

## **Adopt a Monument: Merton Proposal**

### **Background:**

Both English Heritage and Scottish Archaeology have run very successful “Adopt a Monument” schemes in the past. The former was directed more at schools, whilst the Scottish scheme was more targeted at adult learners.

Both schemes enabled communities and / or specific groups to actively engage with an historic monument, raising awareness of its history, assisting in its care, increasing public access and helping to record and interpret the site for the benefit of future generations. The Scottish Scheme was much more formal, involving liaison with landowners, local authorities, bodies responsible for the preservation of historic structures / environments and archaeological units. As part of the scheme, Scottish Archaeology also recommended sources of funding for larger conservation / interpretation projects and assisted local groups in the preparation of bids. Adopting groups were also given training in a range of transferable skills from archaeology and conservation, to research, interpretation and “front of house” work. This approach helped to create a group which could then assist in subsequent heritage projects, or with the ongoing care and management of a particular monument.

### **The Merton context:**

Merton has a wide range of historic structures ranging from churches and historic buildings, to scheduled ancient monuments, free-standing material such as dovecotes, historic pillar-boxes, remnants of historic gardens, graves / tombs and street furniture. Many of these sites are cared for and monitored by the local authority and English Heritage – however there are others for which responsibility remains unclear. Such “monuments” are an integral part of Merton’s heritage and should be preserved, recorded and interpreted for posterity. Where possible we should work to increase public access – either through direct visits, or the use of modern technology to create exhibitions, hard copy resources or virtual tours. In the current economic climate the local authority has neither the funding, nor the capacity to complete this work unaided. A scheme such as “Adopt-a-Monument” would offer the means to link monuments and communities in a mutually beneficial way, so helping to deliver creative and sustainable conservation projects.

### **Benefits to the public:**

- Opportunities to make use of existing skills / resources in a practical fulfilling way
- Potential to acquire new and transferable skills ( e.g. ICT, conservation, research, interpretation / communication skills, archaeology, project management, landscaping )
- Opportunities for socialisation, confidence building, developing language skills ( for ESOL, ) increasing self esteem
- Direct access to historical material
- Supports many aspects of the National Curriculum ( not just history topics )
- Improvements to the local environment – pride of place, sense of ownership
- Increased access to / awareness of Merton’s built heritage
- Opportunities for lifelong learning and social inclusion
- Development of associated events programme ( where appropriate )

### **Monument benefits:**

- Site is better recorded and its context more widely understood
- Ongoing monitoring helps to safeguard the site for posterity – tackling issues such as environmental change and vandalism

- Public engagement with a site makes it better valued and therefore better protected
- Potential for direct conservation, waste clearance and repair
- Potential to develop ongoing management plan for the site, helping to ensure its future
- Increased public access ( where appropriate )
- Increased awareness of the site and its significance – potential for fundraising to assist with site management and interpretation. Could also have corporate sponsor.
- Creation of dedicated support team.

### **Potential scheme for Merton:**

At this point we would like to suggest an initial pilot scheme, to gauge the level of public interest and to give us the opportunity to develop appropriate support networks and the necessary professional contacts. At the most basic level the scheme would take the following format:

#### **Basic level ( minimal / existing resourcing ):**

- Monument is “adopted” by a local school, community group, special interest group or residents recruited from the local catchment area
- This could involve simple monitoring of the site – recording its current condition ( in writing, photographic record ); checking for damage or change over time and informing appropriate contacts
- Regular visits to the site – could be weekly, monthly, quarterly. ( Schools could build such visits into their curriculum work )
- Researching the history of the site ( in conjunction with Heritage Service and / or local heritage stakeholders )
- Helping to raise awareness of the site by creating signage, leaflets, web material, use of social media, school display
- Where appropriate – staging or participating in events / activities relevant to the site

#### **Issues to consider:**

- Need to develop a list of contacts /organisations with relevant expertise to provide information, training and advice
- Ongoing supervision of volunteers / reporting lines
- May require funding bids for larger projects – capacity issues
- Sustainability – can we keep the scheme / individual projects going?
- Legal requirements re. listed / scheduled sites, health and safety, insurance of participants, need for permissions from landowners
- Need to balance public access, with safety / security of site
- Do we need to have a vetting system? Are there monuments that we would not want to include? How do we assess groups wanting to participate – or what criteria would they be expected to fulfil?
- What happens ( especially in a funded project ) if the group / individual decides that they no longer want to continue with the scheme – how do we ensure continuity and avoid LBM liability?

#### **Potential adopters:**

Local schools, heritage stakeholder groups, residents associations, local companies, residents from a given area, church groups, special interest groups ( local branches )

**Support provided from:**

- LBM – Heritage Service, Parks and Future Merton ( + Planning, Comms and Legal )
- Historic England
- Regional Archaeological Unit
- Local museums and historical societies
- Diocesan authorities
- Appropriate interest groups e.g Victorian Society
- Local landowners / property owners
- Local schools and colleges
- Local media

Note: There may be potential for a more wide ranging version of this scheme in the future involving more detailed research, interpretation, basic maintenance and practical conservation work ( subject to funding applications and the provision of appropriate supported training.

**Potential sources of funding for larger projects:**

- HLF – Start up grants £3 – 10K ( for small projects, training and / or first phase work )
- HLF – Our Heritage grant £10 – 100K
- HLF – Grants for places of worship £10 – 250K
- HLF – Parks for People £100K - £5 million ( covers parks and cemeteries )
- HLF – Landscape Partnerships £100K - £3 million ( wider environment )
- HLF - Heritage Enterprises £100K - £5 million
- National Churches Trust Church Repair Grants £10K
- War Memorials Trust granny schemes
- Large number of grant sources listed in Heritage Alliance Directory
- Historic England grants for assorted conservation, repair, capacity building and site management
- Corporate sponsorship – match firm with appropriate site. E.g. Barclays volunteering programme