

<b>Meeting:</b> Council	<b>Date:</b> 08 December 2010	<b>Classification:</b> Unrestricted	<b>Report No:</b> 11.2
<b>Report of:</b> Corporate Director Communities, Localities and Culture  <b>Originating officer(s)</b> Heather Bonfield, Interim Service Head, Cultural Services		<b>Title:</b> Bancroft Local History Library and Archives  <b>Wards Affected: All</b>	

1. **SUMMARY**

This report describes the significance of the Bancroft Local History Library and Archives, provides information on the progress made to date on its development, the role of the Steering Group and advises Members on future planning for the building and its services currently being actioned by officers.

2. **RECOMMENDATIONS**

That the report be noted

3. **BACKGROUND**

- 3.1 The Bancroft Local History Library and Archives is a Grade 2 Listed Building which opened in 1861 as the Vestry Hall of the Hamlet of Mile End Old Town, but in 1902 it was adapted by Stepney Borough Council to become Mile End Library; in 1937 it was extended. It was first used for archives in 1906, with the current climate controlled strong-room being installed in 1988. Although the lending library aspect of Bancroft was subsequently closed, it has continued to be open to the public to consult the records, materials and archives.
- 3.2 Today the Bancroft holds the historic records of the Council (and its predecessors), historic documents, records and maps of local significance, journals, photographs, films and books relating to the Tower Hamlets area and its communities and a small collection of donated paintings and artefacts.
- 3.3 Over many years the fabric of the building deteriorated and unused areas of the building were used for storage; low staffing levels meant that cataloguing and storing materials was problematic and the building acquired an air of clutter and neglect. Despite this it retained loyal and dedicated supporters who visited regularly and it has materials of such significance that it receives enquiries and visitors from around the world.
- 3.4 In 2007 the Council began a consultation on the future of the service and various options were explored. Following a vigorous campaign by supporters

in 2008 the Council agreed to retain the Bancroft as the Borough's local history and archive and in 2009 invested £255,000 on the most pressing health and safety works. Since that time very substantial progress has been made with not only with regard to the building, but also the way the service operates and interest groups have been engaged. One of the key improvements was to appoint a professional and experienced Heritage Manager who leads on new developments, some of which are briefly listed below.

3.5 Amongst the most important developments has been the formation of a Steering Group of local interest groups (including the Save Bancroft Campaign Group) that was set up to help the Council develop its future plans for the Bancroft and its services. The group, which has an independent Chair, meets regularly and amongst its achievements have been the development of a vision for the building and services, joint-selection of the heritage architect with whom the Steering Group have been working, with officers, to the develop a master plan for Bancroft, advice and comment on works currently being undertaken and contributions to the development of policies, such as the Collections Policy and Local History and Archive Strategy which are currently being developed. The Steering Group has also worked with officers on the identification of possible funding streams and will remain a key contributor to the development and implementation of future plans for the Bancroft.

3.6 Other development have been:

- A monthly newsletter advising on activities and new acquisitions, etc is circulated
- A heritage architect (as referred to above) has been engaged to develop a master plan for the building; discussion on this plan is ongoing
- All materials stored in the Bancroft, but not relevant to its collections have been removed
- The capital works to: install an infra-red fire alarm, undertake fire compartmentalisation, asbestos removal, emergency lighting, install a ground floor wc for disabled people, make the entrance DDA compliant, and undertake limited roof repairs are nearing completion
- The climate controls of the strong-room have been replaced
- The entrance hall has been cleared and is being redecorated and will house regular exhibitions after the building re-opens mid-January
- Historic material have been removed from the reading room and stored with other records. The room has been "opened up" and more space and tables provided for researchers. Copies of maps and other materials will be made available in the room for users to self-select; a database of material held is being set up so that researchers can seek materials using key words instead of having to ask staff for assistance (although staff will still help on request)
- 40,000 photographs, paintings and artefacts have been catalogued, recorded and stored

- The staffing level has been reviewed and funding has been identified for professional archivists and outreach staff (this will be a requirement to achieve HLF); recruitment is planned for the New Year. In the meantime there are a substantial number of volunteers who are helping implement the changes
- Funding was secured for a Story of London project on the history of social housing in the Borough; a Black History month event was organised. Other outreach work includes undertaking guided walks and working with schools. These resulted in 700 people being engaged with the service on these projects in just a few months; the events were the first held at Bancroft since the 1980s
- Funding has been secured from Skills for the Future for Bengali Heritage trainees (2 x 12 months)

### **Future Developments**

- 3.7 In September 2010 £500,000 Section 106 funding was allocated to Bancroft for the next phase of works. The priority works are full roof repairs, the installation of a DDA compliant lift and upgrading services to the building to a modern standard. It is intended that the new lift will replace the existing one in the same position, but will be upgraded in a new shaft to modern standards of access. However before works are committed officers will ensure that they fit in with a bid to be made for Heritage Lottery Funding.
- 3.8 It is estimated that the Bancroft requires c £4.6m investment to fully restore it. Discussions have been taking place with the HLF for some time, but recent changes to the funding arrangements mean that a bid for National Funding can now be submitted in excess of £1m, with lower levels of match funding required. Working with the Steering Group officers will shortly develop proposals for the bid on which they will consult widely in the New Year with a view to submitting this to the HLF in May 2011. Provisional discussions indicate that a bid of c£2m could be made; demonstrating the national importance of the materials held at the Bancroft and that staffing is sufficient to manage materials and outreach will be key to success.
- 3.9 Plans are still being developed for Phase Three but if funding is successful a substantial part of the bid will relate to upgrading the secure archive storage (which is near its capacity) to provide storage for at least a further 60 years. A large room on the ground floor will be upgraded so that it can be used for educational purposes, the magnificent hall on the first floor (which was formerly the lending library will be fully restored and the former vestry offices on the ground floor will be refurbished and made accessible for community use. The aim will be to ensure that when the Bancroft is restored it will remain as flexible as possible so that it can meet any future changing needs.
- 3.10 As mentioned above, a Local History and Archive Strategy is being developed and will be submitted to the Mayor next year.

#### **4. COMMENTS OF THE CHIEF FINANCIAL OFFICER**

- 4.1 This report updates members on improvements made to Bancroft Library in the past 12 months which are outlined in paragraph 3.4 and proposals for future developments outlined in paragraph 3.5 and 3.6. As outlined in paragraph 3.6 above, it is estimated that Bancroft Library requires investment of approximately £4.6m to fully restore it and a bid will be submitted to HLF in the new year (following consultation), for up to £2m. Match funding will be required to support the bid, however at this stage the percentage requirement is unknown, but is expected to be in excess of 10%. At this stage, £0.5m has been secured via section 106 funding.

#### **5. CONCURRENT REPORT OF THE ASSISTANT CHIEF EXECUTIVE (LEGAL SERVICES)**

- 5.1 There are no legal implications arising directly from this report.

#### **6. ONE TOWER HAMLETS CONSIDERATIONS**

- 6.1 Shared history is important to building community cohesion and understanding. Sustaining the quality of and access to the unique materials stored at Bancroft and ensuring the capture of tomorrow's history today is therefore of paramount importance.

#### **7. SUSTAINABLE ACTION FOR A GREENER ENVIRONMENT**

- 7.1 Building works comply with requirements to conserve energy and use sustainable materials

#### **8. RISK MANAGEMENT IMPLICATIONS**

- 8.1 Recent works to install a fire alarm and undertake fire compartmentalisation have addressed a major risk. Locker arrangements to prevent researchers taking bags into the reading room and possibly removing materials have been implemented. The climate control of the archives has been recently upgraded, however the storage area is nearing capacity and a priority for an early phase of work will be to review all materials and storage methods to ensure that these are appropriate and adequate for the long-term future. Repairing the roof and guttering, etc, will ensure that risk of damage to the building interior and collections from water penetration will be minimised

#### **9. EFFICIENCY STATEMENT**

- 9.1 The future works will include improved electronic access to materials which will help people to self-serve when researching materials; however members of the public will always require professional assistance to help them locate and access materials.