

EVALUATION REPORT

April 2020 – March 2021



A year of survival and building for the future.

the
exchange

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The year began in lockdown, at a time when our café - The Bookstore - was beginning to turn a profit, when our wider plans were expanding with new funding support from the National Lottery Heritage and Community Funds, and when for the first time, there was sustained funding for non-café staff roles. The pandemic, therefore, knocked us for six – like so many others working in culture / heritage / community.

Our response was to rethink what the community needed us for at a time like this – we focused on the most vulnerable in the community, providing emergency meals in partnership with Bexley Council and Orbit Housing Association. At the same time, we focused on fundraising for survival and growth, reworking our business plan, developing our identity as an organisation and our connection with local residents and groups, on trialling and delivering new digital programming, and working with our Board on our governance structure.

Collectively this work has made us more resilient for the future.

A core part of the governance work we delivered with our Board was the move to a Policy Governance model which defines and guides appropriate relationships between an organisation's owners, its board of trustees and the executive (the staff team). This work was delivered in advance of The Exchange launching a community share campaign which would introduce over 453 new owners to The Exchange. This report has been pulled together using the governing "Ends" as mapped out by our Board – our Ends are our ambitions, our aims; what we collectively believe The Exchange should be doing for Erith and its residents.

Achieving these ambitions would be impossible without a space in which to do it in. The pandemic has taught us just how important physical community spaces – as places for interaction, exchange and collaboration – are for towns like Erith, boroughs like Bexley. As good as digital is, it cannot replace the need for physical contact. This year therefore has also been a time of repair and conservation, getting the bulk of the difficult work done needed on our home the Old Library, working in partnership with Bexley Council.

The building will act as a catalyst for community in Erith. But it is not the only thing required to sustain The Exchange. The most important thing is and will always be the people that make The Exchange and everything that happens within it and around it. This includes so many individuals, including our shareholders, wider users, visitors and supporters. We want to give a massive thanks to everyone, but a really special thanks to our Makers – a group that works with us to define, develop and deliver a community programme for Erith. You are The Exchange.

THE AIMS (“ENDS”) OF THE EXCHANGE

The overall ambition of The Exchange is to make Erith a better place to live. We will do this by achieving outcomes against the following “Ends”:

- We are based at The Old Library, and the building’s community and craft heritage (as a community designed and built space, and as a space for learning and opportunity) is at the centre of our work.
- We empower people and communities
- We actively seek out and champion cultural diversity
- We shine a light on and celebrate local heritages
- We take action to tackle the climate emergency
- We take action to tackle racism, lack of cohesion and inclusion
- We take action to tackle poor mental health, poor wellbeing and loneliness
- We support local innovation and ideas

The following pages show what we have achieved against these ambitions in the year April 2020 – March 2021.



'MAKER' CHARLOTTE JACOBS CONTRIBUTED DIGITAL PROGRAMMING IN THE PANDEMIC, INCLUDING A FILM TO ADVERTISE THE REOPENING OF THE EXCHANGE.

WE ARE BASED AT THE OLD LIBRARY. THE BUILDING'S COMMUNITY + CRAFT HERITAGE (AS A COMMUNITY DESIGNED + BUILT SPACE, AND AS A SPACE FOR LEARNING + OPPORTUNITY) IS AT THE CENTRE OF OUR WORK

The Exchange's reason for being is The Old Library itself. The organisation was born out of need to save Erith's principal community space. Its heritage as a true community building is what runs through everything we do. The Old Library was commissioned, designed and built by local people, using local materials and showcasing local crafts. It was built in order to service the community, providing a space for learning and opportunity. Although no longer a library, or a museum, it can still continue to have the same impact.

COMMUNITY BUILT

Because of the pandemic, we were not able to progress our "community building" plans in the way we had hoped, and much of this work will now take place in 2021/22. However, we did make a start. New partnerships have been formed with local schools including King Henry and Townley Grammar, Belvedere Community Centre and local families and adult residents through our Germinators and Guardians of the Garden groups to enable a community growing project to provide plants for our new garden. Today we have 29 garden volunteers.

We also ran a Community Share campaign, giving local people the chance to save their Old Library. The campaign ended in May 2021, but much of the work to achieve the outcome was delivered the year of this report. 452 individuals became owners of The Exchange, raising £150K with the support of The Booster Programme, and therefore a major part of the rebuilding of this community space.

[Here is a link to our Community Shares film that was produced to support the campaign – it involved some brilliant local people without whom we couldn't have done it.](#)



IMAGES OF THE UPPER FLOOR OF THE OLD LIBRARY DURING CONSTRUCTION WORKS.

SPACE FOR LEARNING + OPPORTUNITY

We recruited a Schools Officer during the pandemic to develop our partnerships with local schools and to begin outlining what a future Schools programme at The Exchange will look like. The Officer's work included digital engagement sessions with students, consultation workshops with teachers and digital online half-term workshops. We are now developing plans for a fundraising proposal to invest properly in our schools work.

"Wednesday was so exciting for us, seeing the first two tunnels go up. I can't tell you what a benefit they will be for the school!"

Matthew Martin
Head of Design Technology at King Henry School

Throughout the year we have created a range of opportunities for local people including funding local residents to produce digital content, supporting local residents to develop ideas for events and activities for Erith, providing free 1/2 term school meals, and delivery of an emergency food programme. Details of all these pieces of work are expanded below.



PARTNERS NORTH WEST KENT COUNTRYSIDE PARTNERSHIP WITH YOUNG PEOPLE FROM KING HENRY SCHOOL PLANTING SEEDS TO GROW PLANTS FOR THE NEW EXCHANGE GARDEN.

WE EMPOWER PEOPLE + COMMUNITIES

THE MAKERS

The Makers are a group of 40 local people who collaborate to develop and deliver community and cultural programming for Erith and The Exchange. Throughout the pandemic, many members of the group have been meeting online to create plans for a festival to be held in August 2021. The plans for the festival include music, a carnival-esque street fair, workshops and a local portrait exhibition, and will be held across a number of locations within Erith. The group is managing all parts of the process from programme development to production and logistics. The Maker programme and festival is being supported by the Arts Council funded Creative People and Places programme, Three Rivers.

THE DEVELOPMENT LAB (THE PEOPLE)

The Development Lab is a space and programme supporting local people with ideas for businesses and projects with a social cause. Within the group are 6 individuals who are receiving support to develop their ambitions.

“The group dynamic is really helpful; I’ve learned so much speaking to everyone in the group. I feel like we’ve got a support system, of people you can talk to. I find developing a business can be quite lonely so it’s nice to have someone to discuss things with.” Jade Flannery who runs Theatre Box Performing Arts Academy.

TOWN CENTRE PARTNERSHIP

In January 2021, The Exchange received support from the Architectural Heritage Fund to support the creation of a Town Centre Partnership, bringing organisations from various “sectors” together to support each other through Covid-19 recovery and in the marketing of Erith as a place challenging persistent and negative perceptions. This partnership includes The Playhouse, London South East Colleges, Friends of Riverside Gardens, Oxleas NHS Foundation, Nemesis Gym, Erith + Belvedere History Society, Mambochinos café, The Running Horses, Orbit Housing, Erith Football Club, LCP Management (Riverside Shopping Centre), Kassiopi Cove, Wasteless Market, London Borough of Bexley, the Erith Think Tank and Active Horizons.

In our first meetings, the Town Centre Partnership have discussed how we talk about and celebrate the Erith brand, i.e., a town proud of its riverside location, its rich natural and built heritages, its independent spirit and its port-town mentality of “Everyone Welcome!”. The group is also now supporting The Makers with the planning of the Erith Made festival.



TWO OF THE MAKERS WITH CO-DIRECTOR PETER ON THE NEWS OF RECEIVING EMERGENCY FUNDING FROM THE NATIONAL LOTTERY HERITAGE FUND DURING THE PANDEMIC.

STAFF

We also aim to provide our staff with empowering opportunities, and in this report want to highlight the work and achievements of two individuals in their own words:

“The Exchange is both an inspiring and empowering place to work. The Exchange really is a non-hierarchical organisation with all members of the team supporting each other to thrive and complete projects, no matter of one's job title. During my time at The Exchange, I was encouraged to work on a variety of different projects from events to fundraising and keenly welcomed into discussions. The Exchange team actively welcomes and respects new ideas and voices, really making an effort to listen to and understand members of staff.”

I started employment with The Exchange with a passion for the arts but not a lot of experience working professionally. The Exchange has taught me what being part of an empowering and productive team looks and feels like. The experience The Exchange has given me is invaluable and has helped me get my foot in the door of the art world, something that I have always wanted to do but often felt out of reach for under-represented groups. I cannot wait to apply this progressive and positive model of teamwork throughout my career.”

Zohra Soorma, ex-Marketing + Events Officer



“This past year has been a challenge for everyone in the hospitality sector and it has been no different for us. During and after the lockdowns I have been developing The Bookstore menus and widening our offer. It's been an amazing opportunity for me to be able to grow both personally and professionally in an area that means a lot to me having grown up here.”

Louisa Budds, Head Chef



COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

The community shares campaign means that now the community owns The Exchange and the 50-year lease we have on The Old Library. It puts the power of what happens with this building in the hands of local residents. This is an amazing thing! And we aim to continue to explore the potential of community ownership through what our shareholders will achieve for The Exchange at the Old Library, but also exploring new opportunities for community ownership in the local area.

MARKETING + EVENTS OFFICER ZOHRA SOORMA, HEAD CHEF LOUISA BUDDS + CAFÉ MANAGER COLETTE ROBINSON.

WE ACTIVELY SEEK OUT + CHAMPION CULTURAL DIVERSITY

DISCUSS + DECOLONISE

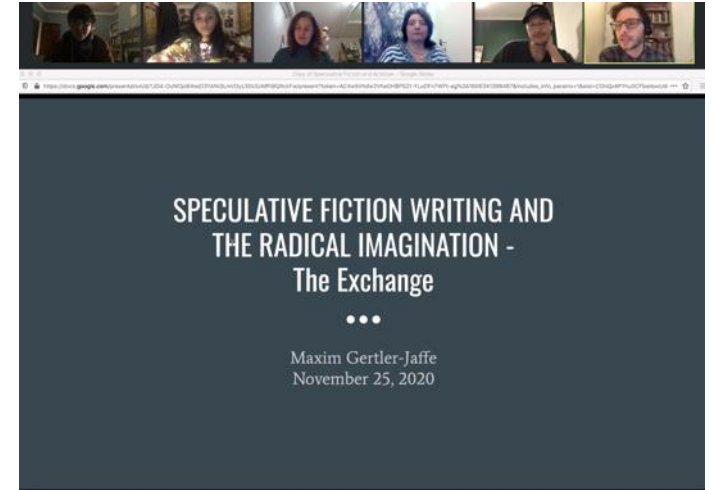
As a community space that is producing objects we believe that we should be critical of the social political context in which object are usually made, exhibited and exchanged. The Discuss and Decolonise projects aims is to change the discourse around creativity, to unlearn the art history some of us were taught in school, and to diversify the references and influences we usually rely on.

The project started in August 2020 as an intimate discussion group of about 5-8 participants initiated by Board member Tim Truong and staff member Mai Omer. After 10 meetings we decided to change the project format so that it would have a longer legacy and a bigger impact. In its current format the project focuses on creating a common language by producing a socio-political-cultural glossary. Each month a guest speaker is invited to introduce themselves, define a term and leave something behind. This way we will be creating a common language while expanding our vocabulary and diversify our cultural references as well as our contributors and our audience. The first new Discuss and Decolonise meeting was with artist Esi Eshun who chose to define the term 'post colonialism by conducting a workshop. It was attended by 10 people.

"It was exactly the sort of discussion I had in mind when we first started talking about the group." Board Member Tim Truong.

ERITH MADE (planning)

Erith Made is a three-day celebration of local people and local creativity. It will take place on the August bank holiday weekend (28th-30th). This Celebration weekend is collaboratively curated, planned and produced by a group of local residents, The Makers. During 2020, the Makers had monthly meetings where they proposed ideas for projects, events and activities that they would like to see in Erith. Together they selected some of the proposals and developed them to create Erith Made. This process ensured that local people are the ones who define what culture is and how it should look like. In other words, Erith Made was made by local people for local people. Likewise, by working collaboratively with many people we produce a varied programme that appeals to diverse audiences. Moreover, we work as a community. We have discussion about local opportunities, needs and challenges and how to mitigate them.



DISCUSS + DECOLONISE GROUP ON ZOOM FOR A SPECULATIVE FICTION WRITING WORKSHOP WITH MAXIM GERTLER-JAFFE.

WE SHINE A LIGHT ON + CELEBRATE LOCAL HERITAGES

THE OLD LIBRARY

We continue to highlight the history of the Old Library through our social media communications, and through using it as the foundation for The Exchange and what we do.

ST JOHN'S CHURCH

A partnership (and consultancy) with St John's Church has been in development throughout the pandemic. Part of this work included the researching its history to create an Assessment of Significance for the building, that will be used in a future fundraising bid to the Heritage Fund for the Grade II* building.

ERITHIANS

The Erithians is a collaboration between RTM (TACO!) and The Exchange set to amplify local stories and to support local storytellers. The programme commissions 6 participants to produce a one-hour podcast that focuses on Erith past and present. In exchange they get creative and technical support, and a small fee. They also get support to produce their own podcast and a platform to share it on RTM.

CULTURE DAY (planning)

Culture day was originally initiated by a local resident, Hamza Zaheer, who proposed having a Bookstore event that celebrates Pakistani cuisine. We worked with Hamza and together we were able to produce a bigger event that combines food, art, family activities and more. The first Culture Day focused on Pakistani and South Asian culture and on Eid el Fitr. The event included a Pakistani menu at the bookstore, an exhibition and a family workshop by local Pakistani artist Usarae Gull, a short lecture by Hamza, and a film screening of "The Hidden Art of Islam" followed by Q&A with the director-producer Faris Kermani. We also added a few provocations as part of our Discuss and Decolonise project. One asked people to provide their definition of the term nationality and the other invited people to add to a timeline of Pakistani history.



TWO ERITHIANS WORKING ON LOCAL HISTORY PODCASTS AND THEIR OWN PODCAST PROJECTS – ROD HENDERSON + REES SAINT-OMAR.

WE TAKE ACTION TO TACKLE THE CLIMATE EMERGENCY

FIT FOR THE FUTURE

The Exchange has joined 'Fit for the Future', an environmental sustainability network that brings together over 100 charities, heritage organisations and cultural venues. The network facilitates knowledge-sharing and collaboration across organisations and sectors so that can achieve the rapid and far-reaching changes needed to decarbonise, adapt to climate change and drive positive environmental impacts.

The Exchange hasn't yet taken full advantage of its membership but aims to progress discussions around how The Old Library and exchange operations can become net-zero by 2030.

WASTELESS MARKET + COMMUNITY HUB

We have been working in partnership with the Wasteless Market and the Wasteless Community Hub for some time. We are supporting them develop their business proposals through the Development Lab, and are currently hosting a pop-up Community Hub and Refill Shop in our Conversation Room. The Wasteless Team are also planning the first outdoor Wasteless Market in Erith as part of the ERITH MADE celebration weekend. The aim of the Wasteless Team is to provide accessible opportunities for people to make better choices about what they buy, supporting ambitions to decarbonise and lower our individual environmental impacts.

GROW BACK GREENER

We were successful in a bid for funding to create opportunities for green projects at The Exchange and in other green spaces in Erith. The project started – in between lockdowns – with a planting project at Applegarth House. This block of flats is owned by Orbit housing association, and along with Orbit and North West Kent Countryside Partnership the aim is to reactivate a green space that sits unused.

The rest of the project is being delivered in 2021/22, and will involve establishing The Exchange as a hub for green learning in North Bexley.



PLANTING AT APPLGARTH HOUSE AS PART OF GROW BACK GREENER PROJECT.

WE TAKE ACTION TO TACKLE RACISM, LACK OF COHESION + THE NEED FOR INCLUSION

DISCUSS + DECOLONISE

One of the projects main aims is to facilitate difficult conversations. Originally the group was created to provide a safe space where local people can process, learn about, and find new ways to tackle racism in the community. The project's new format is designed to make potentially alienating terminology more accessible and to promote a profound understanding of social problems and the different activist approaches.

VOLUNTEER OPPORTUNITIES

Volunteering during the pandemic has been difficult owing to restrictions and lockdowns. However, people have been able to offer their support in the following areas:

- Emergency food programme (15 volunteers)
- Garden Group (29 volunteers)
- Shares Ambassadors (53 volunteers)



SOME MEMBERS OF THE GARDEN GROUP PLANTING SEEDS TO GROW PLANTS FOR THE NEW EXCHANGE GARDEN.

In order to tackle racism and the need for inclusion, we need to ensure that we as an organisation are representative of our community. The following stats show where we are with our Board, Staff and Shareholder membership.

BOARD MEMBERSHIP

Gender:

- 44% Male
- 56% Female
- 0% non-binary

Ethnicity:

- 67% White British
- 22% Asian / Asian British
- 11% Black / Black British

Health/Disability:

- 77% day to day activities not limited
- 23% day to day activities limited a little

Age:

- 22% aged 25 - 34
- 56% aged 35-44
- 11% aged 45 – 54
- 11% aged 65-74

STAFF MEMBERSHIP

Gender:

- 20% Male
- 70% Female
- 10% non-binary

Ethnicity:

- 70% White British
- 10% Asian / Asian British
- 20% Other

Health/Disability:

- 70% day to day activities not limited
- 30% day to day activities limited a little

Age:

- 20% aged 16 - 24
- 30% aged 25 - 34
- 30% aged 35-44
- 10% aged 45 – 54
- 10% aged 55 - 64

COMMUNITY OWNERSHIP

We asked our shareholders to tell us about them. Out of 452, 158 people responded to the survey (35%).

ETHNICITY:

GROUP	WHAT WE WERE AIMING FOR	SHAREHOLDER MAKE-UP
White British	63%	80%
African	16%	1.3%
Indian / British Indian	4%	2.5%
Caribbean / W+B Caribbean	3%	2%
Irish	1%	1.5%
Chinese	1%	0%
White + Asian	1%	1.5%
European Mixed	1%	3%

AGE:

GROUP	WHAT WE WERE AIMING FOR	SHAREHOLDER MAKE-UP
Under-18	24%	0%, and no schools invested
18 - 29	12%	11%
30 - 49	36%	39.4%
50 - 69	16%	36.1%
69+	12%	13.9%

GENDER (We didn't have a target for gender, but this is the makeup of our shareholder group)

GROUP	SHAREHOLDER MAKE-UP
Non-binary	0%
Female	65.8%
Male	34.2%



THE AMOUNT WE HAD RAISED AND NUMBER OF SHAREHOLDERS AT THE END OF THE FINANCIAL YEAR. WE WENT ON TO REACH THE £150K TARGET.

DISABILITY

We didn't have a target for disability, but here is the makeup of our shareholder group compared with local stats:

GROUP	IN LONDON	SHAREHOLDER MAKE-UP
Consider themselves having a disability	21%	24%
No disability	79%	76%

SOCIO-ECONOMIC STATUS

Within the immediate area (Erith, Northumberland Heath, Belvedere, Thamesmead, Slade Green), there are 305 shareholders. Using postcode data mapped against the map of multiple deprivation, we can see the following makeup of shareholders:

GROUP	
Living in most deprived two deciles (bottom 20%)	12%
Living in 3 rd and 4 th deciles (bottom 30 + 40%)	36%
Living in 5 th and 6 th deciles (bottom 50 and 60%)	21%
Living in top 40% (7 th , 8 th , 9 th and 10 th deciles)	10%

Findings:

- We need to do more in engaging people of ethnically diverse backgrounds, and in particular the African community. The work in particular that the Community Projects Manager is leading on will support with this, but we will also work on outreach engagement programmes once restrictions are lifted. We will do more in the next year to engage people from ethnically diverse backgrounds to build representation within our membership.
- Schools engagement necessary. We are currently developing proposals for a Schools programme in advance of an application for funding from Paul Hamlyn Foundation. A conversation with PHF has already taken place and they have encouraged us to apply.
- The share offer attracted a good representation of socio-economic experience / experience of deprivation.

WE TAKE ACTION TO TACKLE POOR MENTAL HEALTH, POOR WELLBEING + LONELINESS

EMERGENCY MEALS / ORBIT PARTNERSHIP

During the initial lockdown, The Exchange worked in partnership with London Borough of Bexley and Orbit Housing to deliver an emergency food programme. In total we delivered:

- 3,150 emergency hot meals
- Over 120 food boxes
- Over 120 ready meals

Alongside the delivery of these meals, the volunteers also provided additional support to the referred individuals with wellbeing check-ups, and providing us with lists of other needs that could be dealt with by us or other groups working on the Covid-19 response.

"Thank you to The Bookstore for the lunches delivered to my vulnerable friend. Thank you to all the volunteers who delivered them and checked and reported on her"

"We have received your dinners during the month of May and we are extremely grateful to you but sad to hear they are coming to an end."

MENTAL HEALTH PARTNERSHIP

We are in conversation with a range of local groups including St John's Church, Re-Instate, North West Kent Countryside Partnership, Oxleas NHS Foundation, MIND, Bexley Council about the setting up of a mental health partnership, based at St John's Church, supporting organisations working in mental health or aiming to promote positive wellbeing in the north of Bexley.



50 HOT MEALS WERE PREPARED EVERY DAY, 7 DAYS PER WEEK DURING THE FIRST LOCKDOWN FOR THE MOST IN BEXLEY.

WE SUPPORT LOCAL INNOVATION + IDEAS

DEVELOPMENT LAB (IDEAS)

The ideas of the individuals in the group consist of:

- Theatre Box Performing Arts Academy: Provision of affordable opportunities for young people in performing arts.
- Wasteless Market + Wasteless Community Hub: A marketplace and re-fill shop selling environmentally sustainable goods, and providing information and opportunities for recycling and being more green.
- Lauriann's STEM club: Provision of activities and services that encourage young women - and in particular women of colour – into STEM careers.
- Cellotrek: a music project that highlights stories of environmental sustainability from around the world.
- RobertMasonWine: Wine and hospitality education programme and consultancy.
- Recreation of the Butler Motorcycle: an idea to recreate the first motorcycle that was invented here in Erith and raced down Manor Road.

ERITH MADE

The principal ideas being developed as part of the ERITH MADE celebration weekend were designed by a core group of 15 individuals. These include music events, an Erith Fashion Label, performances, markets and family workshops. On average, each individual has given 21 hours each in the development of this programme, in this reporting period.



LAURIANN – A MEMBER OF THE DEVELOPMENT LAB, AND AN ENGINEER INTERESTED IN CREATING OPPORTUNITIES THAT ENCOURAGE YOUNG WOMEN INTO STEM CAREERS.

IS ERITH A BETTER PLACE TO LIVE?

Ultimately, our aim is to make Erith a wonderful place to live and visit. But we shouldn't be the ones to say whether we are doing this – you should. So please follow this link to answer a few questions for us, telling us what you think:

[FOLLOW LINK TO SURVEY](#)

