

# BIGGIN HILL MEMORIAL MUSEUM

*Biggin Hill; inspiring generations,  
Remembering the Few and honouring the Many*



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St George's RAF Chapel, Biggin Hill (foreground – Gate Guardian)



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*Our mission is:*

*“Gathering, protecting and making known the stories of Biggin Hill and communicating its significant role in shaping the modern world”*



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# Statement of significance:



RAF St George's Chapel showing the Reredos of remembered pilots

Biggin Hill played a pivotal part in altering the course of the Second World War through its role in the Battle of Britain. Today Biggin Hill's story and heritage stands testament to its internationally crucial role during the war and the site remains an icon for local, national and international audiences.



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## Tangible heritage:

- Biggin Hill is one of the oldest aerodromes in Britain and is still in use.
- Many original buildings and structures from the Second World War and before remain.
- In 1993 the London Borough of Bromley designated Biggin Hill a Conservation Area.
- St George's Chapel is Grade II listed and is an excellent example of post Second World War era church design pioneered by Sir Edward Maufe.
- The chapel has high artistic interest including a collection of exceptional stained glasses windows by Hugh Easton.
- The chapel and museum provide an important place for worship and act as a site of remembrance to those who served in the Battle of Britain.



Stained glass window by  
Hugh Easton



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## Intangible heritage:

- Major innovations in aviation telecommunications including radar were developed at Biggin Hill prior to the Second World War.
- During the Battle of Britain, Biggin Hill witnessed some of the most significant aerial battles in history, with famous fighter pilots engaged in daily combat in the skies above South East England and on the ground, occasions of great bravery by many.
- The chapel's history is testament to the sentiment of national pride and remembrance having been funded by the public through a campaign led by Winston Churchill.



RAF Biggin Hill in 1941. Extensive damage from bombing raids can be seen as white scars in the ground. © Historic England RAF Photography



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# Audience consultation



Families session at Biggin Hill Library



Friends of the Chapel meeting at St George's

To date, the Biggin Hill Memorial Museum team have consulted with over 220 people in order to inform and develop a museum interpretation plan.

Potential audiences have been engaged through different methods of consultation including workshops, drop-in sessions and surveys. Among many others, the team have spoken to young families, heritage enthusiasts, and members of the local community.

Ideas, suggestions and feedback from these groups have directly informed the interpretation plan.



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# Audience consultation

The aim of audience consultation is to find out what potential audiences know and value about the site and its history, what things they expect and like to see in museums and about their visiting habits. The following groups have been consulted:

- *General audiences*
- *Air Cadets (aged 12-17 years)*
- *Local Heritage Stakeholders (volunteers & heritage visitors)*
- *Friends of St George's Chapel*
- *Bromley Youth Council*
- *Local Community members*
- *Families*
- *International museum visitors*
- *Teachers*
- *Under represented groups*



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# Interpretation Planning

Audience consultation, best practice visits to other museums, and academic research all contribute to the development of the museum's interpretation plan.

The interpretation plan is a living document which sets out the foundations of the new museum's approach and objectives these include:

- An outline of our target audiences
- Our positioning compared to other museums and sites
- Designation of exhibition zones and museum spaces
- Identification of key themes and stories
- Intended learning outcomes
- Sample content such as use of film and possible objects



# Audiences and Positioning

## Positioning:

Biggin Hill sits within a number of networks of related sites and attractions, notably Churchill's home, Chartwell House. Geographically Biggin Hill is the gateway between London and Kent and is en-route from Dover for international visitors.

## Understanding our audiences:

The museum will appeal to a range of audiences, our primary target audiences are:

- Families
- Schools
- Retired and older visitors



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# Our Approach

## Engaging visitors:

The museum interpretation will help visitors to engage with the key narratives relating to Biggin Hill. Stories will encourage an empathetic response to familiar stories and reveal untold or rarely told narratives.

## Interpretative Principles:

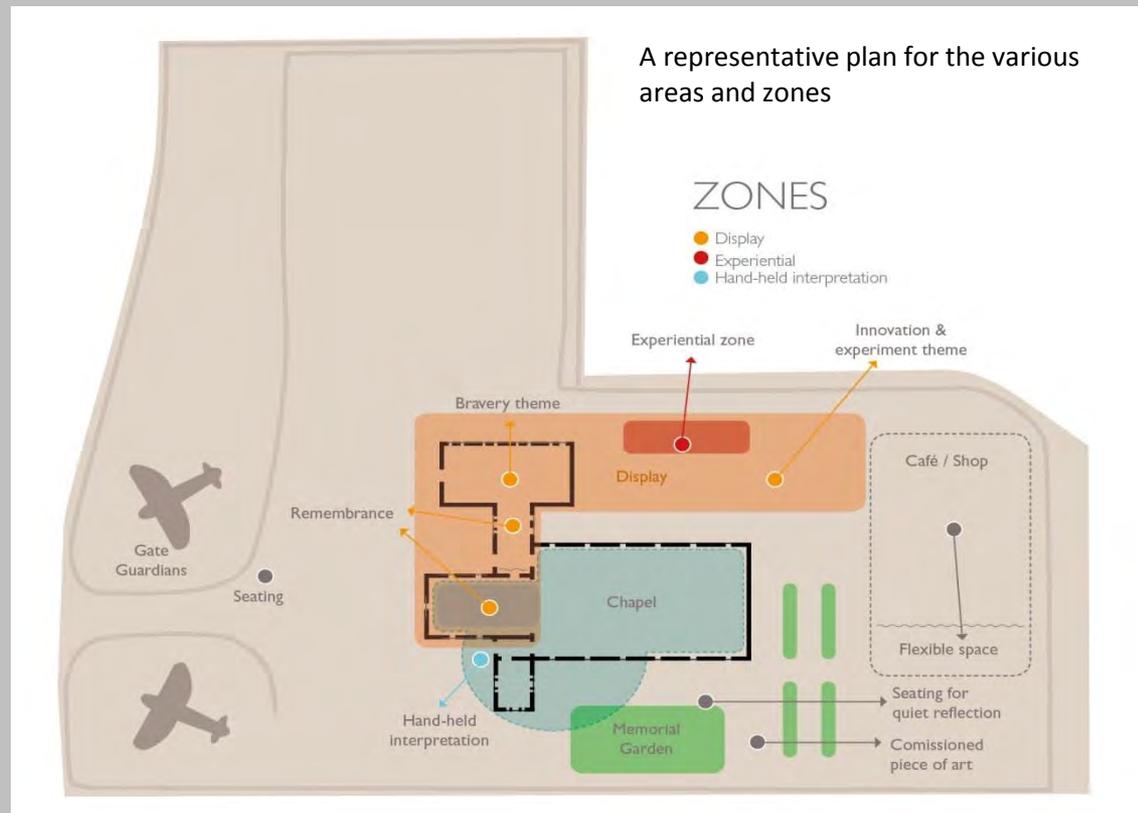
- Tell stories through three key themes of **Innovation & Experimentation, Bravery and Remembering.**
- Underpin these themes with stories about the ‘people and place’ of Biggin Hill.
- Personalise the stories we tell.
- Explore how and why we remember.
- Zone interpretative areas to give a variety of experiences, pace and learning opportunities for visitors.



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# Zones and Visitor Flow

- The heritage site will encompass the Chapel and gardens as well as the museum
- Visitor flow will need to accommodate the chapel sometimes being close to museum visitors
- There will be a flexible space which can be partitioned off for events, schools and temporary displays
- A visitor to the exhibition galleries will experience the three themes in order, their visit will culminate at the Chapel
- Separate access to the Chapel will be maintained



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# Themes, Narratives and Stories

## Innovation and Experiment:

Biggin Hill was at the centre of innovation in wireless technology before and after World War One. Intense, behind the scenes planning and activity before and during the Second World War was behind the successes of the Battle of Britain



German map showing invasion plans for Britain. © Imperial War Museum

### Displays on:

- Wireless Technology
- Strategy and World War One
- Interwar Innovation
- Preparing for the Second World War



Sound Locator No 1 Mk 1. Imperial War Museum



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# Themes, Narratives and Stories

## Bravery:

Stories will be told from the point of view of the people behind them and will include everyone who had a role to play. The pilots, the engineers, the women in the air force, and the local community whose lives were changed by this national story happening on their doorsteps.



Biggin Hill Scramble Bell. RAF Museum

## Displays on:

- The Second World War & Biggin Hill
- The Battle of Britain & the Few
- The WAAF's
- The Many
- The International teams
- Scrambling



Sergeant Joan E Mortimer, Flight Officer Elspeth C Henderson and Sergeant Helen E Turner, recipients of the Military Medal for gallantry, standing outside damaged buildings at Biggin Hill.  
© Imperial War Museum



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# Themes, Narratives and Stories

## Remembering:

The museum will remember the bravery of those who lived as well as those who died. This section will consider the importance and consequences of their actions. The history and role of the Chapel and memorial garden will be explained.



The original RAF Chapel at Biggin Hill



St George's Chapel



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# How we will tell these stories

The museum's focus will be on telling interesting stories well and using appropriate media and resources to bring content to life.

The museum will have well-chosen objects which relate directly to our stories.

There will be high quality replica objects for visitors to handle.

The story will be supported with archival photography, film footage and sound with some specially commissioned films.

In the galleries, non digital interactives will allow for hands on learning.

Digital interaction will be through hand held devices.



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# Next steps....

The museum team keen to gather stories, objects and ideas from the local community and beyond so get in touch!



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