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Councillors to vote on museum sell-off



Gripe ...
campaigner
Margot Rohan.
Councillors will
vote tonight
(Weds) on plans
to sell
The Priory,
pictured by
akphotos.co.uk



He added: "We would like to reassure residents that we recognise the importance of the Grade II* listed Priory building and if the building is offered for sale we will look closely at any proposals that come forward for an appropriate use to safeguard the building, benefit the community and enhance Orpington town centre."
Councillors will take a final decision on the sale of The Priory this evening (Wednesday).

MORE than 1,600 people have signed a petition calling for Bromley Council to rethink plans to sell off The Priory - the oldest building in the borough.

The listed structure in Church Hill, Orpington is home to Bromley Museum and attracts around 19,000 visitors annually. Bromley Council has published plans to sell the medieval building, as well as the car park in front of the building and land to the rear and side of the museum.

Orpington resident Margot Rohan, who created the petition, criticised the local authority for failing to consult residents about its plans. She said: "I haven't met anyone yet who isn't horrified - the whole thing is happening so quickly and nobody has had a chance to ask any questions."

"My main gripe is that I've lived in the area all my life and didn't know about the museum until recently: they don't promote it - they don't market it. There's nothing to say it's there."

She urged Bromley Council: "At least give some time so there can be a proper consultation. There may be some people in the borough who might come up with some good ideas that generate some money for the museum."

Adding his name to the petition, Ian Matthews said: "There's not a lot that's old

and/or cultural about Orpington so perhaps we should be looking to retain and promote this rather than consigning it to the fickle fate of developers. This should be a community facility, not somebody's cash cow."

The council says it will allocate £395,000 to sell The Priory and make alternative provision for its artefacts, but estimates it will make annual savings of at least £44,000 once the building is sold. Its research identifies the museum service as "the lowest priority for residents in the context of all other... services the council provides".

'Budget restraints'

A council spokesman said: "The council has consulted on the future of the museum service regularly since 2009, it has also been consulted on as part of our overall budget consultation in the face of making more than £60million in cuts."

"During the last few months officers have had regular face-to-face meetings, phone calls and emails with stakeholders on the future of the museum. The council recognises the value of heritage, and we are developing proposals for a new offer, including two new high quality exhibitions showcasing the most important and interesting parts of the collection in Bromley central library, while operating under these significant budget restraints."

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