



Berkhamsted Heritage Hub

Strategy

Introduction

This leaflet outlines a strategy which stakeholders in Berkhamsted have agreed for engaging a wider range of people in the heritage of the town and telling its story more effectively.

It is a result of a study that has looked in detail at options for what might be done and included an extensive programme of consultation. The study was funded by a grant from the National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) obtained by the Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society (BLHMS) on behalf of individuals and groups with interest in the town's heritage. Organisations participating on the Hub Project Group included, in addition to BLHMS, Rectory Lane Cemetery Project, Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust, the Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society, and the Dacorum Heritage Trust.

The study was produced by a team led by Fourth Street (Place Consultants), which included Thomas Ford and Partners (Conservation Architects), HKD (Exhibition Designers) and Michael Copeman (a historian specialising in historic buildings). Additional work on the BLHMS collection was undertaken by Emily Toettcher, Curator of Amersham Museum.

The full study is available on the BLHMS website
www.berkhamsted-history.org.uk

Comments and suggestions are welcome.

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The project group thanks National Lottery players, and the National Lottery Heritage Fund, for making these investigations possible.



Children enjoying heritage at a NLHF supported event.
Similar initiatives are important for the Hub

An ancient and interesting place

Berkhamsted is an ancient settlement with a fascinating history.

It lies in the relatively narrow valley of the River Bulbourne, an important route through the Chiltern Hills for thousands of years. The High Street follows Akeman Street, the Roman Road from St Albans to Cirencester. The valley has resulted in the town's linear form and is why a major Norman castle was located here. Saxon lords surrendered to William the Conqueror at the castle in 1066, a seminal event in British history.

The town was wealthy in medieval times because of its royal manor and castle (with numerous links with royalty and also famous people like Thomas Becket and Chaucer), its location on a main trading route, and its successful timber and wool industries. Several surviving buildings on the High Street have high-quality medieval timber frames that are reminders of those prosperous times. The parish church, St Peter's, the oldest surviving functioning building in the town, celebrates its 800th anniversary in 2022.

Berkhamsted declined, in relative terms, from the mid-16th century. The castle was closed and plundered for building material. Berkhamsted School was founded at that time, however, with its surviving original school building dating from 1544. The school rapidly expanded from 1864 and now has a strong presence in the town centre, creating a distinctive sense of place.

The town's most famous resident of the modern era, writer Graham Greene (1904-1991), was born at St Johns, a boarding house of Berkhamsted School, where his father was housemaster (and future headmaster). Many of his novels have scenes in Berkhamsted.

The town became an important coach staging post by the 18th century, linking London with the Midlands and the West Country. A fine group of coaching inns, characterised by gates leading to yards, is a feature of the High Street.

The cutting of the Grand Junction Canal, followed by the arrival of the London and Birmingham Railway in 1837-8, stimulated industrial development. Cooper's Sheep-dip works, which exported its arsenic-based compound world-wide, was the largest concern. Other key industries involved timber, nurseries, pheasants, iron works and mantles.

A magnificent town

Berkhamsted is today a beautiful and thriving community in which the heritage is all around and forms a wonderful backdrop to day to day life.

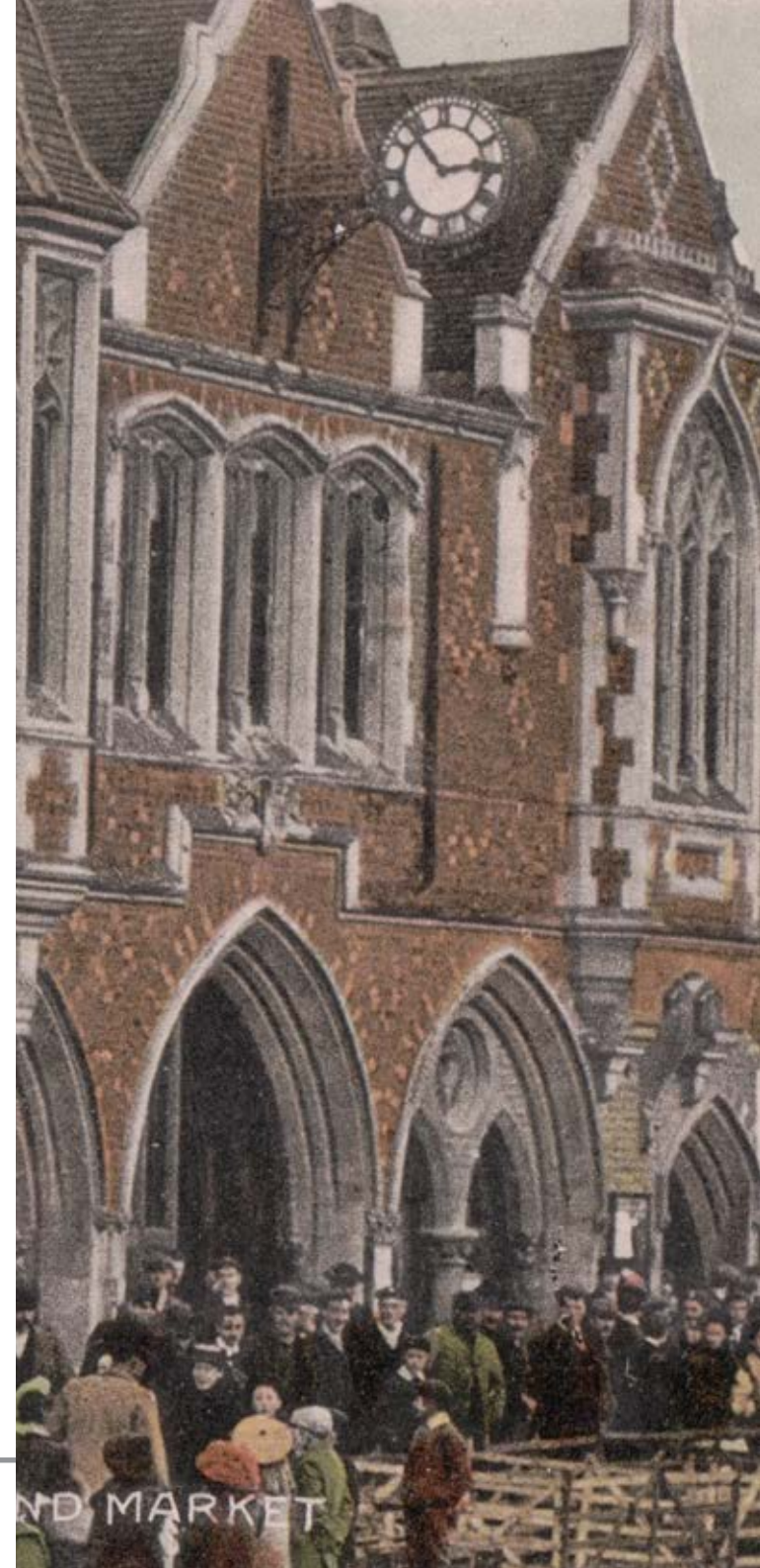
The medieval town plan is clearly legible, with its long High Street and the church still pre-eminent. The castle, once so important, was cut off from the town by the railway, which has given it a certain secluded charm. It is under-appreciated as an historical attraction.

The canal runs through the town, forming an attractive linear park and pleasant environment for walking and cycling. It is easy to walk into the countryside to explore its significant heritage value, particularly the former medieval park attached to the castle and the two commons.

The old buildings of the centre are almost all listed at grade II or locally, underlining the great concentration of such 'ordinary' heritage in the town. The suburbs, a reflection of the town's popularity with commuters, have numerous buildings of high architectural quality, including several cared for by the local schools.

The Berkhamsted conservation area covers most of the pre-1914 built-up area and the castle. An exceptionally detailed conservation area character statement was prepared in 2015. The conservation area has 52 entries in the national heritage list, covering some 70 individual properties. There are nearly 400 properties on the local list. A separate conservation area appraisal covers the centre of Northchurch.

The Town Hall in 1913



Building on strong foundations

Berkhamsted and its district have, therefore, amassed many and varied heritage stories over the centuries.

It has an active heritage sector, involving many organisations and individuals. BLHMS runs a large programme of events, talks and publications, including the Heritage Open Days in September each year, which coincides with the Chiltern Society's Heritage Festival. Dacorum Heritage Trust (DHT) regularly organises pop-up exhibitions and runs other valuable services. A heritage trail connects 32 sites of interest marked by blue plaques, with an accompanying leaflet, and audio trails, produced by Berkhamsted Town Council, providing additional information. There is also a Graham Greene Trail, created by the Graham Greene Birthplace Trust. The Berkhamsted & District Archaeological Society, the Berkhamsted Citizens Association, and other community bodies also contribute significantly to understanding and enjoying the local heritage.

BLHMS has a collection of about 29,000 items relating to the history of the town, stored and managed by the accredited DHT along with collections from other parts of the District.

The Friends of St Peters are restoring Rectory Lane Cemetery, with a grant of just under £1 million from the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Big Lottery Fund. The project is restoring the historic features and creating landscaped public spaces. The project includes documenting people interred in the cemetery and a programme of special events to engage local people.

Berkhamsted Castle Trust has recently been established by local volunteers, supported and encouraged by English Heritage, the custodians of the site, to improve facilities at the castle. It has obtained a donation of land on the east side of the castle and funding to facilitate its work. A conservation and management plan commissioned by English Heritage provides clarity on the significance of the site, as an important step in planning its future development as a visitor attraction.



Popular Berkhamsted Youth Theatre performance during Heritage Open Days 2018

Objectives

The aim is to engage a much larger number and a greater diversity of people, especially those who live in and around Berkhamsted, in the history and heritage of the town.

Group	Character	Objectives
Local people	20,000 people. Mainly affluent. Family-orientated. About 1,800 retired	Most to have greater understanding of the heritage of their town. A sufficient proportion of them involved in volunteering and putting on events. More children and young people to enjoy their local heritage. New residents to become aware of the roots of their community. More people feeling lonely or excluded to be involved in inclusive heritage-related activity.
People living within about 30 minute drive.	1.16 million. Family-orientated.	A substantial number to visit Berkhamsted, attracted by its history. Special emphasis on attracting visitors by non-car methods.
Tourists in the area.	c.50,000 people visiting Dacorum district for holiday; 100,000 visiting friends and relatives.	
Local schools	10 primary schools with 2,500 students & 4 secondary schools with c.3,750 students within the town boundaries.	A higher proportion engaged with the heritage of the town, especially at primary level.

A Partnership Approach

Delivery of the strategy will be a long-term project facilitated by a partnership between the main organisations that have an interest in the heritage of the town.

The partnership is referred to as “The Heritage Hub”. It will form project teams to develop plans for each initiative in more detail in preparation for funding applications. The partnership will assess the most appropriate legal format to take initiatives forward as the project develops.

One of numerous stakeholder workshops held
in preparing this strategy



The strategy

Initiative 1: Create a Virtual Hub

The main elements of this initiative are:

- Complete the collections audit including policies and procedure, rationalisation, and future security.
- Digitise existing collections in order to use images in a range of interpretation portals.
- Create a physical digital drop-in centre and a campaign to digitise collections, encouraging local people to bring objects and photos in to be recorded.
- Create attractive and user-friendly access to the collections so as to tell important local heritage stories, interpret sites, and signpost other resources.

Initiative 2: Create a town-wide Heritage Interpretation Network (HIN)

The main elements of this initiative are:

- Create 10 wall-mounted or free-standing interpretation boards on the key themes telling the story of town's history to form an "inner loop" trail with "spokes" to other places of interest.
- Replace current trail with site-specific information plaques.
- Create a new wayfinding system to include street totems and monoliths (preferably near the station and new car park).
- Create timelines at station and car park.
- Acquire a mobile interpretation vehicle that can take heritage to schools, homes for the elderly, community groups etc.
- Commission an art installation commemorating aspects of the town's history in a manner that is attractive and interesting to a wide range of people.

The above will provide access to further digital information and tell people of the virtual hub and various ways to access it.



Initiative 3: Celebrate heritage through events, performances and activities

The main elements of this initiative are:

- Establish a “Heritage Month” festival in September, with changing themes, to build on the Heritage Open Days and Chiltern Heritage Festival.
- Deliver an annual programme of activities and events appealing to adults and to children, such as: live enactments; heritage art & culture competitions; related film showings; talks; pop-up micro-exhibitions; and “what this building used to be like” displays in shops. This includes a proposed “Ten Centuries Through Ten Stories” 3-year programme of performance/story-telling which builds on experience gained in the Rectory Lane Cemetery Project.

Initiative 4: Designing visitor heritage interpretation facilities

- With the full involvement of Church and Castle managers, studies to test the full scope, costings and other feasibility of creating interpretation of the town’s history in the lodge at Berkhamsted Castle and in St Peter’s Church.

Working Towards

Informed by the studies outlined in Initiative 4, the Heritage Hub will work with key stakeholders to progress the following initiatives:

- A Visitor Centre with exhibition at Berkhamsted Castle focussing on its interpretation and context.
- Heritage exhibition spaces in St Peter’s Church, focussing on the town’s development and, separately, the history of the church. With, possibly, enhanced amenity, performance and activity areas.

Drama performances bring life to heritage at NHLF-supported Rectory Lane Cemetery Project, 2019



Illustrations of Initiative 2

Illustration of the proposed Heritage Interpretation System, Stari Grad World Heritage Site, Croatia



Example of alternative style and use of QR codes to obtain additional information



Examples of possible heritage monuments

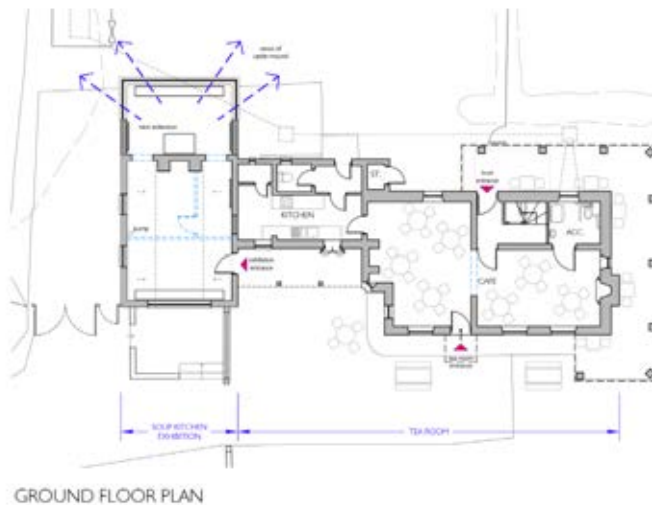
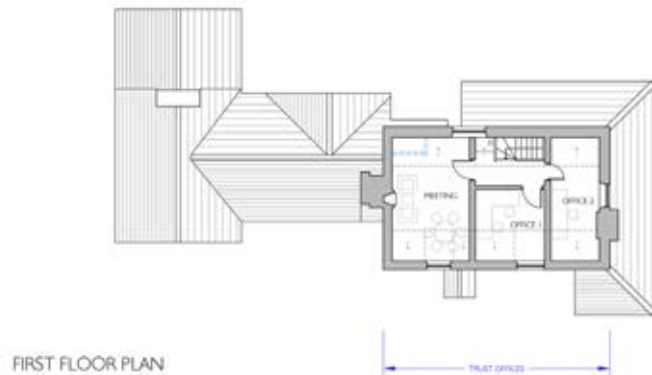


Combined wayfinding and heritage interpretation, Bristol

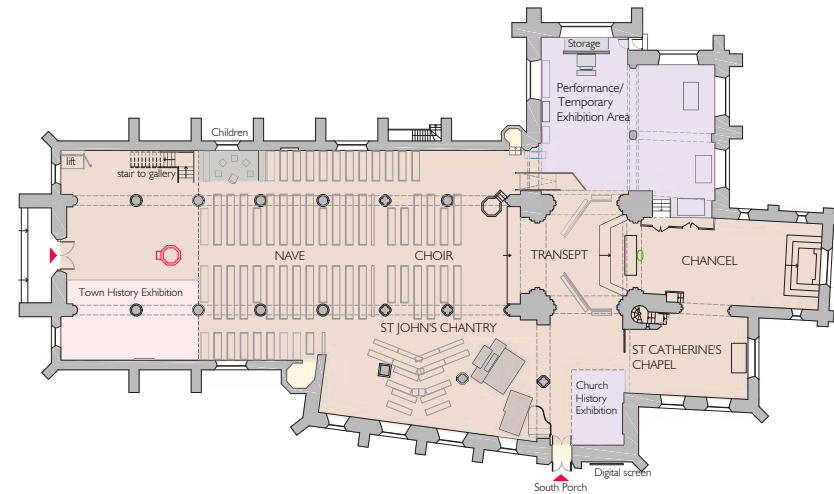


Illustrations of Initiative 4

An indicative illustration of how the lodge at the Castle might be used for café, exhibition, offices and a small meeting space



Indicative plan showing an option for how St Peter's Church might accommodate an exhibition telling the history of the town as part of becoming a more active day to day community hub



Members of the Project Team investigating the lodge at Berkhamsted Castle

Illustrations of varying different styles of exhibition, from traditional to more radical, that could be used in the Castle Lodge and St Peters Church



Costs & Funding

The three-year costs are estimated as:

Initiative 1: Create a Virtual Hub - £190,000

Initiative 2: Town-Wide Heritage Interpretation Network (HIN) - £195,000

Initiative 3: Celebrate Heritage through Events, Performances and Activities - £215,000

Initiative 4: Developing design solutions for visitor facilities at Castle and St Peters - £60,000

Staffing (Project Manager and Community Engagement Officer) plus Administration: £235,000

Other (promotion, training, evaluation, legal, etc) - £35,000

Total funding requirement (before contingency, VAT, inflation) - £930,000

The strategy will therefore need an initial fund-raising campaign to cover the four main initiatives to be invested over a three-year period. The Hub will seek funding from a variety of sources including the National Lottery Heritage Fund, Arts Council England, grant giving trusts and sponsorship by local companies and individuals.

