



The Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust Forward Plan 2026-29

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1. Welcome

This Forward Plan covers the period 1 April 2026 to 31 March 2029. During this time, the Horniman Museum and Gardens will celebrate its 125th anniversary and mark the completion of the transformative Nature + Love project.

At the time of writing, we all face enormous and growing cultural, political and economic uncertainties. As such, this plan is based on a set of assumptions that will need to be revised over time. To respond to this uncertainty proactively, this three-year plan will be reviewed regularly and updated every year to adjust to changing circumstances.

Our commitment to our mission, being a values-led organisation, serving the communities of one of the world's most diverse cities and building equitable partnerships with communities across the world, remain our anchors. This has never been more important to realise our mission.

Our Mission: The Horniman connects us all with global cultures and the natural environment, encouraging us to shape a positive future for the world we all share.

This plan marks a shift in three ways. First, we will deliver our transformational capital project, Nature + Love, in 2026 and 2027. We must make good on our promises to widen access and connect our audiences with the world we all share. Second, we begin to look beyond the delivery of Nature + Love to determine the next phase of development for the Horniman, in consultation with our communities. Third, we focus clearly on what our mission and values mean for our organisational culture and the work we deliver together.

This Forward Plan outlines our priorities for the next three years, what we are aiming to achieve and how we will approach achieving it.

2. Our Environment

As stated, we face a growing range of uncertainties. We also have unique challenges and opportunities within the sector and the Horniman. Key concerns include the risk of a mismatch between downward pressure on funding and upward pressure on costs, governance considerations for a global institution as government policy favours devolution, and the challenges associated with being a values-driven organisation at a time of rapid technological change and cultural volatility.

3. Values, Behaviours and Priorities

3.1 Values and Behaviours

The Horniman has a distinctive spirit and is the sum of 125 years of ideas and approaches. It is always a challenge to capture this in the confines of words. Values and Behaviours help us to communicate who we aim to be, to ourselves and our audiences and partners, and how we will act to achieve that aim.

In 2024, staff and volunteers contributed to a review of the Horniman's Values. In 2025, the Senior Management Team (SMT) and Section Leads built on this work to consider how those values can be brought to life in everything we do, through our behaviours. Our shared view is that how we act is just as important as what we do.

Values	Behaviours
Our Values are who we aim to be	Our Behaviours are a commitment to how we will act to achieve our values
Caring	<p>We show care through empathy and listening, reflection and learning</p> <p>We cultivate biodiversity and are environmentally responsible</p>
Friendly	<p>We communicate clearly and with warmth</p> <p>We encourage creativity, curiosity, innovation and fun</p>
Respectful	<p>We approach people and planet in the spirit of mutual respect and trust</p> <p>We are clear and honest about our ambitions and our limitations</p> <p>We are adaptable, accountable and open to change</p>
Inclusive	<p>We seek diverse perspectives and histories</p> <p>We create fair opportunities for many voices to be shared</p> <p>We support equitable collaboration</p>

3.2 Horniman Priorities

These priorities guide our activities towards our mission over the years covered by this Forward Plan.

- **Empowering teams:** enabling staff at all levels to influence decision making and fostering a culture of cross-team collaboration that can move at pace with new ideas and address challenges supportively.
- **Diversity:** engaging and listening to diverse audiences, staff, volunteers and partners, taking active steps towards decolonisation, equity and inclusion.
- **Environmental and social impact:** making a positive difference to people and the planet through our activity and projects, particularly Nature + Love.
- **Digital transformation:** investing in staff's digital training, development and literacy alongside digital infrastructure to enable greater ambition, efficiency and security.
- **Income generation:** building creative and profitable activities to enable greater relevance and business resilience.

4. Framework Plan

In October 2019 Trustees approved a 10-year framework plan for the period 2020-30, to deliver our priorities through a combination of revised programming and a series of capital projects relating to our buildings and Gardens. In effect, this is the Horniman's long-term guide, while the Forward Plan functions as our strategy.

The major capital projects comprised two strands: the Nature + Love project and refurbishment of the main entrance.

In 2026/27 the Horniman is in full delivery mode for Nature + Love. The supporting Activity Plan runs through 2026/27 and 2027/28 and the impacts and objectives of the project will continue throughout the term of this Forward Plan.

The pace of change in our external environment is such that the existing 2020-30 framework and what comes next needs to be reassessed. Accordingly, within the first year of this Corporate Plan we will develop a new 10-year framework plan, to cover the period 2027-37. Our 125th celebrations will be the springboard for this work.

Staff, volunteers and trustees will be fully involved in this process. It will be informed by our mission and consultation with our audiences and communities.

5. Horniman Goals

The ongoing **Horniman goals** which give structure to this plan and our activity remain as stated in the current 10-year framework, and will be reviewed during 2026 as we develop that framework's successor. The explanatory text underneath each goal highlights major projects and work being carried out or started in the 2026/27 financial year. This text will be updated each year.

Goal 1: Access

We will use the collections and Gardens to stimulate curiosity and wonder, promoting opportunities for people of all ages, abilities and backgrounds to participate in and enjoy exhibitions, learning programmes, activities and events – both face-to-face and online.

Delivers against priorities: Empowering Teams, Diversity, Environmental and Social Impact and Digital Transformation

The celebration of our 125th anniversary and the gradual opening of Nature + Love facilities is an opportunity to redouble efforts to widen our audiences so that the profile of our visitors more closely reflects that of the communities we serve. It will also see us aiming to reach increased visitor numbers of 900,000+. We will continue to address the ongoing legacy of our colonial history through our practice, content and programming, guided by the Decolonisation Working Group, prioritising community-led representation of people who are marginalised or misrepresented in our spaces. Through our Formal Learning and Community Engagement programmes, we will continue to co-develop our offer with learners, particularly those eligible for Pupil Premium, and those identified as in the most need locally, and introduce these audiences to the new facilities. Our work is guided by our Audience Champions Group and outlined in an Audience Development Strategy and Action Plan. Our programming will make the most of our

new Gardens and Museum spaces to attract a more diverse audience to our Forest Hill site for our exhibitions, events and engagement.

We will use the anniversary year to grow engagement with our digital output, including the launch of a new Augmented Reality app to connect the Gardens and the Museum for visitors in an accessible way. We will continue to provide online access to collections through a mix of editorial content, short form video for social media and the effective development of our Collections Online.

We will support new visitors to the Horniman through staff and volunteer training, ensuring everyone feels welcome in our spaces. We will also be mindful that recruiting and valuing a diverse employee and volunteer team is vital to a Horniman that is more representative of the communities we serve. During the first year of the plan, directors will participate in the Museums Association Antiracist Museums Programme, putting this at the heart of future strategic planning.

Working in partnership will extend the opportunities we offer to the widest possible audience. As the largest cultural organisation in Lewisham, we will continue to support Lewisham's cultural strategy through the Lewisham Strategic Partnership and play our role as a member of the complementary Civic University Agreement partnership led by Goldsmiths, University of London. We will work with the GLA, and specifically the Deputy Mayor for Culture, on the Mayor of London's cultural agenda. Equitable and ongoing partnerships with schools, universities, broader formal learning providers, communities and cultural sector organisations will ensure that our public offer is appealing, relevant and forefronts diverse voices and perspectives.

Goal 2: Collections

We will safeguard and develop the collections so that they can be made as accessible as possible now and into the future.

Delivers against priorities: Empowering Teams, Diversity and Environmental and Social Impact

The primary focus during the first year of this plan will be the Natural History collection, as we conserve, mount and install specimens in preparation for opening the new Natural History Gallery. We will continue to embed an integrated approach to Music, involving our collections, our staff expertise, musicians, audiences, formal learners and local communities, with a strong digital component. This will include the development of an exhibition on the local phenomenon of Dubstep music, opening in 2028. We will develop a decolonial approach to enhancing the World Gallery, notably addressing gaps in representation of local diaspora

communities, such as the Caribbean community, and centre marginalised communities through the co-development of exhibitions in response to the Horniman's collections.

We will also build on existing partnerships in support of our Project Coral programme, our Aquarium-led international project dedicated to coral reef conservation, with the aim of increasing the project's impact in affected regions and its visibility in the UK. During the term of the plan, we will develop a project to enhance our display and research facilities. Through the first half of 2026/27 we will have a public programming focus on life under water, with the opening of Voyage to the Deep – Underwater Adventures, a family exhibition, and a new photographic display in Gallery Square highlighting the work of Project Coral.

We will continue to collaborate with international partners and communities on restitution, with a particular focus on ancestral remains, while continuing to build on our links with Nigeria and Australia following the transfer of ownership of the Benin and Warumungu material held by the Horniman. We will extend our focus to incorporating Indigenous knowledge and values into the appropriate care, use and interpretation of culturally sensitive belongings and ancestral remains at the Horniman.

Research partnerships with peer museums, universities and communities, in the UK and internationally, are vital to extending our capacity and opening access to new funding streams. We will continue to partner in the Arts Council England (ACE) funded joint research project led by the Pitt Rivers Museum, Rethinking Relationships, building trust around African collections. We will implement the recommendations for supporting access to collections developed by the project's Ghanaian community partners. Building on our longstanding Egyptian community partnerships, we will continue to examine how Egypt's collection work can be used as a case study to reshape institutional understanding and drive change for how cultures are understood and spoken about across all areas of museum practice. We will partner on new research that will support Southwest Asian and North African (SWANA) community members to reclaim their heritage in UK museums. This will include collaborating with communities to develop new practice and sector toolkits that embed Indigenous knowledge into museum practice regarding ancestral remains, focusing on Egypt, the UK, Australia and Tibet. We will scope and commence the next phase of our Caribbean community-led collecting project and continue to support early-career researchers through collaborative PhDs and post-doctoral research.

Nationally, we will continue to work primarily with museums with similar collections to develop mutually supportive programmes around collections development, while supporting smaller institutions and other sector support initiatives. We will continue to lead the Museums and Galleries Network for Exhibition Touring (MAGNET), funded by Art Fund and Arts Council England, to tour three co-developed exhibitions among 12 partners, and explore opportunities for a third phase of MAGNET.

We will also contribute to Arts Council England's Towards a National Collection programme, the creation of a virtual national catalogue of museum holdings. This will be one aspect of a greater focus on knowledge and information management, as we tackle the backlog in our records, both digital and paper, and work with sector partners to ensure ethical and environmentally sensitive deployment of AI to serve our collections and improve efficiency.

Goal 3: Shaping the future

We will effectively manage our resources and become more financially resilient so that we can continue to develop and share our collections, estate and expertise for the widest possible public benefit.

Delivers against priorities: Empowering Teams, Income Generation, Diversity, Environmental and Social Impact and Digital Transformation

We will achieve a significant increase in earned income across our commercial and fundraising workstreams. This will be achieved through a new focus on membership growth as our visitor numbers recover, and stewardship of those members to encourage greater giving, including a new Patrons scheme and development of legacy giving. During the first year of the plan, we will launch a second café as part of the Nature + Love project, trial new commercial events in the Gardens and grow our event hire business as building disruption comes to an end.

We have identified a path to net zero, and this will be an important theme during the term of the plan, although the task will not be complete until 2035-40 (depending on funding). The immediate priority will be to secure matching support for our Public Sector Decarbonisation Scheme funding to carry out major improvements to the Butterfly House and CUE building. Our aim is to improve our own performance dramatically, while sharing our successes and failures in line with our responsibility to give a sense of agency to our visitors and local community.

Fundamental to our plans to make the Horniman accessible to all audiences is our work to diversify our own staff and volunteers. This issue is the foremost one being addressed by our Equity, Diversity and Inclusion Working Group, which has specific annual targets. We will continue to support the People of Colour staff network, the Disabled and Neurodivergent Colleagues network, LGBTQIA+ Staff Network and the Staff Wellbeing group and initiatives and recognise and celebrate the contribution of our volunteers. We will continue to nurture the next generation of museum professionals through careers days, work experience and student placements, as well as our joint MA in Anthropology and Museum Practice with Goldsmiths.

We will continue to implement our information technology and digital transformation strategy. During this period, we will focus on ensuring that staff across the organisation are equipped with the right systems and security for them to function in the most efficient and secure way. This will be achieved by further developing our cybersecurity, increasing use of Microsoft 365, and by improving and upgrading our network, software, systems and general IT infrastructure. We will replace Mimsy, the 'end-of-life' Collections Management System used by the Horniman since 2000, with a new, digital-first solution that will enhance efficiency, transparency, and best practice across its diverse collections and related activities. We will also continue to integrate our customer relationship management (CRM) system within the areas of ticketing, membership and fundraising, and streamline processes with further system enhancements where possible. Underpinning this is the upgrade to Version 16 of Tessitura, to comply with the Digital Markets, Competitions and Consumers Act and ensuring integrations are developed efficiently across teams.

Maintaining the physical infrastructure of our two sites will be primarily a function of our success in securing capital funding from the DCMS Public Buildings Infrastructure Fund, and we have bids in place to support a comprehensive programme of works throughout the plan period.

A key project to deliver this goal, which will kick off in 2026, is the refresh of our 10-year Framework Plan. At this early stage several possible capital projects to follow Nature + Love are under consideration. However, while some have been scoped and associated with indicative costs, others are little more than concepts. A capital projects assessment process will be put in place, and we will welcome two Clore Research Fellows to the Horniman to assist with scoping.

The staff, volunteers and Trustees of the Horniman Public Museum and Public Park Trust will make every effort to realise these plans over the next three years.

Michael Salter-Church, Chair

Gordon Seabright, Chief Executive