

SAVE THE OLD LIBRARY! INVEST IN ERITH'S FUTURE.

[The Exchange](#) need to raise the final £130,000 to complete the renovation works at Erith's Old Library. To do this, the not-for-profit organisation is asking local residents to become owners of The Exchange.

Over the past 3 years, The Exchange has secured over £3.5m for the repair and renovation of the building, and to kick-start a community programme of workshops, markets, festivals and music. In the year before closing as a result of the pandemic, The Exchange received over 25,000 visits from people taking part in the programme or visiting its [Bookstore Café](#).

During the pandemic, the social enterprise worked with Bexley Council and Orbit Housing to deliver emergency hot meals to the most vulnerable in the community, and has focused on delivering a second-phase of renovation works that will bring the entire historic old library back into community use.

The building works, delivered by local company [GA Harpers](#) and designed by [Robin Lee Architecture](#), are scheduled to complete in late March, with The Exchange reopening to the public in late April/early May, depending on government restrictions.

At this point, it is over to The Exchange and local residents to fit the building out using new Craft Skills Workshop spaces for Woodwork, Ceramics, Print, Textiles and Gardens. This approach builds on the community heritage of the Old Library, where back in 1906 local people were responsible for the designing and building of this impressive historic structure.

The final £130,000 is needed for all the really special features that people want to see restored, including the Edwardian toilets, the mosaic featuring the town's coat of arms, and the wrought iron railings that were previously removed.

To raise this final amount, The Exchange is asking local people not to donate to the project, but to invest in it, through Community Shares. By investing local people will become owners of The Exchange, and will become stakeholders invested in ensuring that The Exchange succeeds for its community.

Investments start at just £20, and organisations as well as individuals can invest. Every investor will have an equal vote and a say on the important issues facing The Exchange and its work in the community. You can also stand for and be elected to the board, and in a few year's time, get your money back. For everyone giving over £100, you also get 30% tax relief and 3% annual interest on your investment.

The Exchange has also received support from the [Booster Programme](#), which is funded by [Power to Change](#). With this support every £1 invested by the community, will be matched by the Booster Programme up to £75,000.

To find out more about the Community Shares offer, and the story of The Exchange visit: www.theexchangeerith.com/shares or watch our Community Shares film: <https://vimeo.com/510555568>

ABOUT THE OLD LIBRARY

The Old Library was built in 1906, funded by philanthropist Andrew Carnegie and designed by local architect William Egerton. It was built with the aim of providing people living in the District of Erith (now North Bexley) with the opportunity for learning and advancement.

The building reflects the incredible craft and trade history of the local area. The bricks were made locally, the windows are early example Crittal windows first fabricated in Sidcup, the timber work crafted by the Thames Steam Saw Mills down Erith's West Street.

The building served as library for over 100 years, and as a local museum since the 1930s, when Librarian Florence Young expanded the building's remit to look at local heritage, and to introduce an outreach programme using the first custom-built Travelling Library Van.

In 2009, the building was closed owing to major dilapidations and a lack of funds to deal with them. The library moved into modern premises, and the museum collection to storage as part of the Bexley Council Museum Collection. For 10 years the building remained closed, until February 2019 when The Exchange partially reopened the building.

ABOUT THE EXCHANGE

The Exchange is a Charitable Community Benefit Society, founded in 2016 by local residents who approached Bexley Council with an idea of what the derelict Old Library could be in the future.

Since then, the organisation has worked with other local residents to build a programme for the Old Library that celebrates local heritage and cultures, empowers local people, and tackles the issues our local area faces including lack of cohesion and mental health challenges that are being exacerbated as a result of the pandemic.

Although currently closed to the public, The Exchange has run a digital programme and delivered much-needed services during the pandemic. It is set to reopen as soon as it is able to do so.

The Exchange has a 50-year lease on the Old Library. And won best charity/social enterprise 2020 in the Bexley Business Awards.

ABOUT THE BUILDING WORKS

The repair and renewal works are being carried out in partnership with Bexley Council, which owns the building.

The first phase of building works was funded by London Borough of Bexley and the Greater London Authority, delivered by contractors Lengards. The second phase is funded primarily by the National Lottery Heritage Fund and Bexley Council, and being delivered by Dartford-based contractor GA Harpers.

The Old Library building project forms part of Bexley Council's [Greater Erith](#) Regeneration programme.

IMAGES

[Link to Dropbox](#). Link contains:

1. Community Shares Film + Share Offer Document
2. Historic Images (credit Bexley Borough Archives)
3. During construction images (credit The Exchange)
4. Now Images – The Old Library (credit The Exchange)
5. The Exchange + Community Images (credit The Exchange)