



**LOTTERY FUNDED**

## **The Women's Hall Celebrating the East London Suffragettes**

### **Exhibition Designer Brief**

#### **1 Background to the project**

2018 is the centenary of the Representation of the People Act, which saw the right to vote extended to 8.4 million women in the UK. The East London Federation of Suffragettes (ELFS), led by Sylvia Pankhurst, continued their campaign for the equal vote during the First World War, but the conflict had a big impact on the Home Front. Local women in Bow and Poplar were becoming destitute and children starving as a result of factory closures, rising food prices and, from 1916, conscription of male family members. Faced with this critical situation, the ELFS instead turned their activist energies to providing help and support to those affected – which included the group's own members. They set up a headquarters at 400 Old Ford Road, a former Mission Hall in Bow where some of them also lived. Naming it 'The Women's Hall', they met there to organise and formulate their activist strategies to lobby for the equal vote and to develop social welfare provision for people struggling to cope with the East End's harsh living conditions.

One of their strategies was to set up a 'cost-price restaurant' in The Women's Hall which served a hot meal twice a day to local women and children. The restaurant ran on volunteer labour and donations of money, food and crockery. With The Women's Hall as their base, the ELFS took over other local buildings in Bow, repurposing them with services specifically to benefit East Enders: a toy factory offering employment to local women, where volunteers fabricated playthings from donated materials to keep children occupied; and the 'Mother's Arms', an old pub that became a crèche.

In this centenary year, The Women's Hall project has been devised to commemorate and celebrate the ELFS, their activism and their impact on those living in the area now known as the London Borough of Tower Hamlets. The Women's Hall itself will be recreated, the spirit of the ELFS revived, and a wide-ranging, free cultural heritage programme inspired by the suffragettes' concerns will be run from late May to late October 2018. The focus of the project's outcomes will be residents of Tower Hamlets, a borough currently ranked as the second most deprived local authority area in England, with the highest level of child poverty.

#### **2 Exhibition overview**

The exhibition hall at Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives - a large Victorian library on Bancroft Road, E1 4DQ - will be transformed into The Women's Hall – an imaginative recreation of the East End Suffragettes HQ.

The exhibition will showcase the research of volunteers into the activities and individual members of the ELFS, and its design will evoke domestic interior décor of the period. The hall measures approximately 144sqm and features four large central columns and a staffed reception desk. Material will be digitised and reproduced from archive collections held at different repositories.

Original items will be loaned where appropriate.

In addition to narrative interpretation panels and display of original items on loan, we anticipate the exhibition will be structured into four different zones reflecting the activities that took place in The Women's Hall and at other key ELFS locations. As far as possible these will be interactive recreations of the wartime period, inviting visitor participation. They would include:

- A toy making area with furniture for children
- A crafting area for making banners, posters, prints
- A dining area for cost-price restaurant meals to be served
- A 'living conditions' area showing cooking and sleeping arrangements

Public events will take place in the exhibition space during the run, so there must be sufficient standing or seated capacity for an audience to gather, flexible furniture and a stage. There must also be accessible routes and clear wayfinding to the other public rooms within the building, and the lift.

### **3 Brief**

We are seeking to appoint an Exhibition Designer responsible for the following:

- Development and implementation of an immersive design for The Women's Hall exhibition at THLHLA, based on historical research and interpretation to be provided
- The design and layout must evoke atmosphere of the working class East End in 1914-1918 throughout, through use of antique or reproduction furnishings, and/or creating designs that evoke the period look and feel.
- Exhibits to be 2D and 3D. In addition to the large wall space, the hall's lighting, flooring, ceiling and all fixtures and fittings are in scope for transformation.
- Proposals can include digital content but as there is an Education Room adjacent with a projector and screen, this is not mandatory, as a specific A-V offer can be presented there
- Hold regular meetings with the Heritage Manager, Volunteer Manager and volunteers throughout, taking direction on the accessibility of the interpretation, look and feel and other priorities.
- Following approval of the design, on a date in early April tbc, you will lead and oversee construction, working with staff, volunteers and other stakeholders on procurement and risk assessments

### **4 Timescale**

The Exhibition Designer will be expected to begin work asap in late February/ early March, and complete by the end of May 2018. The exhibition will be open from 29 May - 20 October 2018 with the public programme running throughout this period.

## **5 Budget**

The total construction budget is £10,000, including preparation, materials, fabrication, lighting, props, and any essential labour costs. This sum excludes printed materials and printed reproductions, for which there is a separate budget.

Volunteers will be involved in developing the exhibition's content and also its construction, working directly with the Exhibition Designer and other team members. In addition, the budget can be stretched further through the use of inexpensive and loaned items.

## **6 Fee and payments**

A fixed fee of £3,600 is available. The payment schedule is as follows:

- Appointment: 20% (March 2018)
- Approval of design plan and visuals: 30% (early April 2018)
- Completion of installation and snagging: 50% (early June 2018)

This is a freelance contract. The Exhibition Designer will be responsible for all tax payments that might be due to HMRC as a result of this contract.

## **7 Partnership**

The Women's Hall project is delivered by a partnership of local heritage organisations: Four Corners, Tower Hamlets Local History Library & Archives, East End Women's Museum, and Alternative Arts.

The Exhibition Designer will be contracted by Four Corners, reporting to the Heritage Manager, Tamsin Bookey, at THLHLA.

## **How to apply**

Please send an expression of interest, comprising

- 1) your relevant experience and examples of previous work
- 2) your proposed approach
- 3) confirmation of your ability to meet the tight timescales required
- 4) a current CV

to: [Tamsin.Bookey@towerhamlets.gov.uk](mailto:Tamsin.Bookey@towerhamlets.gov.uk)

**Deadline: Friday 16<sup>th</sup> February, 9.00am.** Interviews will take place on Thursday 22<sup>nd</sup> February.

For further information and to arrange a site visit, please contact Tamsin Bookey, Heritage Manager on 0207 364 1293.

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