# Herefordshire councillor brands museum event woke virtue-signalling amid public engagement drive



A Herefordshire town councillor, Ewen Sinclair, has publicly denounced an upcoming event intended to guide the redevelopment of the new Hereford Museum, labelling it an exercise in “woke virtue-signalling.” Sinclair's comments were made in a Facebook post detailing the “Contentious Narratives” event, which is part of a broader initiative to encourage public dialogue about how museums should navigate complex subjects like misinformation and contested histories.

This event forms part of a series orchestrated by the Herefordshire Council’s museums and galleries department, aimed at engaging the community in shaping the direction of the new £18-million museum and art gallery set to open in Broad Street. Damian Etheraads, head of the museum department, stated that the discussion is intended to explore ways to present challenging topics with integrity, avoiding the pitfalls of dogmatism while fostering a more nuanced public understanding.

In his criticism, Sinclair voiced concerns over the council's approach, asserting that the event would not genuinely promote open dialogue but rather dictate how participants should think about significant issues like “fake news.” He suggested that Etheraads, who will lead the discussion, is merely engaging in self-promotion. However, a council spokesperson clarified the event’s purpose, stating that attendees would not be told what to think, but rather offered an opportunity to engage with the ideas and principles underlying the museum’s redevelopment.

The importance of such public assemblies cannot be understated, given the current societal context where misinformation and fractured narratives significantly impact public discourse. Herefordshire Council has introduced a series of these assemblies, with previous topics including ethical considerations surrounding the exhibition of human remains, and exploring the language used in historical displays, such as the use of BC/AD versus BCE/CE. These sessions are designed to reflect contemporary community values while ensuring that the museum remains relevant and engaging.

The launch of these public forums is part of a rebranding effort under the scheme titled “Heritage Reimagined – Revitalising Hereford’s Heritage,” which aims not only to modernise the museum's identity but also to elevate local voices in the historical narrative. Over 60 residents from various backgrounds have already participated in co-production panels dedicated to ensuring diverse representation, but the museum service acknowledges a continuing need for increased engagement from underrepresented groups, emphasising the rich plurality that characterises Herefordshire's community.

The upcoming event on June 7 at the History Store in Friars Street invites residents to contribute their perspectives on how historical narratives should be presented. It aims to create an ethical and inclusive framework that reflects the complex tapestry of local history. Etheraads emphasised that engaging with the community is essential to create a museum experience that not only showcases past events but also reflects the diverse stories that shape the present.

While Council Sinclair's remarks may highlight a division in perspectives regarding "woke" culture and the purpose of public discussions, it is essential that forums like these continue to exist, allowing for meaningful conversations around contentious subjects. They serve as critical platforms where diverse viewpoints can be aired, hopefully bridging gaps and enriching the historical narratives that are essential to community identity.

The redevelopment of the Hereford Museum and Art Gallery aims to catalyse positive socio-economic impacts, providing the community with a space that both educates and entertains, whilst being mindful of its historical significance. By embracing public engagement, the council hopes to adapt the museum to better resonate with contemporary issues, cultivating a space that invites all voices to partake in the dialogue around heritage and history.

## Reference Map:

* Paragraph 1 – [[1]](https://hellorayo.co.uk/hits-radio/birmingham/news/hereford-museum-councillor-woke), [[2]](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/1945/join-an-open-discussion-and-help-shape-the-future-of-hereford-museum-and-art-gallery)
* Paragraph 2 – [[1]](https://hellorayo.co.uk/hits-radio/birmingham/news/hereford-museum-councillor-woke), [[3]](https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/04/herefordshire-museum-art-gallery-launches-public-assemblies-to-shape-its-redevelopment/), [[5]](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/events)
* Paragraph 3 – [[4]](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/1971/local-voices-shaping-herefordshire-s-new-museum), [[6]](https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3rleelpg1eo)
* Paragraph 4 – [[7]](https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/museum-development)

Source: [Noah Wire Services](https://www.noahwire.com)

## Bibliography

1. <https://hellorayo.co.uk/hits-radio/birmingham/news/hereford-museum-councillor-woke> - Please view link - unable to able to access data
2. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/1945/join-an-open-discussion-and-help-shape-the-future-of-hereford-museum-and-art-gallery> - Herefordshire Council has launched a series of 'Public Assemblies' to involve the community in shaping the redevelopment of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery. The first event, 'Displaying Human Remains', will explore ethical considerations around exhibiting human remains in museums. Future discussions will address topics like the use of BC/AD versus BCE/CE in displays and how museums should present controversial historical narratives. These sessions aim to ensure the museum reflects contemporary views and aligns with community values. The events are free and open to all, with no booking required.
3. <https://www.museumsassociation.org/museums-journal/news/2025/04/herefordshire-museum-art-gallery-launches-public-assemblies-to-shape-its-redevelopment/> - Herefordshire Council has unveiled a new identity for its museum service, renaming it 'Herefordshire Museums & Galleries', and launched a series of public assemblies to discuss complex challenges faced by museums today. The rebranding includes renaming venues like the Black and White House Museum to The Old House Hereford and the Museum Resource and Learning Centre to The History Store. These changes are part of the 'Heritage Reimagined – Revitalising Hereford’s Heritage' project, supported by the UK Shared Prosperity Fund and led by the Herefordshire Museum Service Support Group.
4. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/news/article/1971/local-voices-shaping-herefordshire-s-new-museum> - Herefordshire Museum Service is engaging local communities in shaping the new Hereford Museum and Art Gallery through co-production panels. Over 60 residents have been involved since early 2025, ensuring the museum reflects the diversity and creativity of the county. Panels represent various groups, including young people, people with disabilities, LGBTQ+ communities, ethnic minorities, and veterans. The museum team acknowledges the need for more balanced representation and encourages further participation, especially from underrepresented groups, to ensure the museum is open, welcoming, and relevant to everyone.
5. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/events> - Herefordshire Council's events page lists upcoming activities, including the 'Exploring Contentious Narratives' session on 7 June 2025. This event will examine how museums navigate challenges such as pseudoscience, misrepresented history, and culture wars, ensuring an ethical, accurate, and inclusive approach. The session is part of a series of public assemblies aimed at involving the community in shaping the future of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery. The events are free to attend, with no booking required, and are open to all interested individuals.
6. <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/articles/c3rleelpg1eo> - Herefordshire Council is hosting a series of meetings to gather public feedback on the redevelopment of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery. The refurbishment aims to reflect the diverse heritage of Herefordshire and bring local history and personal stories to life in engaging ways. The public consultation runs from 8 November to 6 December, offering locals the opportunity to suggest events, traditions, and people to feature in the museum. Museum lead Damian Etheraads emphasised the importance of capturing the rich tapestry of stories that make the community unique.
7. <https://www.herefordshire.gov.uk/museum-development> - The redevelopment of Hereford Museum and Art Gallery aims to create a new visitor experience, showcasing collections like the Herefordshire Hoard. The project will transform the Grade II-listed building into a state-of-the-art museum and art gallery, offering permanent galleries, temporary exhibition spaces, and restored historic areas. New commercial spaces, including a retail area, rooftop café, and event and education spaces, will be introduced. The redevelopment is anticipated to positively impact the local economy, community, and cultural scene, positioning Herefordshire as a destination for art, history, and culture.