

Crystal Palace Subway

Brief for the Assessment of Commercial Options and Viability



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Project Title: Crystal Palace Subway Cultural Venue - Commercial Viability
Site Address: Crystal Palace Parade, London SE19 2BA

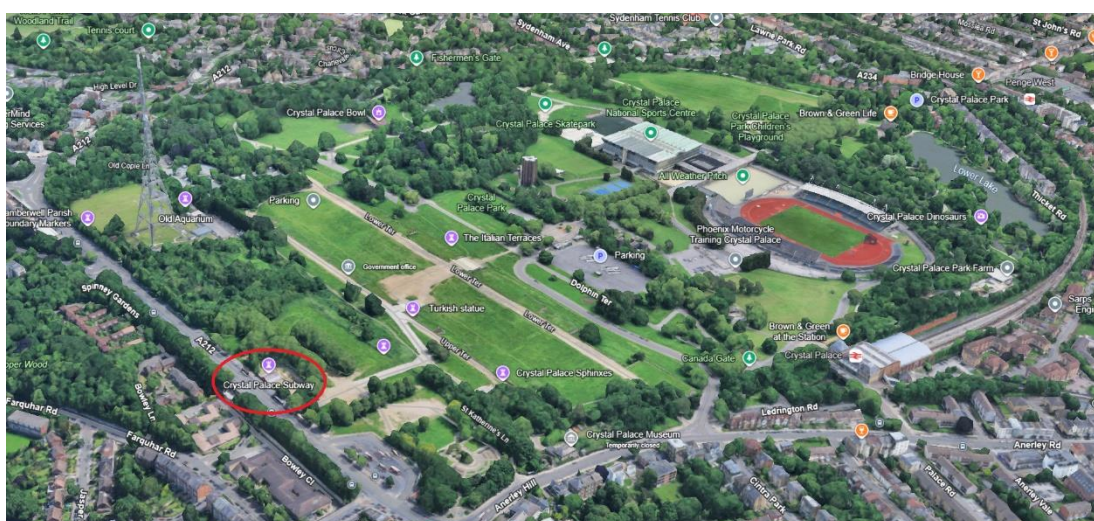
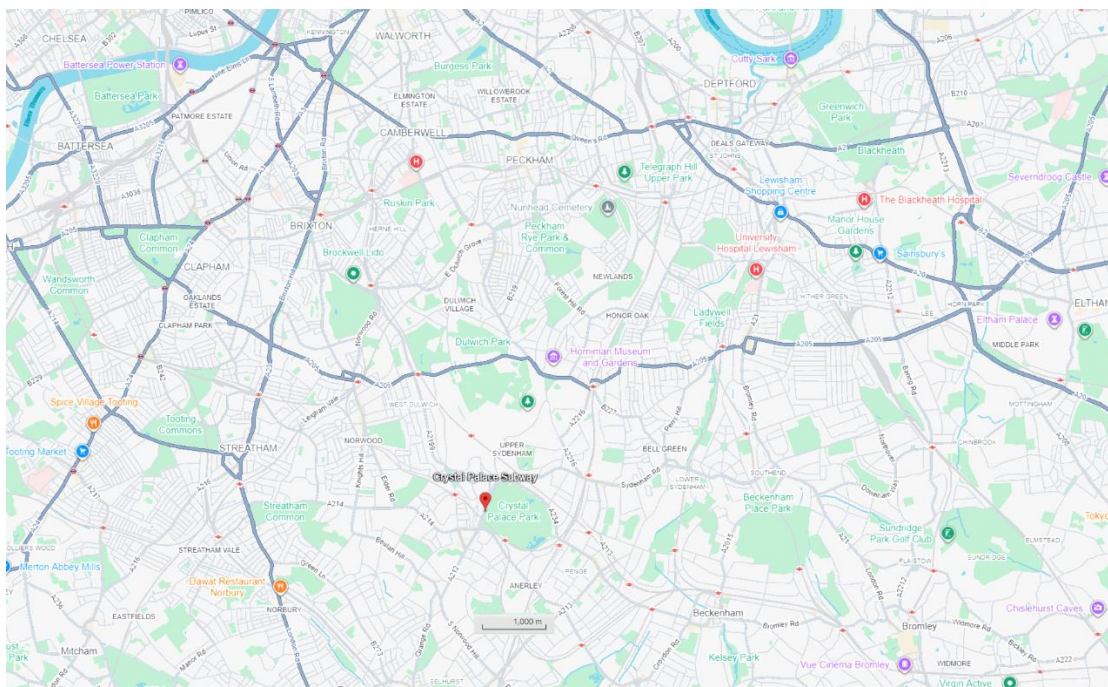
1 INTRODUCTION

- 1.1 The award-winning Crystal Palace Subway was reopened to the public in 2024 following the first phase of an extensive restoration programme. The Subway won a [Museums and Heritage Award](#) as well as a [National Railway Heritage Award](#). It is the jewel in the Park, and one of our most asked about spaces for visits, filming and venue hire. Public open days regularly attract thousands of visitors and we have our first wedding booked in for Summer 2026.
- 1.2 Crystal Palace Park Trust (CPPT) and the London Borough of Bromley (LBB) are seeking to appoint a creative-thinking consultant with demonstrable experience to assess the commercial market for the Crystal Palace Subway as a cultural venue. Crystal Palace Park Trust will be working alongside their partners the London Borough of Bromley.
- 1.3 The successful consultant should have extensive experience of conducting market research, business and activity planning for cultural and heritage visitor attractions. Experience of engaging with similar commercial cultural organisations would be particularly advantageous.

2 BACKGROUND AND CONTEXT

- 2.1 The site is at Crystal Palace Parade, London, SE19 2BA – an award-winning subterranean Victorian cultural venue in the 200-acre Crystal Palace Park, at the intersection of Croydon, Southwark, Lambeth, Lewisham and located in Bromley. The Subway is partially located under Crystal Palace Parade, situated on the edge of Crystal Palace Park. As part of the ongoing wider Regeneration Plan to restore and rejuvenate the Park, the full restoration of this structure will ultimately remove the Subway from Historic England's Heritage at Risk Register, making the site safe and accessible for future generations to enjoy.

CRYSTAL PALACE PARK TRUST



- 2.2 September 2024, saw the completion of a major three-year restoration project, just in time for the Subway's 160th anniversary. This project included the provision of a new roof over the East Courtyard to replace the roof that was destroyed in the Crystal Palace fire of 1936. It included extensive restoration works and structural remedial works to the North Elevation, the installation of West Courtyard gates and full masonry cleaning, as well as new electricity and water supplies to the site. The restored Subway was handed over to CPPT who now manage the site as a multi-use space.



- 2.3 Crystal Palace Park has always been a pioneering location for cultural programming. Becoming the home of the remodelled Crystal Palace in the 1850s, it soon became a world-leading destination for entertainment, evolving into the birthplace of the modern urban festival through its Garden Parties of the 60s/70s, and since then hosting iconic performances including Bob Marley's last UK concert. This historic landscape has delighted audiences for 170 years and now a multi-million regeneration project is putting the park back on the cultural map, hosting audiences across its characterful venues – the Italian Terraces, Concert Bowl and the Subway. 1 million visits are made annually, predominantly from five bordering London Boroughs: Bromley, Croydon, Southwark, Lambeth and Lewisham.
- 2.4 Since handover, CPPT has held 14 free public open days at the Subway to show the site to members of the public and to host small-scale events and local groups such as a Craft Market, Film Screenings and historical societies.
- 2.5 CPPT is keen to see the Park restored to a world-class visitor attraction and in line with this ambition ensure that spaces are accessible and able to be used.

Summary of the key issues

- 2.6 Whilst the Subway has been significantly restored in part, further multimillion investment is required to enable it to reach its full potential, namely: the waterproofing of the vaulted area, improved accessibility (e.g. lift access) and a new build extension to host basic event facilities such as toilets and catering kitchen. These facilities are considered a requirement if the long-term vision for the Subway as a unique venue for cultural events

and entertainment is to be achieved. This is reflected in the 2020 Outline Planning permission for the site (Ref. 20/00325/OUT).

- 2.7 Given the investment required CPPT and LBB are now considering the options for the site. For further investment in the site given the financial constraints of CPPT and LBB, options now need to be considered, and the commercial potential of the site needs to be assessed to inform the viability of further investment. Ultimately, we need to understand the potential of the site - how much profit can be generated each year and how much investment needs to be made to make it profitable. We are looking for a business model that outlines how we can achieve this and potentially work with a commercial investor.

3 PROGRESS TO DATE AND TIMESCALES

- 3.1 Between June and September 2025, CPPT and LBB commissioned work to develop proposals to Stage 2 for a Cultural Venue in anticipation of possible £6m grant funding from the DCMS Creative Foundation Fund. NB this this national funding stream was fiercely competitive, and our expression of interest was unsuccessful.
- 3.2 The work commissioned considered the following:
- Restoration – Further areas of restoration building on the works already delivered to date.
 - New Build – New build extension to the Subway, to improve accessibility (namely integration of lift core), to improve security of the building and reduce chances of vandalism, and for basic visitor/event facilities namely toilets and catering kitchen.
 - Landscape Architecture – Integration with the Grade II* listed Park, creation of a secure perimeter, addressing the Cultural Venue's access needs (pedestrian and vehicular) in a sensitive and cost-effective way.
- 3.3 The Stage 2 work (attached as Annex 1), identified 3 options to respond to these requirements, with an increasing scale:
- Option 1 - An initial layout adhering to the OPA envelope in plan, within a single-storey building, providing space for facilities to serve approximately 40-person events within the subway and 127m² floorspace.
- 3.4 Option 2 - The second option extends the building to the south to cover all four stairs, with Front of House (FOH) and Back of House (BOH) facilities between the stairs and the line of trees to the east. This increases the Subway's seated event capacity to 65-70 guests and floorspace to 188m².
- 3.5 Option 3 - The third option moves the WCs and BOH facilities to the west of the stairs within new buildings flanking the courtyard space. It makes all four stairs legible from the park and opens the frontage to become a

generous foyer and multi-use space with café seating area. This option gives maximum flexibility and allows the Subway to hold seated events for 100-120 people, with 325m² floorspace.

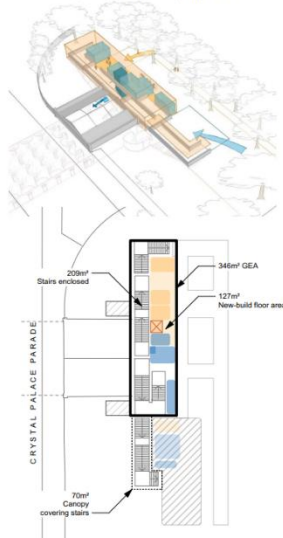
- 3.6 These options are set out in the images below. Option 3 was identified as the preferred option because it gives more flexibility and open foyer space at the front while involving less excavation through archaeology. The Council determined an indicative budget for the construction costs of Option 3 of around £7m. The construction period was expected to be approximately 18 months.

5. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT Three Initial Options

5.5 An initial layout (Option 1) adhering to the OPA envelope in plan, within a single-storey building, provides space for facilities to serve approximately 40-person events within the subway. Much of the building area is taken up by the existing stairs and lift access would be constructed by tunnelling beneath the north-upper stair.

1. OPA Minimum Envelope

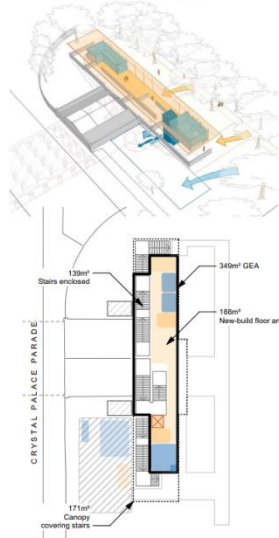
accom. in front | three stairs enclosed | one stair covered
lift access tunnels under north upper stair
127m² floorspace | 346m² GEA | 40 person events



The second option extends the building to the south to cover all four stairs, with FOH and BOH facilities between the stairs and the line of trees to the east. This increases the subway's seated event capacity to 65 guests.

2. Extended Minimum Envelope

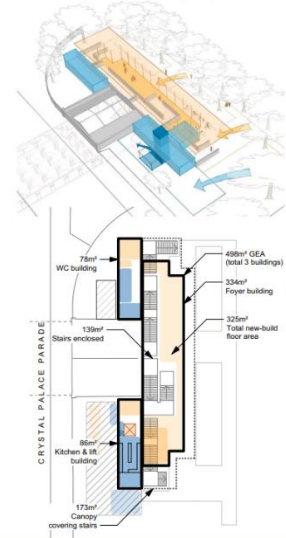
accom. in front | two stairs enclosed | two stairs covered
lift access tunnels under south upper stair
188m² floorspace | 349m² GEA | 65 person events



The third option moves the WCs and BOH facilities to the west of the stairs within new buildings flanking the courtyard space. It makes all four stairs legible from the park and opens the frontage to become a generous foyer and multi-use space with café seating area. This option gives maximum flexibility and allows the subway to hold seated events for 100-120 people.

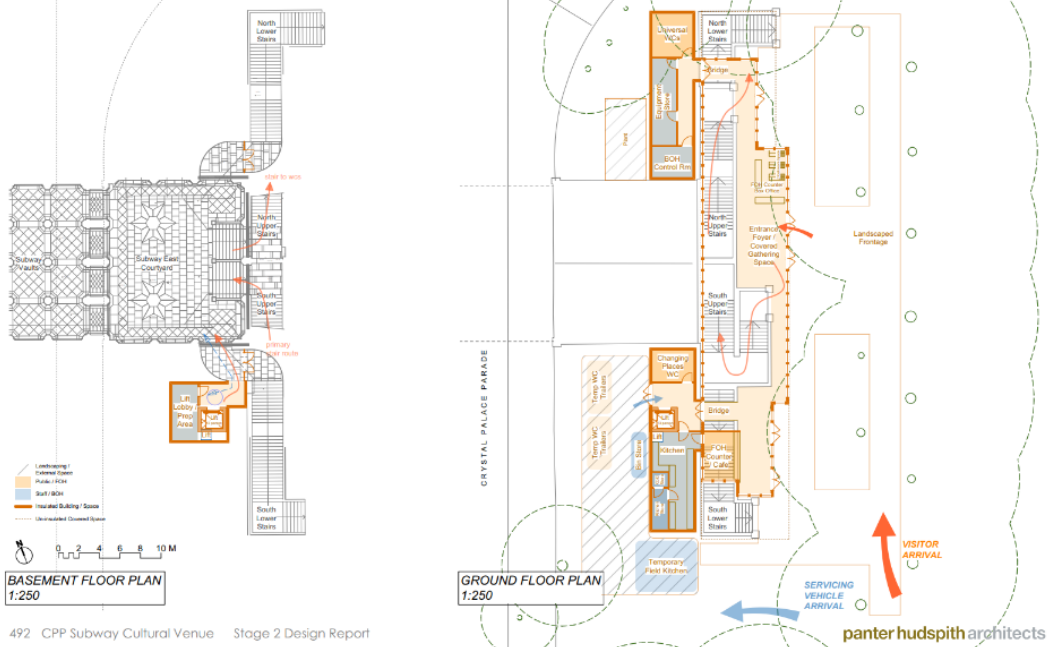
3. Extended Maximum Envelope

accom. to the west | two stairs enclosed | two stairs covered
lift access into south lower stair lobby
325m² floorspace | 498m² GEA | 120 person events



5. DESIGN DEVELOPMENT Option 3 - Extended OPA Maximum Envelope

5.6.2 Option 3 is the preferred option as it gives more flexibility and open layer space at the front while involving less excavation through archaeology. This iteration pulls back the frontage to reduce the overall footprint but results in undesirable corridors.



3.7 Before any of these options are now progressed, given that the grant application was not successful, the potential commercial interest in investing in the venue, as well as understanding the likely annual profit that could be made from the site to service a loan needs to be considered. To inform these considerations, the client wishes to commission an assessment of the commercial viability of the site through consideration of a range of approaches, to be guided by the consultant, including a joint venture with a commercial operator and a bank loan. This required output is a business model for the most viable agreed approach.

3.8 In addition to the ideal aspirational project outlined above CPPT is keen to understand what the minimum intervention might be to activate the space commercially and this is also an anticipated output of this commission.

3.9 The successful consultants will need to complete this work this by 27 February 2026 . The proposed programme is below :

- Deadline for proposals: 14 November 2025
- Award by: 28 November 2025
- Kick off meeting and site visit: week commencing 1 December 2025
- Meetings, site visits and desk-based research: December 25 to end January 25
- Draft submitted – 2 February 26
- Revisions and questions – by end of February 26
- Final product 27 February 2026

4 SCOPE

- 4.1 The consultant will review the market to assess the commercial potential of the Subway. The consultant will determine a range of approaches that could be taken to secure the investment required to enable this full commercial use by considering the likely profitability of the site and the potential for a joint venture with a commercial operator, a bank loan, or other options to be advised by the consultant. The output required is a business model for the agreed recommended way forward to guide the amount of capital investment that is viable given the likely return. This will include a review of the priorities for capital investment in the site – restoration, security, access and facilities. The consultant should also take into account the importance of the Subway as a sensitive historical and cultural venue. Whilst CPPT and LBB wish to maximise the opportunity for the site to be an Income generating venue, it will remain a key part of the wider Crystal Palace Park. The consultant should advise how its assessment of commercial opportunities can also protect and maximise the site's heritage.
- 4.2 The first phase of restoration works to the Subway have been publicly funded using a range of grants. Public access and community use therefore need to be maintained as part of any future offer.

5 SERVICES TO BE PROVIDED

- 5.1 The consultant will need to set out their programme of work to meet the requirements of this brief and the deadline. The services should include the following:
- 5.2 a review of relevant documentation detailing the project proposals and an assessment of all existing market research and surveys, historic visitor numbers and financial data and any other relevant research already undertaken to consider the viability of the Subway as an events space;
- a desk-based analysis of the:
- 5.3 existing visitor data for the park and the Subway, based on the research to inform the current regeneration, information gathered by CPPT and for the evaluation of the current regeneration project;
- existing and forward-looking market demand, based on location, resident population statistics and trends as well as data on tourism and wider visitor interests and transport options - to understand the site's catchment area;

- a review of key factors that will influence the attraction to residents and non-residents as potential users of the Subway as well as potential barriers and how these might be addressed (this assessment should include a SWOT analysis);
- 5.4 relevant commercial interests that could have an interest in the Subway as an events venue;
- existing and likely future competition in terms of the potential commercial interests (this should include any positive and negative implications from the proposed development of the National Sports Centre); and
- 5.5 national and local comparators - including relevant case studies for which data and comparison can be drawn (e.g. listed buildings, number of temporary exhibitions, school visits, members etc.)
- 5.6 Market research to comprise contact with at least three potential commercial operators to inform the potential of a joint venture approach.
- 5.7 The outputs should include:
- A report and presentation on the outcomes of the analysis, including recommendations; and following agreement with the client on the most viable way forward
 - The development of a financially driven business model, based on the most viable option identified for the site as agreed with the client. This should address the potential income, profit and loss based on reasoned assumptions.

6 MEETINGS

- 6.1 In addition to an inception meeting, the consultant should allow for at least 2 site visits and 4 meetings with the client and other relevant parties determined.

7 FEE BUDGET

- 7.1 CPPT and LBB expect the project to be delivered on a fixed fee basis. The estimated consultancy fee value is £20,000.
- 7.2 The fee for the project will be fixed in advance and include all expenses but excludes VAT. The cost of attending meetings should be included in the composite fee to be submitted.

8 QUESTIONS

Any questions on the above should be directed to Crystal Palace Park Trust – Tenders@CrystalPalaceParkTrust.org.

9 APPLICATION

Applications should be submitted by 10AM Friday 14 November 2025, to Tenders@CrystalPalaceParkTrust.org. They should include how you will address the brief, staff who will work on it, two case studies of similar projects you have worked on, costings, outline timings and the names of two references who can be approached.