respondents would be interested in attending storytimes and rhyme time events in libraries, and 17% in attending youth forums. 541 people said they would be interested in using library meeting rooms and 361 would be interested in the home library delivery service.

## Our commitments

Our commitments are to:

- Ensure that libraries are relevant, welcoming environments for all in the local community
- Provide meeting rooms in libraries for community and commercial use
- Review the home library service to maximise social inclusion and ensure we target those most in need
- Provide cafes in selected libraries to increase visits
- Participate in the British Library business start-up programme using libraries in Southwark
- Provide modern, well equipped spaces in libraries for community activities and events
- Work with partners to provide youth forums, youth council and social activities for young people in libraries
- Secure a long term lease for a new library in the Walworth Road to provide library and heritage services

***“The library is my refuge, my sanctuary, my retreat. When I feel overwhelmed by life or grief, I go to a library and immediately feel at peace. A library is not just a source of practical services for me; a library heals my soul”***

**Let's Talk About Libraries Respondent**

# 6: Connecting by telling the story of Southwark



## The challenge

The heritage and local history service aims to value Southwark's distinct and unique spaces, places and stories whilst recognising that the borough is part of a larger picture of local, national and global society and history. The challenges ahead centre around how to preserve, protect and promote the heritage of the borough, how to maximise access to the collections and how best to tell the story of Southwark to develop a sense of belonging and engender community purpose and pride. There is an obvious need to find a new fit-for-purpose physical home for the heritage collection to enable displays and exhibitions, however, it is important also to utilise the latest in digital technologies to bring the past to life and inform new audiences through new mediums so that it engages and inspires the local community.

## What we want to achieve

We want to provide maximum access to the borough's comprehensive heritage collection utilising both a physical and virtual presence. Whilst we develop a permanent location for the heritage and Cuming collections we will continue to provide access to objects via outreach events and partnership exhibitions with other galleries and museums. The physical space

envisaged will include exhibition space and study areas enabling educational heritage activities, talks and workshops. It will be a flexible space utilising the latest display features, showcasing a diverse range of exhibitions and displays to promote the museum artefacts. We are also developing the heritage provision to include the latest digital technology in the form of virtual museum tours, 3D printing and access to the expanding online heritage website containing photographs, 3D images and artefacts from the Cuming collection, bringing to life the stories of the past in new, imaginative and interactive ways.

We also want to improve access to the heritage and local history resources particularly for children and young people to support their educational learning. We will engage with young people in exciting and innovative ways enabling them to better understand and appreciate Southwark's rich history. This will be achieved through immersive, participatory and interactive activities such as handling workshops, virtual museum tours using VR technology and take-over days to illuminate the story of Southwark.

The recent consultation indicates that heritage and archive services are important to the community. 38% of survey respondents said they would be interested in virtual museum tours or exhibitions and 40% would like a digitised photograph collection to be available. 58% of respondents would be interested in finding out about local history and 38% in attending heritage or archive exhibitions. 40% of respondents (712 people) said that they do not use heritage and archive services because they are unaware of the services provided.

## Our commitments

Our commitments are to:

- Provide a new heritage facility as part of the development of a new library in Walworth
- Be a sector leader in the use of digital technology for heritage services
- Improve access to the archive and achieve accreditation in 2022
- Develop a schools outreach offer promoting local history and heritage resources to children and young people
- Promote the collections through organisation of heritage exhibitions in collaboration with key museum and cultural partners
- Provide archives catalogue records for National Archives Discovery database – allowing users to search the catalogues of multiple archives collections across the country
- Obtain external funding for digitisation projects for the archives and heritage collections
- Exploit our archive and museum collections to engage children and young people to learn about Southwark and their place in its history through handling workshops, virtual museum tours and take-over days.

***“I highly value a community's ability to learn about its past and, in this way, connect to its present, and create closer relationships among neighbours, especially those of different backgrounds”***

**Let's Talk About Libraries Respondent**