

Thamesmead Community Archive

Artist Engagement Commission

September 2019 – March 2020



Image credit: George Plemper

As part of the Thamesmead Community Archive programme we are seeking an experienced and engaging artist to work with the diverse communities in Thamesmead to collect their memories and histories.

The commission will run from September 2019 – March 2020

There is an artist fee of £9,000, plus a materials/production budget of £15,000, and an exhibition budget of £3,000. All figures are inclusive of VAT.

Deadline for applications is 9am on 9th September 2019

Introduction

The Thamesmead Community Archive was set up in 2018 with funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund and aims to collect photographs, materials and memories from a broad range of local residents to create an authentic history of Thamesmead. This ambitious community archive will tell the story of London's first New Town established in 1968, and explore the hidden histories of local residents to inform one of the UK's largest regeneration schemes.

The appointed artist will need to work with hard to reach communities in Thamesmead to capture their memories and histories so these can be added to the archive. These memories and materials can be in any form, such as photographs, prints, memorabilia, written or oral memories. The commission also asks for an artwork(s) or creative output to be made or inspired by the material

collected (and/or material already in the archive), and for a modest exhibition to be hosted at the Thamesmead Information Hub in March 2020.

The Thamesmead Community Archive was launched in July 2018 at the Thamesmead 50th Birthday Festival, and has already developed some key projects and collected significant materials:

- We have collected over 4,000 images and materials which are being scanned;
- Published a book of archive materials from Thamesmead's history;
- Developed a pilot radio station called RTM set up by local residents and run by arts organisation TACO! building on the heritage of Radio Thamesmead from the 1980s;
- Hosted three small heritage exhibitions in the Thamesmead Information Hub;
- And 15 local residents have recorded their memories as oral histories.

All of these materials are available to the appointed artist, plus a wealth of Thamesmead material is held at the London Metropolitan Archives and the Bexley Local Studies & Archives Centre for our reference.

The archive will be an ongoing community initiative which will continue to grow as Thamesmead develops and is managed by the Peabody Culture and Heritage team for Thamesmead, with support from Bexley Local Studies & Archives Centre and London Metropolitan Archives.

Applications

Applicants are required to submit a short proposal and CV to:

Sharon Casey Sharon.Casey@peabody.org.uk – Community Archive Manager, by **9am on 9th September 2019**.

Your proposal should be no more than 4 pages of A4 and should cover the following:

- a. Your approach to engaging with hard to reach communities in Thamesmead – how you will approach them and how you will ensure you can gather interesting materials and memories
- b. Your proposal for an artwork and exhibition inspired by the archive material (we appreciate this proposal may change as the material is collected)
- c. An outline budget of how you will spend the artist fee, production budget and exhibition budget. The artist fee should indicate how many days you will spend on the commission and in Thamesmead.

The Commission

The artist will deliver an exciting programme of engagement activities centred on this unique heritage of Thamesmead as 'London's first New Town' and create an artwork(s) that communicate this heritage to a wider audience.

The role requires an experienced and inspirational artist who will propose innovative ways to take the community archive project out into the wider community and engage with more residents. The artist should engage with these communities at a deeper level by approaching heritage from a creative angle, and facilitate ways for residents to contribute their personal heritage relating to Thamesmead over the last 50 years. The engagement activities should bring the Thamesmead community closer to their local heritage and enable isolated communities to feel part of shaping the future.

The artist will need to collect materials over several months and then shape these into a creative outcome. There is also the opportunity to create a small exhibition from the material gathered and

the materials already in the archive. The purpose of the exhibition is to present the community archive to a wider audience and to test out the appetite for heritage exhibitions in the longer term.

We would like the appointed artist to engage with the following groups to ensure that a diverse picture of Thamesmead's heritage is captured:

- Traveller and Gypsy community
- West African community, especially Ghanaian and Nigerian
- Vietnamese
- Nepalese
- Long standing residents of 40 years +

The Thamesmead Regeneration team can provide support and introductions to some of the above communities. For example, we have a dedicated Traveller Liaison & Equine Officer who has a good relationship with the local Traveller and Gypsy community, and we can provide introductions to some community leaders from the West African community.

The appointed artist will need to be sensitive to the needs of these diverse communities and the quickly changing landscape. The collected material must also be in-line with the theme of the archive and effectively organised in a way that can be easily digitised.

To manage this, the artist must work closely with the Thamesmead Community Archive Manager to plan the collection and scanning of photographs, preservation of film and other material.

The artist must also work closely with the archive manager to ensure we follow GDPR protocol and that health and safety and welfare requirements are adhered to.

The artist must have an up-to-date DBS check and be committed to equality and diversity whereby fellow employees, customers, partners and volunteers feel respected, included and valued.

Expected Outputs

- Provide weekly updates to the Archive Manager
- Manage the community engagement within the agreed budget
- Ensure the community visits are planned well in advance and delivered within the set times
- Ensure Health and Safety requirements are met, including a risk assessment for all activities at each location
- Provide copy and images for all marketing, as requested
- Support the evaluation and documentation of the project to meet funder requirements
- Ensure the project celebrates and focuses on the residential era post '68
- Work with the community, schools, volunteering, marketing and administration teams within Peabody
- Ensure permissions are obtained or appropriate accreditation given for original photographs, film and heritage objects
- Comply with Peabody's Health and Safety policies
- Retain a record of all production and travel expenses
- Work within GDPR framework

Background context to developing a Community Archive

The Thamesmead Community archive will focus on the last 50 years of Thamesmead's residents and architecture. This unique story of Britain's modern heritage started with a ground-breaking utopian masterplan and resulted in a unique urban environment, characterised by pioneering housing and innovative public spaces, which were built by the GLC in the late 60s, with the first residents moving in on 3 July 1968.

The 1966 masterplan for Thamesmead was never fully realised due to a multitude of factors. Many thought the proposal to build on Thamesmead was impractical, because of the problems involving land reclamation, building on peat, pollution from the nearby sewage works as well as heavy industry on both sides of the river. But the architecture of Thamesmead was unique in overcoming the challenge of marshland by raising 3 miles of riverbanks, building a new central pumping station and incorporating the sites five lakes into the design.

Thamesmead's iconic architecture has been home to many diverse communities over the last 50 years. The core ethos of Peabody is to put the community at the heart of large scale regeneration of Thamesmead, which aims to complete the aspirations of the original masterplan and create London's new town. This community archive aims to capture the remarkable resident stories of the last five decades, and will actively continue to archive the town's transformation over the next 20 years.

The demand for a community archive can be demonstrated by the Thamesmead All Stages Facebook group which was set up by two local residents in 2008 and has over 11,500 members most of which have been or still are local residents. There are several albums of old photographs on the group page, plus hundreds of other old photographs which have been posted by residents as individual posts, often accompanied by memories or stories from the past. While this is a very popular forum, and provides great engagement across the community, there is no historical interpretation or organised information, and the vast number of posts means that threads of discussions are hard to follow and very temporary.

There is also the wider London and UK context of Thamesmead's heritage at risk. In most books and maps of Brutalist architecture, Thamesmead is mentioned, but not heavily featured and tends to 'fall' off the edge of the London map. Until the 'Thamesmead at 50' book was published by Here Press with the support of Peabody in January 2019, there had been no significant publications on Thamesmead's heritage, as there are about other iconic Brutalist estates. It is hoped that the community archive will bring some attention and importance to the heritage of both the Brutalist and newer developments, as well as providing a human dimension to the iconic architecture by the collection of personal memories from local residents.

Lastly, it is recognised that there is a rapidly growing demographic of residents who are aged over 60 and want to engage with heritage, combined with an increasing reduction in the number of first generation residents who need a platform to share their stories. Losing the voice of Thamesmead's heritage would be a huge loss to everyone in the community; for an ageing demographic of residents who may feel more isolated and for more than 20,000 future residents coming to the area. The community archive may be one of the few remaining opportunities to bring the existing and new communities together during a time of immense change.

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