Bournemouth Heritage Hub: Immersive Coastal History

Deep Innovation Report

Executive Summary

The Bournemouth Heritage Hub reimagines coastal history through immersive, interactive storytelling featuring Saxons, Vikings, and 18th-century smugglers.

By moving beyond static display cases to augmented reality and sensory walkthroughs, the hub creates a year-round cultural amenity in Bournemouth town centre.

A pop-up pilot in an empty retail space will test non-seasonal visitor demand and narrative engagement before committing to permanent infrastructure.

The Better Everyday

What if local coastal history felt less like quiet glass cabinets and more like stepping directly onto Saxon shorelines and smuggler trails.

The Bournemouth Heritage Hub introduces an interactive museum concept featuring sensory galleries, augmented reality guides, and thematic walkthroughs exploring early coastal settlements and maritime trade.

On a grey November afternoon in Bournemouth town centre, families and school groups walk through atmospheric smuggling coves without relying on fair weather or seasonal beach attractions.

This meets an enduring need for engaging indoor cultural experiences that connect residents to local heritage, replacing screen-based isolation with shared physical exploration.

Creating tactile, immersive history sets a higher expectation for local cultural venues, inspiring nearby high street amenities to blend learning with active participation.

Who It Could Matter To

From teachers searching for practical history trips to digital creatives building augmented reality worlds, local heritage touches diverse lives across BCP.

Primary School Educator in Boscombe

Teaches history to young learners and needs accessible local field trips that do not require long coach journeys across the county.

Encounters the hub when searching for winter term curriculum trips that bring early British history into real-world focus.

Gains a reliable, affordable educational trip with structured workshops, provided the venue offers straightforward group booking and clear learning materials.

Off-Season Visitor and Local Parent

Lives locally and seeks engaging indoor weekend activities for children during wet coastal winter months.

Looks for high-quality town centre activities when beach visits and outdoor parks are impractical due to rain.

Finds an immersive year-round family destination, provided ticket options remain affordable for regular visits.

Digital Media Producer in Lansdowne

Works in the local creative technology sector, building augmented reality software and digital storytelling tools.

Seeks civic applications for digital media expertise beyond commercial client projects.

Discovers a showcase for creative tech talent, provided clear revenue-sharing or commissioning models exist for local creators.

What This Could Change for BCP

Transforming local history into immersive experiences creates year-round footfall and deepens civic connection across town centres.

Aligning with BCP Council's regeneration ambition for vibrant, year-round town centres, the hub offers a distinct cultural reason to visit outside summer peak months.

Directly generating consistent footfall for neighbouring high street businesses, the venue creates steady demand for local food, retail, and hospitality providers.

As a ripple effect, the project could spur collaborative partnerships between local digital agencies, heritage groups, and regional tourism networks across the south coast.

The practical trade-off involves balancing high initial setup and hardware maintenance costs against the commitment to keep ticket prices inclusive for local residents.

Who Must Connect

Bringing coastal heritage to life requires a tight network of creative technologists, venue providers, and historical custodians.

Delivery relies on an independent cultural operator working alongside a local digital design agency to combine narrative curation with robust interactive hardware.

Participation involves local historical societies and community archivists who help verify stories and contribute authentic artefacts to exhibit narratives.

Enabling access depends on BCP Council providing suitable town centre property or adaptive reuse spaces with flexible planning terms for cultural use.

Sustaining operations requires revenue from school admissions, seasonal visitor tickets, and grant support from regional cultural endowments.

The missing link is a structured partnership between digital media researchers at Arts University Bournemouth and heritage curators, requiring a joint workshop facilitated through the Silicon South network.

Why This Fails

Broken technology, high off-season overheads, and disconnected narratives pose the largest risks to sustained operation.

Hardware breakdown and exhibit fatigue: Complex digital displays and augmented reality headsets break under heavy daily use and lack funding for ongoing maintenance. The early warning sign is multiple out-of-service notices across interactive galleries during peak weekend visits.

Off-peak financial deficit: High winter operating and heating costs outpace modest off-season ticket sales, draining cash reserves before spring visitors arrive. The early warning sign is falling weekday booking rates and reduced staffing hours during autumn months.

Style over substance: Visual effects overshadow historical depth, disappointing local history groups and school trip coordinators looking for educational value. The early warning sign is negative feedback from educators regarding thin curriculum alignment.

One Experiment to Start

Testing a temporary pop-up walkthrough in a vacant shop unit reveals true visitor interest before building permanent infrastructure.

The critical uncertainty is whether local residents and schools will pay for short-format immersive heritage experiences outside the summer tourist season.

A fortnight pop-up pilot in a vacant retail unit in Bournemouth town centre will host a single 'Smugglers Cove' sensory walkthrough for local families and test groups.

Keep going if visitors express willingness to buy seasonal passes and schools book test sessions; Stop or rethink if footfall remains low despite local promotion or visitors find the experience brief.

Next step: A creative studio lead in Bournemouth town centre convenes a meeting with local heritage advisors within 90 days to design a two-weekend pop-up trial.