

8 May 2009

Ref: HD/Scrutiny/8May09
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To: The Members of the Scrutiny Committee of the North Hertfordshire District Council

(Councillors L.W. Oliver (Chairman); R.L. Shakespeare-Smith (Vice-Chairman); Mrs A.G. Ashley, David Billing, John Bishop, S. Bloxham, Melissa Davey, S.K. Jarvis, Lorna Kercher, Marilyn Kirkland, H.M. Marshall, Alan Millard, Elliot Needham and Michael Paterson).

[Substitutes: Councillors Judi Billing, John Booth, Tom Brindley, P.C.W. Burt, Lee Downie, Sal Jarvis and David Kearns]

You are invited to attend a

MEETING OF THE SCRUTINY COMMITTEE

to be held in

MAIN HALL, HITCHIN TOWN HALL, BRAND STREET, HITCHIN*

On

MONDAY, 18 MAY 2009

at

7.30 p.m.

[* PLEASE NOTE VENUE*]

Yours sincerely,



David Miley
Democratic Services Manager

AGENDA
PART I

ITEM	PAGE
1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	-
2. NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS Members should notify the Chairman of other business which they wish to be discussed by the Committee at the end of the business set out in the agenda. They must state the circumstances which they consider justify the business being considered as a matter of urgency. The Chairman will decide whether the item(s) raised will be considered.	-
3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION To receive petitions, comments and questions from members of the public. At the time of printing the agenda, no requests to speak had been received. Public participation requests received within the agreed time will be notified to Members as soon as practicable.	-
4. CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a prejudicial or personal interest and are required to notify the Chairman of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda. Members declaring a prejudicial interest can speak on the item, but must leave the room before the debate and vote.	-
5. MUSEUMS: REVISED SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN REPORT OF THE THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES <i>This report was under preparation at the time the agenda went to print and will be published as soon as possible.</i>	1 [Report to follow]

The dates of the Scrutiny Committee Meetings for the Civic Year 2009 – 2010 will be:

16 June 2009

1 September 2009

13 October 2009

8 December 2009

19 January 2010

23 March 2010

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

AGENDA ITEM No.

5

TITLE OF REPORT: MUSEUMS: REVISED SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

REPORT OF THE STRATEGIC DIRECTOR OF CUSTOMER SERVICES

The attached is a copy of the report being presented to Cabinet on 19 May 2009, Members comments are invited.

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* PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.

TITLE OF REPORT: MUSEUMS - REVISED SERVICE IMPROVEMENT PLAN

REPORT OF THE PROJECT EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO HOLDER: COUNCILLOR TRICIA GIBBS

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 This report is presented following Cabinet's approval at its meeting on 27th January 2009 to vary the Museums Fundamental Service Review (FSR) Service Improvement Plan (SIP) timescales to allow for the construction of a district wide museum in Hitchin as agreed by Cabinet.
- 1.2 The report provides details of an initial 'proof of concept' study and the opportunity to consider Scrutiny Committee's observations on the proposal, details of which will be tabled at your meeting.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 The report contains a recommendation on a key decision which was notified in the Forward Plan in May 2008.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 At its meeting on 27th January 2009, Cabinet considered a report of the Heads of Community Development & Cultural Services and Financial Services which provided relevant information on a proposal to change the timescale for the closure of a museum, envisaged in the Museums FSR, in order to provide additional potential efficiencies to help produce a balanced budget for 2009/10. A copy of the report appears as Annex 1.

At that meeting Cabinet resolved:

- (1) *'That Option 2, as outlined in the report, be adopted and the necessary changes in the implementation plan be made;*
- (2) *That, as part of this strategy, plans for closing Letchworth Museum by 31 March 2011 be agreed;*
- (3) *That this be accompanied by a change in the Capital Programme to accommodate the Museum Service, including the construction of a museum in a refurbished Hitchin Town Hall;*

- (4) *That, in view of the short time available in considering this matter, the Scrutiny Committee be offered the opportunity to scrutinise this decision prior to implementation.*

Option 2, more fully described in Annex 1 proposed the development of Hitchin Town Hall as a museum for North Herts and the deferral of the completion of a smaller collection centre than originally envisaged in the Service Improvement Plan.

- 3.3 Following Cabinet's decision, an initial feasibility study was commissioned to establish 'proof of concept' and this paper was subsequently prepared for submission to the Council's Asset Management Group as a necessary stage in securing final approval for capital expenditure and to help frame the terms of reference for a comprehensive feasibility study. A copy of the consultant's report is appended as Annex 2 to this report. Also appended at Annex 3 is a copy of the options appraisal report (as updated) considered by the Museums Project Board which formed the basis for the recommended changes.
- 3.4 For the sake of completeness a copy of the Heritage & Cultural Strategy (which incorporated the FSR SIP) appears as Annex 4.
- 3.5 As resolved by Cabinet, a special meeting of the Scrutiny Committee was offered and has been arranged to allow it the opportunity to scrutinise this decision prior to implementation. The observations of Scrutiny Committee, which will meet on Monday 18th May, will be provided at your meeting.

4. CONSIDERATIONS

- 4.1 At your meeting on 27th January 2009 Letchworth Town Councillor Phillip Ross spoke to Cabinet under the 'public participation' section of the meeting. Whilst acknowledging the difficulties faced by the Council in setting its budget for 2009/10, he expressed concern at the proposed closure of Letchworth Museum which constituted the important of its asset to the town and with this in mind, he had called an emergency meeting of Letchworth Town Council with a view to identifying funding assistance to keep the museum open and therefore urged the Cabinet to instruct officers to work with the Town Clerk to achieve this.
- 4.2 Following this, officers met with the Clerk of Letchworth Town Council who confirmed that following Cabinet's decision the Town Council had resolved to work in partnership to avoid the closure of Letchworth Museum and was considering an approach to how this might be achieved. The Town Clerk had confirmed that the Council would be in a position to provide further detail on the form any support might take by September 2009. In the meantime, your officers are co-operating with the Town Clerk by providing necessary background information to assist in this work.
- 4.3 The report of Cragg Management Services on the possible relocation of North Hertfordshire Museums to Hitchin Town Hall appears as Annex 2. In its summary this states:

'We consider that the Town Hall building could be adapted for the purpose, and that suitable education and study space and other public facilities, as well as office space for the museum service staff, could be provided. Some limited additional storage space could also be accommodated: this would be limited to essential items associated with current displays.

Two possible conversion options are shown in outline form on the attached sketches sk11 and sk12, although other combinations of these options are possible. Option 1 is cheaper; Option 2 provides more space and goes further towards satisfying the brief.

We have provisionally assessed the project costs for the two options at around £2.35M and £2.6M respectively. An indicative development programme has been suggested: this indicates that completion would be possible by January 2012, but steady progress would need to be maintained through to completion. The form of procurement could affect the key milestones however the overall completion dates are likely to be similar.

The use of the building as a Museum could be combined with other uses, for meetings or private functions, but we consider that the current use for large weddings parties would not be easily accommodated on account of the large spaces required, and the potential security implications without further flexible and robust museum gallery design considerations. The preference is to retain a degree of private and public usage and further detailed discussions and design development would be needed to secure this option on a limited scale'.

- 4.4 Following detailed consideration of this report the Head of Financial Services approved the scheme for inclusion in the capital programme and, by implication, the release of funding for a detailed feasibility study which is anticipated to cost in the region of £25-£30k. An indicative timetable for the completion of the feasibility study appears below.

Ref	Task description	Estimated Completion Date
1	Invite fee quotations from three architectural practices	20 th May 2009
2	Pre submission discussions each company	4 th June 2009
3	Submission of fee quotations	17 th June 2009
4	Appointment of consultant	24 th June 2009
5	Project commencement meeting	4 th July 2009
6	Progress meeting	19 th August 2009
7	Submission of draft report	30 th Sept 2009
8	Comments on draft report	14 th October 2009
9	Submission of final report	11 th Nov 2009

4.5 The feasibility study would consider, amongst other things:

- Structural feasibility,
- Space utilisation efficiency and functionality,
- Environmental performance and sustainability
- Scheme costs, inclusive of fitting out and professional fee costs.
- Opportunity cost implications
- Construction phase health and safety implications
- Completion timescale.
- Local planning Issues

4.6 Further detailed information on these aspects is contained within section 7 of the Cragg report at Annex 2.

4.7 The timetable for the feasibility study outlined in paragraph 4.4 above together with the programme for design and construction (detailed in section 7.4 of the report Cragg report at Annex 2) would suggest that completion of the project would be in January 2012. Although it may be possible to shorten the feasibility, design or construction stages this will be dependant on conditions on site and these are not yet fully known.

4.8 As a result, Members should be aware that Cabinet's previous decision to close Letchworth museum by 31st March 2011 would bear additional and unbudgeted costs which would need to be quantified following any amendments to the outline programme for feasibility, design and construction. Officers will report on this and other options in detail at the earliest opportunity.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

5.1 The Terms of Reference for Cabinet state that Cabinet should develop the policy of the Council in relation to leisure, recreation and the arts. Any strategic decision relating to the museums falls within its jurisdiction.

5.2 Under the terms of the conveyance (which passed the gymnasium within the Hitchin Town Hall to the former Hitchin UDC) it states that any future use of the gymnasium must be for use as a gym or for other purposes mentioned in s6(3) *Museums and Gymnasiums Act 1891* and also for any other (charitable) purpose for the benefit of the North Herts District. The *Museums and Gymnasiums Act 1891* has been replaced by the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964* and the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976*. Broadly, there are powers in these two Acts for local authorities to provide recreational facilities, museums and art galleries. The trusts relating to Hitchin Town Hall are therefore ideally suited for its use as a museum.

5.3 The procurement of a contractor to undertake the detailed feasibility study will need to comply with the Council's Contract Procurement Rules.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 These are primarily addressed in the report at Annex 1.
- 6.2 The scheme cost in the capital programme is £3.5m (inclusive of a Resource Centre), included within this is provision for professional fees relating to appraisal, design and tender stages. Approval for these stages is in place for 2009/10.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 There are no immediate Human Resources implications in addition to those detailed in the report at Annex 1.
- 7.2 The Museum FSR SIP was specifically designed to improve accessibility to Museum facilities and in particular to achieve compliance with the provisions of the Disability Discrimination Act.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 A special meeting of Scrutiny Committee to consider this matter has been arranged for Monday 18th May and the Committee's views will be provided at your meeting.
- 8.2 Consultation has taken place with the Portfolio Holders for Community Engagement and Rural Affairs and the Finance Portfolio Holder.
- 8.3 Arts, Museums & Heritage Forum. Consultation on the original decision took place at a well-attended meeting in Baldock Community Centre on 4th February 2009. The next meeting is scheduled to take place in Hitchin Town Hall, provisionally on 15 June, but this date has yet to be confirmed.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to:

- 9.1 Consider Scrutiny Committee's observations and determine how it wishes to respond.
- 9.2 Confirm it wishes officers to proceed with a full feasibility study.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To allow Cabinet the opportunity to fulfil its obligation to consider Scrutiny Committee's views and take these in to account before implementing it's decision.
- 10.2 To procure the necessary assurance, in accordance with Financial Regulations, that the scheme is viable and fit for purpose.

11. CONTACT OFFICERS

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12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Annex 1 Cabinet Report 27th January 2009
- 12.2 Annex 2 Report on Possible Relocation of North Herts Museums to Hitchin Town Hall – Consultants Report 30th April 2009
- 12.3 Annex 3 Options Appraisal Report & Museums Project Board 22nd January 2009
- 12.4 Annex 4 Heritage & Cultural Strategy 2007/11

13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 Report to Cabinet 23rd August 2005 on the Findings of the Review of the North Herts Museums Services.
- 13.2 Draft Collections Centre Business Case submitted to the Museums Project Board, 5th March 2008.

* PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT	AGENDA ITEM No.

TITLE OF REPORT: FUTURE OF MUSEUMS SERVICES

REPORT OF THE HEADS OF COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT AND CULTURAL SERVICES AND FINANCIAL SERVICES ON BEHALF OF THE PROJECT EXECUTIVE

PORTFOLIO HOLDERS : COUNCILLORS TRICIA GIBBS AND TERRY HONE

1. SUMMARY

- 1.1 The purpose of this report is to provide Cabinet with relevant information on a proposal to change the timescale for the closure of a museum as envisaged in the Museums FSR in order to provide additional potential efficiencies to help produce a balanced budget for 2009/10.
- 1.2 Cabinet is asked to note that whilst a proposal to close the budget gap has been made in the budget report elsewhere in your agenda, which assumes the closure of Letchworth Museum, this is subject to Cabinet's decision on that matter.
- 1.3 This joint report has been prepared for the 'Project Executive', to provide Cabinet with sufficient information to inform any decision on the timing of closure. It must be stressed, however, that whilst care has been taken in compiling the report, the short time available to produce it does mean that consultation with stakeholders and a very detailed operational and financial analysis have not been carried out.

2. FORWARD PLAN

- 2.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key decision that the Leader of the Council considers to be urgent. It was not possible to notify the public by including it in the Forward Plan in order to bring forward a proposal to create additional efficiencies to assist in setting a balanced budget for 2009/10. The Chairman of the Scrutiny Committee has agreed that consideration of the key decision cannot be deferred.

3. BACKGROUND

- 3.1 The 29th July 2004 meeting of the Performance, Audit & Review Committee RESOLVED:

- (1) That the proposal to undertake a 'fast track' Fundamental Service Review of the North Hertfordshire Museums Service be agreed.
- (2) That the Scope Document for the Fundamental Service Review of the North Hertfordshire Museums Service be agreed.
- (3) That officers be requested to present the results of this Fundamental service Review to the meeting of the Performance, Audit and Review Committee to be held on 7 April 2005.

3.2 The findings of the Review of The North Herts Museums Service were reported to the 28th July 2005 meeting of PARC, which resolved:

- (1) That the proposals made in the review for the future of the North Hertfordshire Heritage and Cultural Service as presented at Appendix A to the report be endorsed;
- (2) That the Strategy and Community Services Manager be requested to ensure that the role and participation of stakeholders is included in the Improvement plan for the North Hertfordshire Heritage and Cultural Service.

RECOMMENDED TO CABINET:

- (1) That the proposals made in the review for the future of the North Hertfordshire Heritage and Cultural Service as presented at Appendix A to the report be approved;
- (2) That the implementations of the findings of the review of the North Hertfordshire Heritage and Cultural Service be managed by a project board and that the PRINCE 2 methodology be used.

3.3 Cabinet received this referral at its 23rd August 2005 meeting and resolved:

That the Improvement Plan developed by the Review be deemed acceptable and that the following activities be undertaken in order to implement it:

1. A detailed costed scheme proposal and timetable be developed, complete with funding options so that the scheme can be included in the capital programme at a future date;
2. That Officers enter into consultation with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to look at the possibility of partnership working for the provision of museums, arts and storage within Letchworth Garden City;
3. That Officers contact district wide voluntary museums, heritage and arts providers to establish more detailed communication and development plans;
4. That a project board be established and PRINCE 2 methodology be used for the development of a business case for the Capital Works projects identified within the Improvement Plan;
5. The possibility of securing external funding to support the implementation of parts of the Improvement Plan be investigated further;
6. That all Area Committees be consulted in formulating and recommending proposals.

3.4 The report to Cabinet on 23rd August 2005 also concluded within its Improvement Plan the following actions:

Table 1

Action Required	Financial Cost and Funding Source	Timescales
Develop plans for one front of house gallery, museums and community venue in a town centre location	Total cost is estimated to be £5m.	5 years to complete
Improve storage, workshop and research facility	Total project cost is estimated to be £1m.	2 years to complete

3.5 The FSR indicated that a proportion of these costs would be offset by capital receipts from the disposal of some or all of the Council's three main museums services sites.

3.6 Subsequent to this, a Project Board has been established to progress the implementation plan. The Project Board has established a Project Plan, the key elements of which are:

Table 2

Action	Progress/Timescale
Preparation of Arts Museums and Heritage Strategy	Completed July 2007
Development of Collections Centre	November 2011
Establishment of new/refurbished Museum for North Herts	October 2013
Closure of one of current NHDC Museums	October 2013

The scheduling of the above was developed from the timescale originally set out in the Action Plan from the FSR. This timescale was designed to allow for the collection centre to receive the collections from both Burymead and any items from either Hitchin or Letchworth Museums following the establishment of a new/refurbishment museum for North Hertfordshire.

3.7 Work has since progressed on the development of a Business Case for a new Collections Centre, though in recent months this has been somewhat slowed down in view of the need to review the necessary levels of investment of resources to carry out the works.

3.8 As a result of the recent and significant impact of the reductions in interest rates and the consequent loss of income to the Council, a number of additional proposals were quickly produced including a major reassessment of the timing to bring forward the closure of a museum as envisaged within the Museums FSR implementation plan was suggested as an efficiency to help bridge the budget gap.

3.9 This report therefore sets out a rationale for the changes for which Cabinet decision is sought. If minded to proceed, Cabinet is asked to recommend as part of the Corporate

Business Planning Process for 2009/10 to Council to agree a change in the hitherto agreed programme of the Project Board with regard to the implementation of the Museums FSR

4. KEY ISSUES

- 4.1 In order to bring forth the closure of Letchworth Museum, Cabinet is asked to consider the key interdependent elements as set out below.

Closure Of Letchworth Museum In 2009/10

- 4.2 In order to help meet the additional savings required for the 2009/10 Business Planning Process, the closure of the Letchworth Museum is being considered as an option.
- 4.3 The rationale for the closure of the Letchworth Museum is the preference for a strategic balance of museum facilities across the District as set out in the original FSR. The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation has previously confirmed that it would wish to establish a new/refurbished museum in Letchworth and there are already existing museum facilities in Hitchin, Royston and Baldock.
- 4.4 Given the distribution of these museums, it is further proposed that a new Collections Centre should be located in Letchworth, while a new/refurbished museum for North Herts is proposed for Hitchin (see below).
- 4.5 Notwithstanding this, the closure of a museum is a hugely complex operation as the Council still has the responsibility for the maintenance and upkeep of the exhibits and collections, even though the museum may not be open to the public. It is evident that there are significant risks to any proposed closure, as set out below.
- 4.6 In the original FSR scheme, the closure of one museum would have been implemented once the refurbishment works for the main North Hertfordshire Museum and the Collections Centre had been completed (see Table 2 above). This would then have allowed a relatively straightforward transfer of museum assets.
- 4.7 With the current proposal, though the Letchworth Museum could be closed to the public from 1 April 2009 and some initial savings made, curatorial staff will have to be retained to look after the collections, while the heating and alarms will need to be kept on to secure the 80 sq. m. secure environmentally-controlled storage, containing 750 artworks, 800 items of costume and costume accessories, and 300 items of ceramic and glass.
- 4.8 One alternative might be to transfer the collections from the Letchworth Museum. However, it is apparent that the Council does not have sufficient space or appropriate temperature controlled environments of its own, so that specialist storage at additional costs would need to be identified.
- 4.9 It is apparent that over time, a number of artworks at Letchworth Museum have been purchased with grant-aid totalling over £40,000. Most grant funds have strict conditions about works which they have helped purchase. For example, paintings cannot be lent to non accredited museums, and it is not clear whether the funders would allow them to go to Hitchin Museum unless a new NHDC museum was definite. If the works are sold, NHDC will have to return 'a proportion equal to the percentage of the grant from any monies received or the original sum (whichever is

the greater) as set out in the V&A/MLA Purchase Grant Regulations. Many of the artworks have risen considerably in value since purchase, so it is estimated that the figure of £40,000 in many cases could be three times this figure.

- 4.10 If any of the collections are to be disposed of, museum staff will need to ascertain NHDC's right to the legal title of each object. Loans have to return to the original lender, or their descendants. Items acquired by bequest have legal conditions which restrict disposal. This is a significant amount of work requiring curatorial and administrative input, and this could take up to two years to complete. Current guidance is that items should ideally be transferred to another Accredited Museum. Failing this, in order, transfer to another institution within the public domain, return to original donor, sale to an Accredited museum, transfer outside the public domain, sale, recycling, destruction.
- 4.11 The workshop for North Hertfordshire Museum service is located at Letchworth Museum. If Letchworth Museum were to close to the public, but open for essential staff, the workshop could be retained, but if it was to close completely, alternative workshop facilities would need to be found in the short term. Workshop facilities have been factored into the design of the new Collections Centre.
- 4.12 Letchworth Museum has scheduled temporary exhibitions up to the end of 2010. Many of these have signed contracts. The artists and lenders will need to be contacted if the museum is to close. Many of these exhibitions also have planned events and activities, such as Gifted & Talented project with Fearnhill School this autumn, which will also have to be cancelled. It has not been possible to quantify any costs arising from such cancellations at this stage.
- 4.13 The closure of Letchworth Museum will have a negative impact upon the performance of the authority as its user figures contribute to the relevant Best Value Performance Indicators collected by the Council. There are three local indicators for this service (BV170a, b and c) which relate to public usage and in particular school pupils visiting museums. With regard to the Corporate Plan, the Council is currently performing at a second quartile, above average level. Reducing these figures is likely to move NHDC performance into a lower quartile on these specifically and potentially on the wider corporate Performance.
- 4.14 If Letchworth Museum were to close, the museum will lose its Accreditation status. The significance of having Accredited Status is that any application for Heritage Lottery Funding (HLF) is a much greater possibility, though not guaranteed. Losing Accreditation status could impact upon any potential application for Heritage Lottery Funding for the proposed Collections Centre or new museum for North Hertfordshire.
- 4.15 However, following consultation with the Museums, Libraries and Archives Council, it is apparent that the Hitchin Museum would retain its accreditation.

Development Of A New Collections Centre In Letchworth

- 4.16 Work on the provision of a Collections Centre commenced in May 2007 and following substantial consultation with users and partners through a dedicated Working Group, an Outline Business Case was presented to the Museums Project Board on 5th March 2008.

ANNEX 1

- 4.17 The Business Case set out a clear vision, purpose and function for a new Collections Centre to replace the existing store at Burymead, Hitchin. The Business Case provides the justification for the transformation of the current museum resource facilities and will presage a new partnership approach to be made for external funding from the Heritage Lottery Fund.
- 4.18 The Collections Centre would provide a resource centre for all the museums in North Herts (the Heritage Foundation, Royston, Ashwell and Baldock) and could feature greatly improved storage conditions plus visitor education and interpretation, research and café facilities.
- 4.19 The Collections Centre could also host the Council's archive and reprographic functions, though the detailed costs and full implications have yet to be concluded.
- 4.20 The Business Case identified a number of alternative options for the location of a new Collections Centre. However, the preferred option is for a Collections Centre to be sited in Letchworth in an existing premises which can offer the space and flexibility to secure all elements of the Centre specification.
- 4.21 However, the development of a Collections Centre cannot be seen in isolation of the improvements needed for 'front end' exhibition space, which the FSR established is required to be provided through a town centre District Museum.
- 4.22 The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (LGCHF) originally expressed its broad support for the implementation of the Museums Review as far back as 2005. It recently reaffirmed its enthusiasm and willingness to work in partnership with the Council to develop a Collections Centre in Letchworth. Discussions will also take place on the re-allocation of the current collections held on loan from the Council and also those currently managed at the Council's Museum.

North Hertfordshire District Museum

- 4.23 The Museums FSR did not specify in which town centre a North Hertfordshire Museum should be established. Since then there has been some debate about the most appropriate town and siting, though to date this has been inconclusive.
- 4.24 However, in the light of the present financial constraints, a proposal that the main museum for North Hertfordshire should be located at a town centre site in Hitchin was made to the Project Board at its meeting on 22nd January 2009.

The rationale for this is based on the Council's desire to see a strategically balanced distribution of museums services. Furthermore, this would support one of the Council's immediate priorities of 'Town Centres'.

- 4.25 Though a specific site for a museum in Hitchin town centre has not yet been confirmed, there are several possibilities, including a refurbishment of the existing premises. Nevertheless, the preferred option is to convert part of the Hitchin Town Hall site to a museum, whilst at the same time retaining elements for general community use.
- 4.26 In broad terms, the footprint of the Hitchin Town Hall would easily accommodate the required exhibition and display space, and as a museum refurbishment, would qualify for potential HLF funding. This work could also be extended to the general physical structural improvements of the main hall, which would then be enhanced to encourage

greater community use. This concept has been raised by the Development Trusts Association (DTA), the external consultants working with the Council, during discussions on the future of the Hitchin Town Hall, where external funding opportunities have been examined.

- 4.27 This option would not only also help the Council resolve the long standing issue of the future of the Town Hall in terms of the capital refurbishment, but over time would realise an additional £30k net revenue savings.
- 4.28 Clearly there is a significant amount of work to be carried out, so a Feasibility Study is proposed. As part of this, a Museums Facilities Working Group would be established to consider in detail the location, form and function of the museum exhibition and the relationship to other uses and spaces.
- 4.29 The financial appraisal of the different elements of the overall museums programme are set out in section 6 below.

Implementation Options

- 4.30 The proposal to close the Letchworth Museum for the financial year 2009/10 would change the original project plan timeline for the museums FSR. As a result two options can be considered for the further implementation of the improvements to the museums service.

Option 1

Develop the Collections Centre, then complete the refurbishment of the Hitchin Town Hall to be the North Herts Museum

This reflects the present Project Plan which indicates that the Collections Centre should be completed prior to a new/refurbished museum for North Herts. For both these schemes, external funding would need to be secured for the capital works.

Option 2

Develop the Hitchin Town Hall to be the North Herts Museum, then complete a smaller Collections Centre

This alternative approach is driven very much by cost differentials and also the potential for generating the necessary inward investment. There is also a public perception that a front line museum provision would be of greater benefit than a resource or collections centre.

- 4.31 As referenced above, if the Letchworth Museum was closed, then it would lose its Accredited Status and any application to the HLF for grant funding by North Herts District Council would be seriously compromised. To continue with the Collections Centre as originally proposed may therefore require a greater call on Council capital resources.
- 4.32 However, given that the Hitchin Museum would retain its Accredited Status, then any HLF application for a new/refurbished museum in Hitchin, would probably have a better chance of success. Though, as ever with grant funding applications, this is very much

dependent upon the quality of the application, rival bids and the amount of funds available.

- 4.33 If Members decide to proceed with the closure of Letchworth Museum, Option 2 suggests that the priority should be the development of a new district-wide museum to be located in Hitchin. A new Collections Centre, most likely to be in Letchworth would still be considered, but this would likely to be on a smaller scale as this would be less likely to secure the higher levels of external funding. This option would also require the Council to consider its collection policies and in a structured way work towards rationalising this to make future maintenance of the collection more cost effective.

5. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

Procedural issues

- 5.1 Cabinet has responsibility for developing the strategy of the Council for leisure, sports, recreation and the arts. Any strategic decision relating to the museums falls within its jurisdiction.
- 5.2 Cabinet additionally has overall responsibility for implementing Council policy and service delivery to the public so, taken together with its strategic role, it can endorse a decision for early closure of the Letchworth Museum. However, as this decision has budget implications it is necessary for the Cabinet to refer this decision for approval by Council (Schedule 4 Functions and Responsibilities Regulations 2000).
- 5.3 Urgent business may be dealt with by the executive provided that certain rules are met. For key decisions, such as this, agreement that the business is urgent and cannot be deferred needs to be obtained from the Chair of the Scrutiny Committee. This has been obtained.

Land ownership issues

- 5.4 The main part of the Letchworth Museum was transferred to Letchworth UDC in 1955. It is subject to a restriction to use it only for the purpose of a public museum with curator's flat or other purposes of the Public Libraries Acts 1892-1919 or for any other purpose to which the relevant Minister may consent. This is now held freehold by the Council, though the upper parts of the Museum fly over the library. The Council currently holds user rights for the flying floors of the district museum. A 10 foot sliver of land to the southern side of the museum was transferred with the freehold which contains a restriction to use that land as a place of worship, school mission hall, presbytery or dwelling house. In addition a visual inspection of the library appears to demonstrate that the children's library and large print section seems to lie behind the museum on land conveyed for the museum.
- 5.5 Therefore, the matters to be overcome if the building were to be sold are as follows:
- 5.5.1 The extended upper parts over the library would require the building to be sold together with the library or else would require the use of the flying freehold to be put on a more formal basis (an agreement with HCC for cross covenants);
- 5.5.2 Removal of the restrictive covenants on the building is possible but would require an application to the Lands Tribunal. Removal of the covenants may be justified if it can

be shown that the covenants are obsolete or would impede reasonable use of the building but compensation may be ordered.

- 5.5.3 The occupation of the museum land by the library would have to be dealt with either by transfer of that part of the land to HCC or by asking HCC to decant the museum land.

Museum Accreditation Scheme

- 5.6 The Museum Accreditation Scheme is a registration scheme for museums and galleries which requires those museums to meet minimum standards in management, user services, visitor facilities and collection management. The core benefit in being accepted into the scheme is the eligibility it gives for grant funding and awards. There are very definite rules which govern acquisition, retention and disposal of collections which have some similarity to rules relating to holding of property on trust. These rules can be found in the 'Accreditation Standard' document issued by the Museums Libraries and Archives Council.
- 5.7 None of the current collections held by the Letchworth Museum are believed to be held under a specific trust. Bequests (gifts made by will) are not held to be made on trust and therefore only moral and not legal obligations will apply to these gifts. The Museums Association Guidelines on Disposal would need to be followed.

Hitchin Town Hall

- 5.8 Under the terms of the conveyance (which passed the gymnasium within the Hitchin Town Hall to the former Hitchin UDC) it states that any future use of the gymnasium must be for use as a gym or for other purposes mentioned in s6(3) *Museums and Gymnasiums Act 1891* and also for any other (charitable) purpose for the benefit of the North Herts District. The *Museums and Gymnasiums Act 1891* has been replaced by the *Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964* and the *Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976*. Broadly, there are powers in these two Acts for local authorities to provide recreational facilities, museums and art galleries. The trusts relating to Hitchin Town Hall are therefore ideally suited for its use as a museum. Accreditation would be sought for a new museum at the Hitchin Town Hall.

6. FINANCIAL AND RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Following the reduction of interest rates on 8th January 2009 Councils budget gap increased by a further £200k to £620k. The revenue efficiency following the closure of the Letchworth Museum is estimated to be £50k in 2009/10. Given the expected delay before a new collection centre or museum is ready, it is not expected that any further revenue efficiencies can be made until approximately 2011/12. An allowance for the risk that the full year's saving in 2009/10 may not be achieved has been incorporated into the estimated general fund balance as part of the financial risk analysis.
- 6.2 A provisional sum of £3.5million has been proposed for the capital programme beginning 2009/10 in anticipation of a decision on the rescheduling options presented in this report. This is based on an anticipation of approximately £2million funding from third party grants with the remainder being funded by NHDC capital receipts.

The Business Case for the Collections Centre has identified two potential sources of third party funding towards the estimated cost of between £3million and £3.75million for conversion of an existing building in, Letchworth or £4.5million for a new build.

A Business Case for a North Hertfordshire Museum facility has not yet been prepared, but the cost to convert Hitchin Town Hall is estimated to be between £2.25million and £2.5million and it is anticipated an application for £1million from the Heritage Lottery fund will be made. In compliance with Lottery funding rules, if the amount requested is below £1m, then any submission will be evaluated by the East of England Committee. Any application of more than £1m will have to compete on a national basis.

- 6.3 It would not be cost-effective to part-convert a building for a Collections Centre in Letchworth if other partners were not included in the scheme but there might be build savings by not equipping the site for their purposes. Efficiency gains from sharing the facility's running costs will not be realised if the centre is used exclusively for NHDC's purpose.
- 6.4 A Feasibility Study for the North Hertfordshire Museum facility would be prepared and will include a Business Case, in which it is anticipated that an application will be made to the Heritage Lottery Fund. In compliance with Lottery funding rules, if the amount requested is below £1m, then any submission will be evaluated by the East of England Committee. Any application of more than £1m will have to compete on a national basis.
- 6.5 The feasibility study will evaluate the suitability of conversion to a museum facility together with an options appraisal of both capital and revenue costs. It is further anticipated that the feasibility study will require the engagement of specialist museums technical advisors to assist with detailed designs and costs.
- 6.6 In terms of revised timescales, if the Council took the decision to fund the development of a new/refurbished museum in Hitchin (without bidding for additional funds) the estimated time required would be 2 - 3 years time. This would suggest a completion in 2011/12 or 2012/13.
- 6.7 Assuming the improvements to the Town Hall can be completed in this timescale, it would allow for the full savings from the closure of the Letchworth Museum to be realised in the financial year 2011/12. Preliminary calculations estimate a further efficiency of around £30k as a result of closing Hitchin Museum and providing a museum in the Town Hall.
- 6.8 Without a detailed feasibility study for the two options of a new North Hertfordshire Museum Facility at Hitchin Town Hall or a new Collections Centre in Letchworth, together with a concluding option appraisal, there are significant risks relating to either options in particular those relating to scheme costs, third party contributions and annual running costs of the completed project.

7. HUMAN RESOURCE AND EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 Staff that are affected by the potential closure of Letchworth museum have already been informed.
- 7.2 The trade union have been informed and the proposal will be discussed more fully at the Trade Union Consultation meeting in January. Group consultation will continue with updates to the Staff Consultation Forum in February and March.
- 7.3 Affected staff will be invited to an individual consultation meeting with the Cultural Services Manager and HR representative.

- 7.4 Any compulsory redundancy will be managed sensitively in terms of consultation, advice and support in line with the Council's Reorganisation and Early Severance Policies. Human Resources will be on hand to offer appropriate advice and guidance to affected staff and managers.

8. CONSULTATION WITH EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS AND WARD MEMBERS

- 8.1 Because of time constraints it has not been possible to consult with Ward Members or Opposition spokespersons.
- 8.2 Further, it has not been possible to consult more widely with interested parties on the collection centre and the future of the North Hertfordshire District Museum through the Arts, Museums and Heritage Forum although that opportunity does arise on the 4th February 2009.
- 8.3 There has been consultation with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to confirm its continued support for the overall programme.
- 8.4 The Museums Project Board has been consulted on the report.

9. RECOMMENDATIONS

Cabinet is recommended to consider the content of this report and determine whether it wishes to proceed with either of the options all detailed in paragraph 4.30.

10. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 10.1 To provide a potential efficiency to contribute towards savings required within the Corporate Business Planning process for 2009/10.

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13. BACKGROUND PAPERS

- 13.1 Report to Cabinet 23rd August 2005 on the Findings of the Review of the North Herts Museums Services.
- 13.2 Draft Collections Centre Business Case submitted to the Museums Project Board, 5th March 2008.



North Hertfordshire Museums Service

REPORT ON POSSIBLE RELOCATION OF NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE MUSEUMS TO HITCHIN TOWN HALL
30 April 2009

CRAGG MANAGEMENT SERVICES



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North Hertfordshire Museums Service

REPORT ON POSSIBLE RELOCATION OF COLLECTIONS

30 April 2009

1 INTRODUCTION

1.1 Purpose of report

This report has been requested by North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC), to explore the feasibility of relocating some or all of the Museum Services collections to a new site in the former Town Hall Building at Hitchin, Herts.

The scope of the study is as follows:

- to consider the shortcomings and aspirations of the existing museums;
- to consider more specifically the current arrangements for display and local limited storage of the Museum Service's joint collections in Letchworth and Hitchin: this would include visiting the existing sites, and discussing the Museum Service's organisation and needs with key persons;
- to consider the suitability of the former Town Hall building in Hitchin as a possible site for display of the collection. This includes consideration of the siting, condition, capacity and other features of the building, and the preparation of simple layout options. There should be some consideration of whether existing (or alternative other) uses could continue to be accommodated;
- to consider in broad terms how development of the building might be carried out, including recommendations in respect of consultants and procurement;
- to consider in broad terms the likely cost and timetable for the development;
- to prepare and submit a written report of the findings.

1.2 Background and context

The Museums Service currently operates two museums, one in Letchworth, and one in Hitchin. In addition a large part of its collection is stored in warehouse accommodation on a site in Burymead, near Hitchin.

We have been advised that NHDC have been aware for some time of shortcomings and inefficiencies in the display and storage arrangements for the collections in their care, and various reports have been prepared to explore the options. These include the following:

- Fundamental Service Review completed July 2005;
- a draft Business Case for Collections Centre and Museums Digitisation;
- NHDC Arts Museums and Heritage Strategy for 2007 to 2012;
- (confidential) Project Manager's Options report prepared in January 2009.
- Report to Cabinet 27 Jan 2009; Future of Museums Services

These reports have identified that while the Museums Service was valued and held in affection by the local community, the facilities were in need of updating, and that there were opportunities for revenue savings to be made by rationalising the service.

In addition to the two Museums operated directly by NHDC, five other independent Museums operate within the NHDC area, and there may be opportunities for co-operation in respect of facilities.

NHDC advised that they are able to provide potential premises for a combined museum within the Town Hall at Hitchin and have allocated a potential sum of £3.5m for all works including the new Resource Centre. The allocation of funds are therefore notionally circa £2.5m for the combined museum works at Hitchin Town Hall and circa £1m for the Resource Centre

We have been advised that NHDC may seek HLF funding for the works but that this is currently being reviewed



NHDC have advised that they wish to review the options and the decision to proceed in June 2009

We have been instructed to prepare a feasibility study for the proposal and to identify the clients brief sufficient to enable the report to be used for tender and procurement purposes.

1.3 Basis of report

We have studied the various reports made available to us. We have also been provided with CAD drawings of the Town Hall, on which we have relied in preparing the sketch drawings annexed to this report.

We have visited the existing Museums and the storage facility at Burymead, and the Town Hall at Hitchin.

We have held brief conversations with the managers of the Museum Service, and with the curators at the Letchworth and Hitchin Museums, and also with the manager of the Town Hall at Hitchin.

1.4 Exclusions

We have not been instructed to consider, and have therefore not considered in detail, the matter of the deficiencies in off-site storage arrangements, or the ways in which integration or co-operation with other museums in the area might be achieved.

We have not undertaken any measurements or detailed surveys of any of the buildings: the areas provided in the various schedules are therefore approximate and should not be relied upon as accurate.



2 EXISTING COLLECTION ARRANGEMENTS

2.0 General

Both the existing Museums operated by NHDC can be classified as local Museums, but there are elements of the collections that are of wider importance. In addition to providing display space for permanent and temporary exhibitions, the Museums act as resources for schools and researchers, provide accommodation for Museums Service staff and include limited storage and archives and small museum shops.

Although there are considerable shortcomings to both museums, which are discussed below, it should equally be noted that both have a friendly and intimate feeling and are obviously well loved by their users. The staff we encountered displayed an infectious enthusiasm for their collections and are clearly committed to providing the best service possible within the limitations of their premises.

2.1 Letchworth Museum and Art Gallery

The Letchworth Museum and Art Gallery occupies a three-storey brick building, purpose-built in 1914 to house the collection of the Letchworth Naturalist Society. This collection remains at the heart of the display on the ground floor, but the museum also houses a significant display of local archaeology as well as providing space for temporary exhibitions. The Museum connects with the adjacent library on the first floor and uses space within the library to accommodate visiting school parties.

A summary of the principal spaces within the museum is provided in Appendix A1.

2.2 Hitchin Museum and Art Gallery

The Hitchin Museum and Art Gallery occupies a two-storey, Victorian gothic house, in which it was established on the upper floor in 1941. The library occupied the lower floor until a new building was constructed adjacent, freeing up the whole building for the museum. The permanent collection consists of four main components: a local and social history display; a room devoted to the Hertfordshire Yeomanry and Artillery; a costume collection of national importance, and a reconstructed Victorian chemist's shop. The museum also continues to store documents used for research. There are two temporary exhibition galleries on the ground floor. In front of the building is a small but attractive physic garden.

A summary of the principal spaces within the museum is provided in Appendix A2.

2.3 Burymead storage facility

This consists of a range of industrial buildings with little mechanical environmental control. Much of the collection appear to be poorly stored and in considerable danger of damage due to the poor condition of the buildings. However as with the two museums the current conditions appear to be relatively stable.



3 SHORTCOMINGS AND ASPIRATIONS

3.1 Display facilities

In both museums it is evident that space is at a premium: displays are generally densely packed and in some cases have been extended onto circulation areas. The shapes and sizes of rooms are not ideal, and have been carved, in some cases awkwardly, out of the original rooms. There is a premium on wall space, and this has meant a restriction on interpretation boards and signage. In the case of Hitchin Museum in particular it is clear that more and better-organised space would allow more of the collections to be displayed to advantage.

The collections are somewhat disparate, but there may be some scope for unifying them in a way that makes them more intelligible to the visitors and reduces the number of separate rooms required.

The curators interviewed both expressed a desire for more display space, particularly for temporary exhibitions, and for particular collections (at Hitchin the costume gallery in particular was felt to be too small).

3.2 Storage

Storage space is extremely limited, and so intensely used as to make it difficult to access easily the stored exhibits. Environmental control appears to be rudimentary, although in the majority of stores it appears that relatively stable conditions are maintained.

The provision of a new Resource Centre may alleviate the storage concerns primarily at Burymead however each museum has limited on site storage requirements for sensitive and frequently used items.

3.3 Security

In both museums invigilation is achieved principally by means of CCTV monitored from the reception or the offices. This may be broadly acceptable, since many of the exhibits may not be of the kind that would be particularly attractive to thieves, but the physical security of the buildings probably leaves much to be desired.

Letchworth Museum has been cleared for Government Indemnity and on two occasions (2003 and 2006) oil paintings from Tate Britain and other nationals have been exhibited. There are iron bars on the upper exhibition space windows and passive infra red and vibration alarms throughout.

3.4 Access and facilities for visitors

Both museums are relatively centrally located within their towns. At Hitchin there is a convenient car park adjacent although it was full at the time of our visit, and it is not clear if it is available to the public visiting the museum. At Letchworth there did not appear to be any dedicated parking, although there is a bus stop directly outside the museum and a Morrisons Pay and Display car park opposite.

Neither museum is adapted for persons with disabilities. There are steps at the entrance to Letchworth Museum and changes of level within the ground floor; Hitchin Museum has level access at the front door and throughout the ground floor, but neither museum has a lift.

Public toilet facilities are minimal, there are none at Hitchin and at Letchworth they are on the first floor, again making them inaccessible to those of restricted mobility.

Provision for visiting students and researchers are limited: at Letchworth it was not apparent that any space is available; at Hitchin there is a small room, but only one person at a time can be accommodated, and there is a steady demand to use the archives. Both museums have volunteer workers, but at present these have no dedicated space to work in.

School parties at Letchworth can use the upper floor of the library. At Hitchin school parties use the general public gallery areas.



Both museums have small shop areas, squeezed into the reception areas: an arrangement of this kind may be adequate. There is not catering provision at either site, and it was felt that this would be desirable.

3.5 Facilities for staff

Office space in both buildings is fairly cramped, with storage for files and other items evidently lacking.

At Hitchin there are staff toilets but at Letchworth they are shared with the public.

There is a small and clearly well-used workshop at Letchworth Museum: this appears to be a useful asset. Current standards would probably require better ventilation arrangements.

3.6 Outline brief

On the basis of the above observations and comments received from interviewees, we have compiled a sample brief consisting of a schedule of spaces and brief comments, against which the suitability of the Town Hall building can be tested. This is attached in Appendix B. Three sets of areas have been given: those derived from existing provision, a set giving a modest increase in area, and an optimum, or maximum, set.



4 HITCHIN TOWN HALL

4.1 Description

The former Town Hall at Hitchin is a prominent Queen Anne style red-brick building dating from 1901. It stands at the corner of Brand St and Grammar School Walk, adjacent to the one-way system in the centre of Hitchin. There is hard-standing area alongside Brand Street and at the rear of the building, offering limited parking space or unloading area. There is a public car park to the rear of the building.

The original building consists of a hall with a high, curved ceiling, behind a two-storey façade containing the main entrance, toilets, and, on the first floor, a committee room and offices. There is a balcony at the front end of the hall, reached from stairs from the entrance area, and a raised stage at the far end, with toilet accommodation in a semi-basement beneath. A newer gymnasium has been constructed to the east of the main building, at the rear of shops on Brand Street, with a connecting link containing a large kitchen and bar area. At the south-east corner of the gym building is a three-storey annexe containing changing rooms and an attic space.

The two main parts of the building and the link enclose a courtyard area that has been substantially filled in with outhouses relating to the shops on Brand St. There is a steel fire escape stair from the annex into the side alley, and another from the tower room adjacent to the stage.

The majority of the current usable floor-space sits on the ground-floor level. This is a short flight up from the street level at the front, but level access is available from Grammar School Walk at a door mid-way along the north-west side of the Hall. There is also the possibility of ramped access to the connecting link via a passage from Brand St, and level access to the rear doors of the link and gymnasium.

There is currently no lift within the building, so the upper floors and basement areas, as well as the stage, are inaccessible to persons of limited mobility. The upper floors are also divided between three independent areas, at the front (offices and balcony), alongside the stage (one small room), and in the annexe to the gymnasium (changing rooms and attic).

The main hall with its arched roof and clear-storey windows has sufficient height to allow the insertion of an upper floor. The feasibility of this in structural terms would need to be investigated.

The building appears to be in reasonable condition, although there are signs of dampness in places: alongside the stairs to the right of the stage, and on the chimney breast in the gymnasium. The internal fittings and furnishings are ageing and would be in need of upgrading for any use.

The building is not listed as of national importance, but it is in a conservation area and is locally listed as a building of significance.

A schedule of the spaces within the building is given in Appendix C. Plans of the building are shown on the annexed drawing sk01.

4.2 Current usage

We understand that the Town Hall is currently hired out on a regular basis to various user groups and is also frequently used for private functions, including large wedding parties, for which it is deemed particularly suitable on account of having two large spaces and a large kitchen located between them. The gym is used for dance, martial arts and exercise classes. The second-floor room in the annexe is occupied as an office and store for the St John's Ambulance organisation. The first floor in the main frontage is used as offices, with the Lucas Room used regularly by a range of groups..

It is understood that these activities attract revenue income to the building, and we have been asked to consider whether it would be possible to continue to accommodate some or all of them. This is considered in section 6.4 below.



5 OPTIONS FOR USE

5.1 Basic area comparisons

We have considered the existing areas of the 2 museums and assessed the area requirements: These have been assessed as follows:

Optimum (max)	The preferred area taking into consideration the current rather cramped conditions within the existing galleries, the preference to exhibit more of the collection and improved circulation areas and facilities (1875m ² incl plant etc.)
Existing	A purely like for like comparison of areas (670m ² (excl plant etc.))
Median	An area assessment between the existing and the preferred area allowing an improvement in display conditions and user access (1305m ² incl plant etc.)

The limited size and fragmented arrangement of the basement areas suggests that they would be of limited use for primary or secondary functions as the cost of providing step-free access would be likely to be prohibitive. There is also evidence of dampness, which suggests it might be more realistic to dedicate the basement areas to plant and supporting functions. The basement areas have therefore been ignored in the comparisons below.

There is more space available on the upper floors, but it seems unlikely that either the upper floors of the annexe, or the small room adjacent to the stage, could be economically made accessible. The first floor suite at the front of the building is more substantial, and if combined with the balcony or a new floor within the hall, might make the provision of a lift in this area a feasible option.

A comparison of the overall floor area, with the requirements listed in the sample brief suggests that the overall existing area of the ground and upper floors (approx. 1,400m²) would be inadequate for the optimum (max) provision of 1,875m². This suggests that optimum (max) accommodation could therefore only be achieved by increasing the floor area. Options for this are discussed below.

The median area requirements of 1,305m² do fall within the available area; however, the restrictions on access would effectively discount use of the upper floors without the provision of a lift. If the ground floor area (1,027m²), and the first-floor area of the front of the building and the balcony (158m²), were made available, then the total of 1,185m² compares reasonably well with the median area requirement of 1,155m² excluding plant.

5.2 Options for expansion

Two possible options exist for extending the available floor-space, as follows:

- a) Extend onto the hard-standing area to the rear of the link

There is an area of approximately 70m² to the rear of the single-storey link connecting the main hall and the gymnasium. This option would increase the available space at ground-floor level. However, it would be at the expense of the potentially valuable parking or loading area, and would be a relatively expensive option. It would also require planning permission which might not be readily forthcoming,

- b) Construct an upper floor in the main hall

The headroom within the main hall would appear to allow the insertion of an upper floor, this option could extend the first-floor area connected to the existing balcony, by up to 200m². Subject to structural viability, it would be a relatively cheap option, although the cost of lift access and adaptation of the existing balcony would need to be taken into account. The main disadvantages would be the loss of the original volume and the lack of natural light in the lower part of the hall.

This could be a partial covering providing a mezzanine floor or a complete covering providing a full new floor.



5.3 Accommodation of functions

There are certain functions that should be located on the ground floor: these include the following:

- at least some of the galleries (all if no lift provided);
- reception and shop;
- cloakrooms and toilet accommodation;
- café if provided;
- delivery area and workshop;
- some storage for exhibits;
- occasional public or private hire

Functions that could be accommodated elsewhere in the building, subject to accessibility, include the following:

- offices and meeting rooms;
- staff cloakroom, toilet and kitchen facilities;
- education room and associated ancillary spaces;
- library, archive and study/research rooms;
- other storage areas.

If good lift access to the upper area were provided, then it would be feasible to locate some galleries above ground level. However, there would need to be a "critical mass" of such gallery space to make it worthwhile for visitors to change levels.

The accommodation of functions other than those directly related to the museum service is discussed in section 6.4 below.

5.5 Access

Access for wheelchair users could be achieved in a variety of ways. It is noted that the pavement on Brand St in front of the main entrance is wide enough to accommodate a ramp: if this was started on the left-hand side, near the corner with Grammar School Walk, it could take advantage of the natural slope of the street and would not be particularly obtrusive. The local Highways authority would need to be amenable. Alternatively, but less satisfactorily, a dedicated level entrance could be provided at the door in the middle of the main hall, from Grammar School Walk, or else at the rear of the building. Parking space could be provided alongside the building in Grammar School Walk.



6 LAYOUT OPTIONS

6.0 Common elements

We have been requested to consider whether Hitchin Town Hall would be suitable for a combined museum and we have therefore evaluated two primary options. However it should be noted that other options are available and these would be explored as part of the next stage of development

Two options for the possible arrangement of the spaces are shown on sketches 11 and 12 in Appendix E, and described in brief below. Area schedules for both options are given in Appendix D. The layouts shown are very schematic, and show blocks of accommodation rather than individual rooms. Minor variations of the two options would be possible and some are mentioned in passing.

Both options assume that the main entrance to the building would remain off Brand Street, with public cloakroom facilities alongside and the staff office suite above. A lift for the use of both public and staff would be located in this area. The existing entrance is not large, and would not be suitable for a greatly enlarged retail area. If this was required it might be possible to locate it in conjunction with the café area, or else incorporate it into the front part of the main hall. Both options assume that the upper floors of the annexe are used for storage: unless made accessible with a lift, this is the least restrictive use, but other possibilities are discussed later.

Both options assume that the basement areas are used for mechanical and electrical plant, and that further plant (for chillers or air-handling units), could be located on the flat roofed area of the link, although this would probably be subject to planning permission

6.1 Option 1

Option 1 is shown on sketch drawing No sk11, and a schedule of spaces and areas is given in Appendix D1.

This option makes use of the existing space with a minimum of modification. Nearly all the areas to which the public require access are kept on the ground floor level, the exception being the education area, which is shown on the modified balcony in the main hall. The area for this is less than ideal, so some limited extension of the balcony could be undertaken to increase the area.

The gallery spaces would be divided between the main hall, the gymnasium, and the annexe, giving a total gallery area of up to 600m². This compares with approx. 414m² at present, and the median aspiration of 620m². Display area could be extended into the existing corridor alongside the main hall. A small café is located in the link block, and could be combined with the circulation between the two halves of the gallery space.

The workshop is located at the rear of the link, with access from the hard-standing to the rear, and some storage could be accommodated on the stage area where there is a difference of level, if necessary with a simple platform lift to give access between the two. Other storage is located on upper floors.

The principal advantages of Option 1 are as follows:

- simpler, less expensive conversion;
- keeps all the gallery space on the ground floor;
- retains the full height of the hall;
- could allow the two "halves" of the gallery to be semi-independent (e.g. the gymnasium area could be used for temporary exhibitions and accessed from the rear of the building);
- the café is located centrally and links the two gallery areas: it could also be roof-lit and serviced from the hard-standing area;
- the storage space provided is substantially increased (but see also below).

The main disadvantages of Option 1 are as follows:

- education space not ideally located and not as large as ideal unless the balcony is expanded;
- storage space mainly on upper floors and access problematic without a lift in the annexe.



6.2 Option 2

Option 2 is shown on sketch drawing No sk12, and a schedule of spaces and areas is given in Appendix D2.

This option assumes an increase in floor-space, achieved by the construction of an upper floor in the main hall, and accessed from the new lift, and probably new stairs within the hall, perhaps at the stage end. Both levels of the hall, and the stage area, are shown as gallery space, although the latter remains at an intermediate level so would not be fully accessible without the installation of a small lift. This gives a slightly greater total gallery area of 658m² (compared with the existing 414m², median aspiration of 620m² and optimal area of 835m²).

The Gymnasium has been given over to workshop and storage, still with service access from the rear hard-standing area. This then makes the link fully available for a good-sized education area (116m²). A small study area is shown in the room at GF level stage right.

The café has been moved to the ground floor of the annexe.

The principal advantages of Option 2 are as follows:

- more space created by the new floor;
- education space more extensive and better located on the ground floor;
- would also allow semi-independent programming of the upper and lower galleries;
- more storage space, and better located on the ground floor adjacent to the workshop, creating a "back-of-house" zone.

The main disadvantages of Option 2 are as follows:

- more extensive (and expensive) conversion;
- half of galleries located on the upper floor and hence slightly less obvious
- café not so centrally located and may not attract so much passing trade.

6.3 Variations

Options for using the annexe for other than storage functions would be opened up by providing a second lift for this area. Each of the upper floors could provide about 60m² of usable space: this could serve well as more private archive or study area, or might be made available for hire. This is a particularly favourable consideration in conjunction with Option 2, where plenty of storage space has already been provided on the ground floor.

Furthermore, a well-positioned lift in this area could open up the possibility of some mezzanine storage within the gymnasium: at present the height of around 4m to the suspended ceiling is slightly too low, but it may be that there is additional headroom between roof trusses that could be used.

Other minor variations to the options described above would be possible: for instance, in Option 1, if the workshop were to be moved either to the stage area or the rear of the gymnasium, and the café located in the annexe (as Option 2) it would allow the education room to be located in the link as in Option 2. This would however result in a reduction of gallery space to less than the median aspiration.

6.4 Other functions

We have been asked to consider whether any of the existing uses of the building might be accommodated within the scheme for the combined museum. Such uses would be subject to considerations of security, access and practicality, but should not be ruled out. The following options could be considered:

- a) It might be possible to rent out individual spaces for meetings or private functions: the spaces that would be best suited would be the following"
 - the upper floors of the annexe (subject to improved access: see above);
 - the education room (in either option, but particularly in Option 2, where access could be provided from the rear hard-standing);



- the café (although neither of the current options provides an ideal scenario)
 - galleries allocated to temporary exhibitions: in Option 1, if these were housed in the gymnasium there would be suitable independent access from the rear hard-standing. Such use would depend on the nature of exhibitions being shown: high-value or free-standing items would pose risks.
- b) Sets of spaces could be combined, for instance:
- in Option 1 the gymnasium gallery and the café;
 - in Option 2 (subject to improved access) the whole or part of the annexe including the cafe

In relation to the specific existing use for large scale events, it is difficult to see how these could be accommodated within a conventional gallery design. The requirement for separate large open areas and a substantial kitchen could not in our view be met while maintaining a typical gallery use, certainly not without considerable disruption and risk to the exhibits.

It may be possible to hold occasional more limited events within the Town Hall if a more flexible and robust design is incorporated. This could include the use of mobile display units and robust fixed perimeter units including toughened glass cases and / or fixed screening.

Consideration would need to be given to the sensitivity of the exhibits and fragile or delicate exhibits may need to be displayed elsewhere within the building if the areas are to be used for public or private events. The final museum layout would need to be considered to review whether the general usage of the spaces could be allocated to provide more flexibility.

Option 2 could have greater scope for public and private usage as there is a greater area available to accommodate these events and the 2 museums.

Security would need to be considered both within the spaces hired out and elsewhere within the building to restrict access and the insurers would need to be notified. On site invigilators may be required during events.

We are aware of the current public and private usage of the Town Hall and would wish to retain a degree of ongoing usage. We would recommend however that these events be considered carefully with regards suitability.



7 DEVELOPMENT CONSIDERATIONS

7.1 Consents

Any development will be subject to the normal process of statutory consents and obligatory requirements: these could include the following:

7.1.1 Planning Permission

The building is local listed and part of a conservation area. This means Planning Permission would not be required for internal alterations. However, it would be required for any change of use, and for any work affecting the external appearance. Specific issues that might be the subject of scrutiny could be alterations to traffic flow and parking around the building, and the generation of noise, for instance from mechanical plant. We have not at this stage made any specific enquiries to the Planning Authority (presumably NHDC itself).

7.1.2 Building Regulations

Building Control approval would be required for work falling under the Regulations. This would include any structural work, the provision of sanitary fittings, ventilation, electrical work, fire alarms and means of escape, amongst others. The latter are also the subject of scrutiny and approval by the local Fire Officer.

7.1.3 Highways

Alterations to the roads, footpaths or crossovers around the building would need to be agreed by the local Highways Department (NHDC). This might affect the provision of ramps or parking for disabled persons.

7.1.4 Party walls

It is possible that some of the work would fall under the Party Walls legislation.

7.1.5 Security against crime

Security of the building and its contents would clearly be an important design consideration, and provisions would be taken into account by the eventual insurers. In addition, the local police force would need to be consulted in relation to the prevention of crime both in and around the building.

7.1.6 Health and Safety

The construction works would be subject to the Construction (Design and Maintenance) Regulations 2007: these are intended to ensure that works are carried out safely and that safe maintenance of the building is possible

7.1.7 Environmental Health

Any catering facilities would be subject to Environmental Health Regulations: in terms of the development this would include ensuring that proper facilities for hygiene and food storage and preparation, and the disposal of waste, are provided. The local council would need to agree provisions for the storage and removal of rubbish.

7.1.8 Statutory undertakers

The various utility companies would need to be consulted at an early stage to ensure that requirements for water, electricity and gas supplies and the disposal of sewage could be met. Specific regulations apply to the installation of these services, in addition to the Building Regulations.

7.1.9 Premises Licence

A licence to operate and admit members of the public would be required under the Licensing Act 2003. The provision of a license will be dependent on conformity with many of the Regulations discussed above, but also on the presentation of a Management Plan for the building.



7.2 Site investigations

The development of an existing building usually requires a thorough set of surveys and investigations prior to development commencing. It is likely that these would include the following:

7.2.1 Measured survey

We are aware that a set of survey plans have already been prepared: it is recommended that these should be checked for accuracy, and supplemented (for instance with details of levels, elevations and sections).

7.2.2 Structural survey

The building will need to be surveyed for signs of any structural defects, and also to establish whether the existing structure would be able to carry increased loads if proposed in the design. If an extension was proposed a ground conditions survey might be required.

7.2.3 Conditions survey

A detailed conditions survey should be carried out at an early stage in order to determine the extent of any repair works that may be needed in addition to the works to improve or convert the building. Our superficial inspection revealed a number of areas of damp penetration.

7.2.4 Contamination survey

A building of this age may contain deleterious materials such as asbestos or lead paint: it would be advisable to establish the existence and if possible dispose of any such contaminants at an early stage.

Other more specialised surveys may become necessary as the development proceeds.

7.3 Consultant team

Any development will require the appointment of a consultant team to manage the process and to design and oversee the building works. The main components of the team would be as follows:

7.3.1 Project manager

The Project Manager's role is to plan and co-ordinate the development process. Specific duties could include:

- preparation of a brief;
- advice on the appointment of other consultants;
- maintenance of the project budget;
- maintenance of a development programme;
- advice on the procurement method;
- liaison between the employer and the other parties;

The Project Manager might be a member of the client body if someone with relevant experience is available or an external Project Management consultant.

7.3.2 Architect

The architect is usually the leader of the design team, and is responsible for the overall concept design and the co-ordination of the work of other consultants. In some cases the architect may provide a full-design service including other technical sub-consultants.

The choice of a suitable architect is crucial to the success of the finished building, and the Council should be clear in its own mind what kind of finished building it envisages before it makes this appointment.



7.3.3 Quantity Surveyor

An independent quantity surveyor is normally appointed to provide cost advice and control throughout the project.

7.3.4 Structural engineer

The structural engineer is responsible for the design of the structural elements of the building, which may include secondary structures such as balustrades and plant support.

7.3.5 Services engineer

The services engineer is responsible for mechanical and electrical installations within the building. A key aspect of this will be the provision of suitable environmental control for the museum's collection, both on display and in storage. Some specialist advice on the conservation of specially sensitive items may also be required.

7.3.6 Other consultants

Depending on the requirements and on the level of expertise provided by the principal consultants, further specialised advice may be required from others, including the following:

- acoustic engineers;
- lighting designers;
- specialist conservation experts;
- display and exhibition designers;
- catering consultants;
- retail consultants;
- party wall surveyors;
- graphics designers;

7.3.7 Contract administrator

Depending on the form of building contract, a Contract Administrator (CA) or Employer's Agent (EA) will be required to administer the contract on behalf of the employer. The CA role is frequently provided by the architect, but can be independent. The EA role is frequently provided by the Project Manager or the QS.

7.3.8 Legal services

Specialist legal advice may be required from time to time on development, appointment and building contract matters, and the Council should ensure that its regular legal advisors are able to provide an appropriate level of expertise.

7.4 Programme

We have initially advised that the works would take between 2.5 – 3 years to complete.

The length of the development programme will depend on a variety of factors including in the following:

- resources of the design team;
- the obtaining of the various consents, particularly Planning permission;
- size and complexity of the works;
- external constraints (such as the expiry of leases on existing buildings);
- availability of funding;
- political considerations.

An indicative development programme is attached in appendix E.



The programme shown indicates an overall development period of 2.5 years. However, such programmes are in our experience usually subject to change and review. The Council should consider the constraints and priorities and commit to an outline programme, to be reviewed as the project proceeds.

The attached programme indicates that in order to achieve the project programme (option 1) the following key milestones would need to be followed:

- Client decision to proceed	12 June 09
- Appoint project manager	14 June 09
- Complete design team brief	2 July 09
- Tender for design team (not OJEU)	3 July 09
- Appoint design team	30 July 09
- Planning submission (if required)	7 Jan 2010
- Tender work	5 Aug 2010
- Commence on site	28 Oct 2010
- Complete main work	7 July 2011
- Exhibition Fitting out commence	7 July 2011
- Exhibition Fitting out completed	27 Oct 2011
- Client opening	19 Jan 2012

7.5 Building procurement methods

A variety of contractual routes are available for the carrying-out of the building works. Each offers a different balance of design responsibility, cost certainty, programme, risk distribution and quality control. The choice of procurement method is a key decision, and will need to be taken once the Council's requirements are more fully understood, with the advice of the Project Manager.

7.6 Other development considerations

Certain particular considerations may affect the decision on whether, and how, to proceed with the project. While we are not necessarily aware of all the factors, we understand that the following issues might be of significance:

7.6.1 Re-use of the existing museum buildings

Decision to relocate the museum service may depend upon alternative uses being found for the existing buildings and sites. We have not considered this aspect in detail, but we understand that one factor may be the existence of a restrictive covenant in relation to possible uses of the Hitchin Museum. This building is also likely to be subject to Planning considerations as a listed building.

7.6.2 Trusts

We have been advised that "under the terms of the conveyance (which passed the gymnasium to the former Hitchin UDC) it states that any future use of the gymnasium must be for use as a gym or *for other purposes mentioned in s6(3) Museums & Gymnasiums Act 1891* and also any other (charitable) purposes for the benefit of the district. The 1891 Act has been replaced by the Public Libraries & Museums Act 1964 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976. There are powers in these Acts for local authorities to provide recreational facilities, museums and art galleries, the trusts relating to Hitchin Town Hall are ideally suited for its use as a museum"

7.6.3 Public Consultation

There are likely to be opinions on the project from existing museum users and the general public, as well as existing Museum Service staff, which will need to be factored into any decision to move the service.



8 COSTS

8.1 Construction costs

NHDC have advised that the available funds for the overall project works are circa £3.5m with £2.5m notionally allocated to the capital works to combine the two museums within the Hitchin Town Hall.

The two options outlined above and indicated on drawings sk11 and sk12 would need to be further developed and designed prior to definitive costs being established. However the initial indications are that option 1 could be provided for circa £2.35m and option 2 for circa £2.6m excluding VAT.

The process for further cost certainty would be to appoint the project manager, design team and quantity surveyor as soon as possible, develop the initial design for the options selected and to prepare a detailed design estimate.

The cost with option 2 - sk12 is subject to structural and ground investigations

8.2 Other development costs

We have included within the above cost assessment a 20% allowance for all fees including design consultants, legal advisors, statutory approvals etc., and a notional £200,000 for clients internal direct management costs. The direct costs would need to be reviewed and confirmed by NHDC.



9 SUMMARY AND RECOMMENDATIONS

9.1 Summary

North Herts District Council has requested an assessment of the suitability of Hitchin Town Hall for use as a combined Museum and Art Gallery for the collections currently housed in Letchworth and Hitchin Museums, as well as space for temporary exhibitions and storage.

Based on our inspections of the existing and proposed premises and discussions with NHDC staff, we have prepared a sample brief for the project and compared this with the space potentially available at the Town Hall.

We consider that the Town Hall building could be adapted for the purpose, and that suitable education and study space and other public facilities, as well as office space for the museum service staff, could be provided. Some limited additional storage space could also be accommodated: this would be limited to essential items associated with current displays.

Two possible conversion options are shown in outline form on the attached sketches sk11 and sk12, although other combinations of these options are possible. Option 1 is cheaper; Option 2 provides more space and goes further towards satisfying the brief.

We have provisionally assessed the project costs for the two options at around £2.35M and £2.6M respectively. An indicative development programme has been suggested: this indicates that completion would be possible by January 2012, but steady progress would need to be maintained through to completion. The form of procurement could affect the key milestones however the overall completion dates are likely to be similar.

The use of the building as a Museum could be combined with other uses, for meetings or private functions, but we consider that the current use for large weddings parties would not be easily accommodated on account of the large spaces required, and the potential security implications without further flexible and robust museum gallery design considerations. The preference is to retain a degree of private and public usage and further detailed discussions and design development would be needed to secure this option on a limited scale.

9.2 Recommendations

Should NHDC wish to proceed with the project on the basis of the above assessment, we recommend that steps should be taken to appoint a consultant team as soon as possible, commencing with a Project Manager, who can then assist with the other appointments.

NHDC should confirm the budget, programme and outline brief as the basis for the appointment of the consultant team.

NHDC should also identify a person or group within the Council that will act as executive client, with responsibility for day-to-day decisions and liaison over policy issues.

DRAFT**MUSEUMS PROJECT BOARD****22 JANUARY 2009****NHDC MUSEUMS DEVELOPMENT – OUTLINE OPTIONS****REPORT OF THE PROJECT MANAGER****1. INTRODUCTION – FUNDING CONTEXT**

The Museums FSR (2005) indicated that £1m would be required for a Collections Centre (storage) and £5m for a new district-wide museum. The report did not specify whether these capital costs should be wholly met from within the NHDC capital programme or whether there should be some external or partnership funding. However, the report did indicate that the value of existing assets could reduce this figure down to £2m net cost to the Council.

The options below generally assume £1 million grant-aid from the Heritage Lottery Fund, and where relevant, £1 million from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

Please note that the Options are in order of preference and have been prepared on a desk-top analysis basis. The indicative costs are based on Spon's Price Book 2008, plus 15% fees, 5% external works, 6% RPI and 5% contingency, demolition costs where appropriate, and £4-£500,000 removal/fitting out costs, all ex. vat.

All costings have been checked and verified by the Council's Finance and Property Services).

2. PROPOSALS FOR A NEW COLLECTIONS CENTRE**Location and Purpose**

Letchworth is the preferred location, for two reasons. Firstly, it enables NHDC to have a museum presence in the town should Letchworth Museum close and relocate to an NHDC museum in Hitchin. Secondly, it enables partnership with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which is keen to move from its current museum store to larger and more accessible premises. Partnership working would help both sides, particularly in respect of any Heritage Lottery Fund bid.

The purpose of the new Collections Centre is to unite a number of different museum stores on one site, giving a joined-up public service. The building will include user-friendly research facilities, together with easy access to the stored items which make up our local and regional heritage.

The vision is for a new or refurbished building, which will include storage, research, office and visitor facilities. The combination of stored collections from a number of local museums will bring a wider range of visitors and researchers to the site, and indeed to the location. Consultation has identified wide support for accessible museum storage amongst all user groups.

The Collections Centre could also house the Council's archives and Document Centre (currently located on the Town Lodge site, Gernon Road).

In summary, the Collections Centre will be:

- **A one-stop shop** for all those interested in researching or viewing the different museum collections
- **A pioneering education space**, providing a focus for school, adult and family learning, running parallel to and supplementing the existing museum-based learning
- **A physical manifestation of local identity**, contributing to the sense of place which consultation has shown NHDC residents greatly value
- **An example of best practice** for the region, illustrating how different museums can work in partnership to gain state-of-the art facilities for the wider community, and to house their stored collections
- **An agent for change**, contributing to peoples' well-being through its opportunities for volunteering, and for research, particularly in the area of family history
- **A cultural hub** enhancing the role of the existing museums, giving the opportunity to connect rural and urban areas of the District

Option 1

All museum stores (NHDC and external partners including Heritage Foundation) to move to a joint Collections Centre in Letchworth. NHDC Document Centre could move to this site.

Advantages:

- Sustainability of NHDC asset
- Building is a suitable size to house stored items from NHDC, LGCHF and other museums, plus Document Centre
- Accessible store/research centre for all NHDC residents
- NHDC museum presence in Letchworth if/when the current museum is vacated
- Museum objects only move once
- HLF grant-aid is more likely – supporting partnership working
- NHDC realise asset value of Burymead and Document Centre sites
- Space for museum staff offices
- Good parking; near bus route
- Positive PR for NHDC in helping smaller museums
- Heritage Foundation capital/partnership funding/in-kind contributions

Disadvantages:

- Loss of rental income £15,000pa.
- Less convenient for small but vocal Hitchin user group

Financial Implications

Conversion cost: £3 million to - £3.75 million (1760 sq. m). The variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey.

New build £4.5 million.

(NB: These costs do not include fitting out a new Document Centre)

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£1m +
	HLF	£1m
	LGCHF	£1m

Legal Implications

Not yet fully quantified, although no adverse legal issues foreseen

Option 2

Move all museum stores (NHDC and external partners *excluding* Heritage Foundation) and NHDC Document Centre to Building in Letchworth.

Advantages:

- Sustainability of NHDC asset
- Building has enough storage space for NHDC and other museums, plus Document Centre
- Accessible store/research centre for all NHDC residents
- NHDC museum presence in Letchworth if/when the current museum is vacated
- Museum objects only move once
- NHDC realise asset value of Burymead and Document Centre sites
- Space for museum staff offices
- Good parking; near bus route
- Positive PR for NHDC in helping smaller museums

Disadvantages:

- No partnership with Heritage Foundation, so HLF grant-aid less likely, though still possible
- No Heritage Foundation capital/partnership funding/in-kind contributions

Financial Implications

As above. It would not be cost-effective to part-convert the building, but there may be savings by not equipping for the LGCHF.

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£2m +
	HLF	£1m

Legal Implications

As above.

Option 3

Refurbish current Burymead building, demolish derelict garages and extend on the site with new building for NHDC and external partner museums, excluding LGCHF

Advantages:

- Sustainability of NHDC asset, with the space to offer partner museums
- Accessible store/research centre for all NHDC residents
- NHDC-owned site
- Space for museum staff offices
- Space for parking
- Not far from bus routes; walking distance from BR station

Disadvantages:

- Museum objects would need to be moved to secure store off-site during building work
- No partnership with Heritage Foundation (as building not in the Garden City) so HLF grant-aid less likely, though in principle still possible
- No Heritage Foundation capital/partnership funding/in-kind contributions
- Probably too far from Letchworth to locate NHDC Document Centre
- No NHDC museum presence in Letchworth if the current museum is vacated, with attendant adverse PR

Financial Implications

Cost £2.75 million to £3.25 million (750 sq.m. conversion, 500 sq.m new-build).

Again, the variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey. Running costs for this option will be higher because of the mixed configuration of new and old portions.

(NB. Cost of complete new-build: £4 million although a smaller building than option 1, fitting costs may be the same)

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£2m
	HLF	£1m

Legal Implications

No adverse legal issues foreseen

3. PROPOSALS FOR A NEW/REFURBISHED DISTRICT WIDE MUSEUM

Location and Purpose

Hitchin Town Hall is the preferred location. The museum would contain easily accessible display and exhibition spaces, with public facilities such as toilets, café, and education/lecture room.

The Citizens' Panel (2005) included a large number of museum-related questions. The museum section of this survey had 671 respondents, so the research may be accepted as sound, and representative of our public. The survey reported that the two most important elements for a museum service were to do with ease of access - firstly, a building that was easy to get to, in a prime location with good transport links (ie a town centre), and secondly, a building that is easy to move around inside. The other essential features requested by NHDC residents were a wide range of temporary exhibitions, informative permanent displays, children's holiday activities, workshops for schoolchildren in the museum, and general amenities such as a café and toilets.

The aim of the museum would be to tell the story of life in North Herts. from prehistoric times to the present day, using modern display techniques. The museum would include:

- History of life in Hitchin, from Iron Age to present day. The displays would include sections on trades, transport, schooling, shopping, housing, beliefs, Hitchin people, and would include the re-installed Chemist's Shop.
- Displays on the art, archaeology and countryside of North Herts.
- Displays on living in North Herts., with an overview of the main towns, and sections on the villages, using existing material currently in store.
- Temporary exhibition galleries x 2. One large for touring exhibitions, one small for community use
- Education/lecture/community room
- Café
- Shop, possibly shared with a TIC

Depending on feasibility, museums staff could be housed in offices on site at the Town Hall, or else at an expanded Collections Centre (see above), with just a manager and Visitor Service staff on site at the museum. There is the possibility that some stores could relocate to the new museum; Burymead currently does not have the space or suitable environmental conditions for the fine art/costume/decorative art objects in store at both museums. The museum workshop will also need relocating once Letchworth Museum closes – either to the Resource/Collections Centre or to the new museum. The move will give the opportunity to audit the collections and dispose of extraneous/duplicate items, but the majority of the collections are linked to North Herts. and should remain in the District.

Option 1**Conversion of Hitchin Town Hall.**

Advantages :

- Sustainability of NHDC asset, which NHDC has previously put out to tender, and tried to lease to a Community Interest Company; neither was successful. The Town Hall needs investment, and re-use as a museum, possibly with some community space, could be an excellent solution.
- Town centre location, as requested in the Citizens' Panel.
- Ideal size for conversion to NHDC Museum as above. Excluding on-site storage and workshop facilities, the combined space of both existing museums is 748 sq. m.; HTH is 887 sq. m., the additional 140 sq. m. giving room for storage/offices/community facilities. If necessary a mezzanine gallery could relatively easily be added in the main ballroom.
- The building already has a kitchen, and café/bar on the ground floor. A separate entrance from Brand Street, which could also give easy disabled access, leads straight to the café area. There are toilets on the ground and upper floors.
- Possibility of high quality rental income from weddings and conferences if the main hall was upgraded.
- Good candidate for grant-aid – attractive building in need of a focussed use
- Positive PR from locating the museum in Hitchin. Although a vocal group worry about the future use of the current Hitchin Museum building, overall it is felt that the Town Hall location would be welcomed.
- Opportunity to upgrade facility to comply with DDA etc in a sustainable way using green technology where possible.
- Parking and public transport nearby.

Disadvantages:

- Loss of general community space for hire
- Would need agreement of Trustees for change of use of their space
- Negative PR from loss/change of use
- Compensation might have to be paid if the existing Hitchin Museum was closed; see Note below
- Hitchin Town Hall is not large enough to contain the museum displays and also the museum stores; a Collections Centre would still be needed. This could be scaled down, and on the Burymead site if necessary.
- Parts of the building need major maintenance work (the basements are damp), but as long as NHDC owns the building, maintenance has to be undertaken regardless of the use.
- At least one lift would have to be installed for DDA access to the upper floors

Financial Implications

Cost: £2.25 million to £2.5 million (887 sq. m).

The variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£1.25 - £1.5m
	HLF	£1m

Legal Implications

Part of the Town Hall site (gymnasium and workman's hall) form a Trust which was taken on by the then Hitchin Urban District Council in 1935.

The Council is the sole Trustee of the property which is subject to the Trust. The Council owns the property on trust to use it for the purposes designated in the Trust documents. The Council's ownership of the property is therefore limited by the terms of the Trust. There is no legal distinction in this regard between the Council's ownership as property owner and as a trustee; it is one corporate body.

Hitchin Town Hall is administered under the Public Libraries & Museums Act of 1964, and there is no legal reason why it should not become a museum, as long as current Trustees of the Workman's Hall give consent.

If Hitchin Town Hall was to become the main NHDC museum, NHDC might try to realise its asset of the existing Hitchin Museum. Hitchin Museum and library (on a site originally of over an acre) was a gift in 1937 to Hitchin UDC from the Moss family, as a public library and museum in perpetuity for the benefit of the urban district. A 1937 covenant precludes any new buildings on the site except as requisite as a public library and museum; the garden to be maintained as a public garden. It would be possible to apply to the Lands Tribunal to discharge the covenant, on the basis that it is no longer of practical utility. If the Lands Tribunal agreed, it could order substantial compensation to be paid to the descendants of the Moss family.

Option 2

Conversion of Hitchin Museum

Advantages:

- Sustainability of NHDC asset
- Much-loved building, with community support
- Good PR
- If it were possible, it would become DDA compliant modern museum

Disadvantages:

- Hitchin Museum would need to double in size to function as the main NHDC Museum, with an education room, café and toilets as well as space to display the archaeology, countryside and other collections from Letchworth Museum, together with material about the towns and villages.
- It would need a huge extension, and the only space large enough would jutting out from the front of the existing building into the garden in front. There is not the space at the rear without building over the (County Council) library's van access, or at the side over the Physic Garden. Hitchin Museum is housed in a Listed building, and permission would have to be obtained from English Heritage. Informal discussions with the Council's Conservation Officer have suggested that such permission would probably be difficult to obtain, so no costing has been given for an extension.
- Outside the central town centre area. Hitchin Museum is near the centre of the town, but cannot be said to be in the Town Centre.
- Lack of parking

Financial Implications

Cost: £1.25 million- £1.5 million (450 sq. m). This cost is just to convert the existing building into an accessible 21st century museum, which would not be large enough for a District-wide museum, or indeed to hold the Letchworth collections. Again, the variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey of the museum building and any difficulties encountered with the installation of lifts.

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£250k- £500k
	HLF	£1m

Legal Implications

No issues as long as Hitchin Museum remains a museum for the public benefit.

Hitchin Museum and library (on a site originally of over an acre) was a gift in 1937 to Hitchin UDC from the Moss family, as a public library and museum in perpetuity for the benefit of the urban district. A 1937 covenant precludes any new buildings on the site except as requisite as a public library and museum; the garden to be maintained as a public garden. It would be possible to apply to the Lands Tribunal to discharge the covenant, on the basis that it is no longer of practical utility. If the Lands Tribunal agreed, it could order substantial compensation to be paid to the descendants of the Moss family. Should the museums service move its collections out of the current building, the house would become part of the Council's portfolio of assets, managed by the Head of Finance

Option 3

Conversion of Hitchin Museum, plus conversion/demolition and rebuild of existing Hitchin Library

Advantages:

- Sustainability of NHDC asset
- Large enough space to design a good museum with community facilities, particularly if it was possible to demolish library and re-build.
- Better option for DDA compliance (possible use of existing Library lift)
- Good PR

Disadvantages:

- Outside the central town centre area
- NHDC would have to persuade the County Council to move Hitchin Library from this site; they would need a replacement building in Hitchin (?Registry Offices). County Council would need a good reason to relocate the library.
- Possible planning issues over any demolition/rebuild.
- Little room for additional parking

Financial Implications

Conversion of both museum and library (est. total 1350 sq. m) £2.5 to £3.5 million.

The variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey, in particular those relating to joining the buildings. No allowance for value of the library building.

Conversion of museum, with new-build on library site (450 +900 sq.m) £4.5 to £5 million Again the variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey of the museum building and any difficulties encountered with the installation of lifts.

No allowance for value of the library building.

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£2.5-4m
	HLF	£1m

Legal Implications

No issues, as long as any new buildings are for a public museum or library, and the gardens remain open to the public.

Option 4

Conversion of Letchworth Town Hall

Advantages :

- Sustainability of NHDC asset
- Town centre location
- Good size for conversion to NHDC Museum as above.
- Good candidate for grant-aid – attractive building in need of a use
- Good location for public transport, both bus and rail; car parks very close

Disadvantages:

Negative PR for moving NHDC museum from Hitchin – the adverse publicity would be vocal and extremely unpleasant; Hitchin community wants a museum in Hitchin, telling the town's story. If the Collections Centre was also in Letchworth, the fury would be all the greater.

- Potential adverse reaction to siting both museum and collection centre in one town
- Would antagonize Garden City Heritage Foundation, which has publicly stated its desire for this building to become a major Garden City Museum
- Potential conflict with any accommodation option required by NHDC
- No capital receipts from sale of Town Hall

Financial Implications

Costs: £2 million to £2.25 million (800 sq. m)

Again the variation depends upon what defects are encountered following a detailed structural survey of the building and any difficulties encountered with the installation of lifts. This is a lower cost option than Hitchin Town Hall because it is a more compact building; running costs will be lower than Hitchin Town Hall.

Funding proposals:	NHDC	£1million - £1.25 million
	HLF	£1m

Legal Implications

Not yet fully quantified.

4. SUMMARY OF FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

For illustrative purposes, the maximum costs are used.

Collections Centre	Funding NHDC £m	Funding HLF£m	Funding LGCHF£m	Net Cost	Comments
Option 1	1.25	1.0	1.0	3.25	
Option 2	2.5	1.0	0	3.5	
Option 3	2.0	1.0	0	3.0	

NHDC Museum	Funding NHDC £m	Funding HLF£m	Funding LGCHF£m	Net Cost	Comments
Option 1	1.5	1.0	0	2.5	
Option 2	0.5	1.0	0	1.5	
Option 3	4.0	1.0	0	5.0	
Option 4	1.25	1.0	0	2.25	

5. PROJECT BOARD RECOMMENDATIONS

- 5.1 Following the proposal to close Letchworth Museum on 31 March 2009, Project Board met on 22 January 2009, and considered all four location options for the new/refurbished District-wide Museum.
- 5.2 Option 1, Hitchin Town Hall, was recommended, for a number of reasons – see Advantages, p.6. It has an excellent location, which the Citizens' Panel has shown is an important issue for our residents. It seems to be an ideal size for displaying material from the two existing museums, and already has a kitchen, café and toilets. NHDC owns the building and has for some time been looking for alternative uses. Financially this seemed to be the preferable option. NHDC could make estimated revenue savings of around £28,000 pa just by moving Hitchin Museum to the Town Hall, as museum staff could take on many of the booking functions.

- 5.3 Project Board recommended that the Museums Facilities Working Group be involved in future discussions on the new museum where possible.

6. INVOLVEMENT OF EXTERNAL CONSULTANT

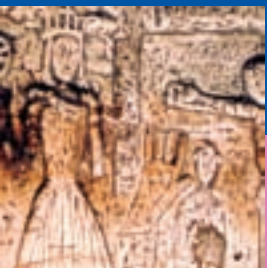
- 6.1 A specialist museums consultancy firm (Cragg Management) has been engaged to give an initial feasibility study on whether Hitchin Town Hall could be converted into a District-wide museum, and if so, how likely Heritage Lottery funding might be. The report is expected on 20 April 2009.

Report Author: R. Allwood, Project Manager

Contributing Officers: P. Candler; B Jones

Revised Report 6 April 2009

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ARTS, MUSEUMS & HERITAGE STRATEGY 2007/11



SMALL IMAGES FEATURED THROUGHOUT DOCUMENT

Cover:

- Performance at Plinston Hall
- Letchworth Museum
- Archaeology Day
- Royston Cave

Page 2:

- Club 85
- Queen Mother Theatre
- Letchworth Arts Centre
- Baldock Museum

Page 4:

- Letchworth Museum
- Letchworth Museum
- Ballroom dancing, Spirella Building
- Letchworth Arts Centre

Page 6:

- Broadway Cinema
- Rhythms of the World
- The British Schools Museum
- North Hertfordshire College

Page 8:

- Hitchin Museum
- Letchworth Museum
- Letchworth Museum
- Hitchin Museum

Page 10:

- Letchworth Town Hall
- First Garden City Heritage Museum
- Letchworth Arts Centre
- 'Paradise Is' sculpture

Page 12:

- Hitchin Museum
- Hitchin Museum
- Rhythms of the World
- Hitchin Band

Page 14:

- Vaisakhi Festival
- North Herts. Museums

- Letchworth Museum
- Knebworth House

Page 16:

- Ashwell Museum
- The British Schools Museum
- Letchworth Museum
- Ashwell Museum

Page 18:

- Rap-Aid
- All Saints Church, Sandon
- Royston & District Museum
- Royston Kite Festival

Page 20:

- Royston & District Museum
- The Settlement
- Big Spirit Youth Theatre
- David's Books

Page 22:

- Bamboozle Circus, Club 85
- The British Schools Museum
- Rhythms of the World
- Tim's Art Supplies

Back Cover:

- Benslow Music Trust
- Tim's Art Supplies
- Scribbly-Artz,
- St Mary's Church, Clothall

LARGE IMAGES FEATURED THROUGHOUT DOCUMENT

All North Herts Museums Service apart from p.3, brooch from Ashwell Hoard (British Museum); p.11 North Hertfordshire College; p.12 Offley Morris Men at Hitchin Museum; p.15 Hitchin Physic Garden.

We are most grateful to everyone who kindly supplied photographs for the Strategy.

FOREWORD

I am delighted to introduce this important strategy as I believe that it demonstrates how, together, we can build on our strengths in the fields of arts, museums and heritage. The strategy sets out a shared vision for the many people and organisations who are concerned with improving the arts and heritage in North Hertfordshire. The implementation of the strategy requires partnership working. The District Council cannot, and indeed should not, implement the strategy alone, and we are determined to work with all our partners to ensure that together we can meet the ambitions and aspirations raised in this document.

North Hertfordshire has much to be proud of in its vibrant, creative arts, its wide range of museums and its rich archaeological, architectural and natural heritage. These things make our towns and villages more attractive places to live and to visit; they can bring us pleasure, and give depth and meaning to our lives. However, while what we have is good, there is still

room for improvement, and this strategy will help guide decisions over the coming years.

Finally, I would like to thank all the dedicated individuals and organisations who gave up so much time and energy over a long period to help create and refine the strategy.



Cllr. Tricia Gibbs
Portfolio Holder for Community
Engagement & Rural Affairs



INTRODUCTION

OUR AMBITION

Our ambition at North Hertfordshire District Council is to offer all residents and visitors the opportunity to improve the quality of their lives through access to high-quality arts, museums and heritage services within the district.

This strategy examines the role that North Hertfordshire District Council and its partners can play in this achieving this outcome.

In the process, it will help North Hertfordshire District Council achieve its strategic objectives, and it also takes account of wider regional and national initiatives. These can only be achieved by working in partnership with a wide range of different groups.

The strategy has identified a huge range of arts and heritage activities

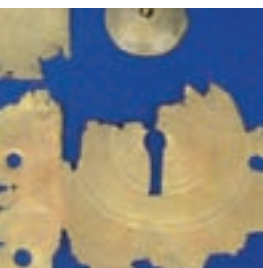
already taking place in North Hertfordshire, and we have much to be proud of in this district.

It has been produced after extensive and detailed consultation with members of the public, special interest groups, town and parish councils, local schools, museums, youth groups, Hertfordshire County Council and all Area Committees of North Hertfordshire District Council.

STRATEGY OBJECTIVES

Following this consultation, the strategy has identified the following six objectives, which underpin provision for the arts, museums and heritage in North Hertfordshire, and which link directly to the District Council's own Strategic Objectives :

- 1 To increase the numbers of those participating in and enjoying the creative arts**
- 2 To increase participation in**



- 3 museums, galleries and heritage sites**
- 4 To improve facilities for experiencing, creating and using the arts, museums and heritage
To encourage partnership working across all sectors**
- 5 To use arts, museums and heritage as a support for social inclusion**
- 6 To encourage cultural tourism and regeneration in the district**

RESOURCING

The ambition of the Council and its partners to improve the range and accessibility of services and activities cannot be achieved without better use of existing resources and the inward injection of new funding.

The costs needed to deliver the Plans for Action can be met from a

combination of sources. These include current budgets, applying for external grant funds, seeking sponsorship and donations, optimising partnership-working, benefiting from planning gain and generating additional income from increased usage.

North Hertfordshire is fortunate in having many individual volunteers and organisations who already contribute their knowledge, creativity and ideas to help improve arts, museums and heritage in the district. One function of this strategy is to help mobilise the latent energy and enthusiasm of those who are not yet involved, but have much to offer.

MONITORING AND REVIEW

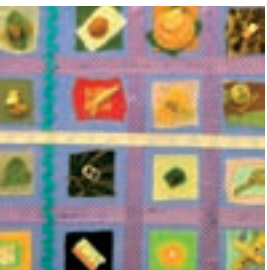
The Arts, Museums & Heritage Strategy will be reviewed at regular intervals to ensure that it remains relevant and up-to-date.

WHY DO WE NEED A STRATEGY?

STRATEGY AIMS

Communities in North Hertfordshire currently enjoy a rich cultural life, from which residents and visitors alike can benefit. By working together with the

public and all our partners, North Hertfordshire District Council can help make the district a more vibrant place to live, work and prosper.



THE STRATEGY AIMS

To set out a common vision of arts, museums and heritage services for North Hertfordshire

To identify the ways in which arts, museums and heritage services can help North Hertfordshire District Council achieve its strategic objectives

To help improve awareness of and access to arts, museums & heritage

To help plan future arts, museums and heritage provision

To audit the existing provision across the district, to identify local needs

WHAT DO WE MEAN?

THE STRATEGY

The strategy fits into the Council's Corporate Plan to review the operation of its Museums Service, and to support and encourage annual arts and cultural events across the District.

This strategy takes account of recent national, regional and county objectives, and will help North Hertfordshire District Council work with its Local Strategic Partners. It demonstrates that the Council values arts, museums & heritage, and the success stories show how arts, museums & heritage already make a positive contribution to the quality of life in the district.

We hope to increase significantly the amount of external funding for arts, museums and heritage coming into the district over the next five years, and the strategy will help make this ambition a reality.

IN THIS STRATEGY WE DEFINE:

ARTS as all forms of visual art, craft, design, video, film, literature and writing, public art, and the performing arts such as music, dance and drama. These activities can be done by individuals or in groups, in public and in private.

MUSEUMS as those museum collections which are open to the public, whether run by the public, private or voluntary sector.

HERITAGE as the architectural heritage of our historic towns and villages, and also the archaeology of the district, which together make up our urban and rural landscapes. The natural heritage is also covered by the countryside collections within the museums.



HOW DID WE GET HERE?

MUSEUMS SERVICE BEST VALUE REVIEW

This strategy grew out of the District Council's Best Value Review of its Museums Service undertaken in 2004-5. The Review found that visitors greatly valued all aspects of the current service (Hitchin Museum & Art Gallery, Letchworth Museum & Art Gallery, the Education Service with its School Loans scheme, the Archaeology and Natural History services) but that the facilities were in need of updating.

Cabinet agreed the following recommendations from the Best Value Review at its meeting on 23.08.05:

That the Improvement Plan developed by the Review be deemed acceptable and that the following activities be undertaken in order to implement it:

- 1** A detailed costed scheme proposal and timetable be developed, complete with funding options so that the scheme can be included in the capital programme at a future date;
- 2** That Officers enter into consultation with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to look at the possibility of partnership working for the provision of museums, arts and storage within Letchworth Garden City;
- 3** That Officers contact district wide voluntary museums, heritage and arts providers to establish more detailed communication and development plans;



- 4 That a project board be established and PRINCE 2 methodology be used for the development of a business case for the Capital Works projects identified within the Improvement Plan;
- 5 The possibility of securing external funding to support the implementation of parts of the Improvement Plan be investigated further;
- 6 That all Area Committees be consulted in formulating and recommending proposals.

At its meeting on 25th May 2006, the Performance Audit and Review Committee (PARC) further agreed the Initial Business Case (as set out in the Project Initiation Document):

To develop plans for the future of the Arts, Cultural & Heritage services of North Hertfordshire.

To work in partnership with the voluntary/not-for-profit sector to establish a new/refurbished Museum & Gallery facility and a new Resource Centre for the whole of North Hertfordshire, to replace or augment the existing Hitchin, Letchworth and Burymead sites.

To undertake the works by September 2011 to ensure that the revenue savings target for the service is achievable.

A Project Board formed from District Councillors and Officers was set up in November 2005 to implement the proposals (See Appendix 1) .





LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY HERITAGE FOUNDATION

At the same time as the Council Review, the independent Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation had been examining its own museum in Letchworth, with the suggestion that a 'Garden City Centre' could open in Letchworth Town Hall. If this were to go ahead, much of the Letchworth material belonging to the Council and to the Heritage Foundation could potentially be shown together in one museum.



the relevant section of the previous North Hertfordshire District Council Leisure & Cultural Strategy 2001-2005. After further consultation it was agreed to include the arts and heritage within the strategy, and an Arts, Museums & Heritage Working Group was formed. Membership consisted of representatives of many local groups and societies, staff and volunteers from the North Hertfordshire museums, and interested individuals (see Appendix 2). Consultees also included Town Centre Managers, local schools, local councillors, Hertfordshire County Council, North Herts. Minority Ethnic Forum, the Voice of Hitchin Youth, and Letchworth Youth Council.

WIDER CONSULTATION

Following a public consultation meeting about the Council's proposals in January 2006, it was decided to set up five separate Working Groups, one for each of the Review recommendations listed above. The first task was the production of a museum/ cultural strategy, to update

THE LOCAL CONTEXT

THE VISION

This strategy supports the North Hertfordshire Local Strategic Partnership's vision for the district, as laid out in the Corporate Plan, and to work collaboratively with its partners and communities to achieve the vision, **'making North Hertfordshire a vibrant place to live, work and prosper'**

In short, the strategy will put the 'vibe' back into vibrant!

NHDC STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

The Arts, Museums & Heritage Strategy supports all six strategic objectives in the NHDC Corporate Plan:

SUSTAINABLE COMMUNITIES

Promoting sustainable development of the district to ensure we deliver adequate affordable housing, protect the environment and conserve the heritage of our historic towns and rural areas

by the display and interpretation of collections relating to the local environment and heritage, particularly through the district's museums, and also through the NHDC Planning and Building Control Service

SAFER COMMUNITIES

Encouraging responsible citizenship and creating safe communities with less crime and less fear of crime

by its emphasis on building up local pride through awareness of the rich heritage of individual towns and villages, and by supporting creative projects for young and older people



SCRUTINY (18.05.09)



HEALTHIER COMMUNITIES

Promoting first class leisure and cultural facilities to contribute to healthy living for all our citizens

by its support for high-quality facilities relating to the arts and/or museums and/or heritage in each of the major towns, and by its aim of finding new ways of providing services for those in the district's villages



EQUAL COMMUNITIES

Targeting resources at areas of disadvantage in the district to reduce social exclusion and improve the quality of life for everyone

by aiming to increase awareness of arts, museums and heritage facilities, and by supporting provision of facilities which are accessible to all



PROSPEROUS COMMUNITIES

Creating opportunity for all by promoting sustainable local economic development

by encouraging 'cultural tourism', and ensuring that residents and visitors are aware of the local cultural offer



SATISFIED COMMUNITIES

Ensuring that we listen to our citizens and deliver high-quality, value for money, customer-focussed services

through increased partnership working

The strategy also relates to and complements a number of other District Council strategies, listed in Appendix 3.



THE NATIONAL AND REGIONAL CONTEXT

This strategy was informed by and will support the following local, regional and national strategies (see Appendix 4 for details of these and other strategy documents consulted):

Enjoy! A cultural strategy for Hertfordshire 2002-2007 (Hertfordshire Cultural Partnership, 2002)

www.hertsdirect.org

Hertfordshire Local Area Agreement, 2006-2009

www.hertslink.org/hertfordshireforward

A better life: The role of culture in the sustainable development of the East of England (Living East, 2006)

www.livingeast.org.uk

Our agenda for the arts in the East of England 2006-8 (Arts Council England)

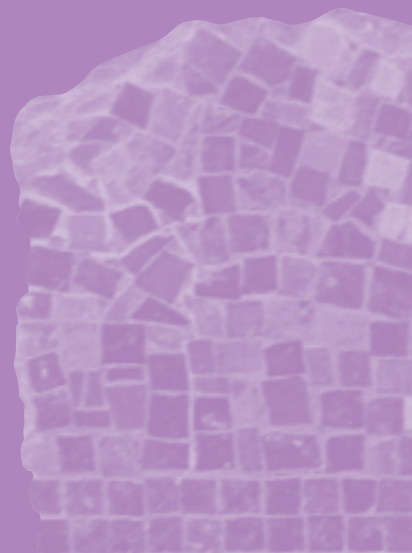
www.artscouncil.org.uk

Museums for the Future: A development strategy for Museums in the East of England (MLA East of England, 2006)

www.mlaeastofengland.org.uk

Heritage Counts: The state of the East of England's Historic Environment, 2006 (English Heritage, 2006)

www.english-heritage.org.uk



WHAT MAKES NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE SPECIAL?

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE HAS

attractive market towns; Baldock, Hitchin and Royston

picturesque villages

Letchworth the world's first Garden City

an exceptional archaeological heritage

a rich and varied artistic life

SOME LOCAL STATISTICS

the population of North Hertfordshire is 120,600

the largest towns are Hitchin (pop. 30,360) and Letchworth (33,690). Royston (14,290), and Baldock (9260)

the district is comparatively wealthy, with low unemployment, although there are pockets of deprivation

there are more people of retirement age than the national average of 24%; in the towns 34% households contain at least one person of retirement age, and in the rural areas this rises to 43%.

under-16s make up 20% of the population.

the cultural mix is the second-most ethnically diverse in Hertfordshire, with an ethnic minority population of 6.8%. This includes people of African, Bangladeshi, Caribbean, Chinese, Indian, Italian, Pakistani and Polish origin, who mostly live in Hitchin and Letchworth.

the 2006 District Survey found that 95% of those questioned were satisfied with North Hertfordshire as a place to live.



INVENTORY OF CURRENT PROVISION

As part of the consultation process undertaken to develop this strategy, we undertook an inventory of current arts, museums and heritage provision in the district. (Organisation names and web-links of the many groups and societies in the district which sent in details may be obtained in a separate document, available on request).

Some of the present highlights are given below:

MUSIC AND PERFORMING ARTS

Benslow Music Trust, Hitchin

Queen Mother Theatre, Hitchin

Plinston Hall, Letchworth

Letchworth Arts Centre

Rhythms of the World Festival

Knebworth House

VISUAL ARTS, CRAFT AND PUBLIC ART

Exhibitions at Hitchin, Letchworth and Royston & District Museums

Letchworth Arts Centre

Open Studios scheme, run by the Hertfordshire Visual Arts Forum.

‘Paradise Is’, Letchworth sculpture by Bettina Furnee commissioned 2003

Underpass in Letchworth’s Grange Estate painted by Scribbley Artz in partnership with Stonehill School, 2006





MUSEUMS

Seven museums in the district:

- Ashwell Museum
- Baldock Museum
- First Garden City Heritage Museum
- Hitchin British Schools Museum
- Hitchin Museum & Art Gallery (NHDC)
- Letchworth Museum & Art Gallery (NHDC)
- Royston & District Museum

Active in family and life-long learning

Wide range of exhibitions and events

Tourism benefits

HERITAGE & LANDSCAPE

61 Scheduled Ancient Monuments, the most in any district in Herts., including Royston Cave

World’s first Garden City

2494 listed buildings

13 registered Historic Parks and Gardens

40 Conservation Areas

Large number of community history and environmental groups

Wide participation in Civic Trust Heritage Open Day scheme

National Archaeology Week events throughout district

Young Archaeology Club run by NHDC

KEY THEMES FOR NORTH HERTS DISTRICT COUNCIL AND ITS PARTNERS

STRATEGIC FRAMEWORK

The following key themes provide a framework that underpins the coherence and comprehension of each of the Plans of Action. Each of the individual actions will have regard to one or more of the themes and though they may well be complete in themselves, they will also enable a broader contribution to a wider cultural development.

EQUALITY OF ACCESS

North Hertfordshire District Council has a duty to ensure equitable access to arts, museum and heritage provision right across the district, for all sections of the community.

SENSE OF PLACE

However, the 'sense of place' so important in giving residents a source of community identity is strongly shaped by the particular local

environment. The distinctiveness of the different North Herts towns and villages has been a constant theme in the public consultation during the writing of this strategy.

The Lyons Inquiry into Local Government refers to this 'distinctiveness' as important in attracting skills and investment, and the variety of environments, and range of arts and heritage organisations, within North Hertfordshire is one of the unsung strengths of the district.

FINDING THE BALANCE

This strategy recognises the need to find a balance between local needs and aspirations, and district-wide provision, when considering any future investment in the arts, museums or heritage fields. The Council appreciates the fact that some organisations have a very specific local brief, and the strategy aims to support their ambitions, while being mindful of efficiently meeting the needs of the wider community.



GREATER DIVERSITY

An aim of the strategy is to create greater diversity of provision in the arts, museums and heritage fields. It will reflect the priority given to children and young people in Every Child Matters and the County and District Children's and Young People's Plans. It also aims to encourage activities for older people, women and minority groups.



PARTNERSHIP WORKING

Partnership working is key to the future management and development of all arts, museums and heritage provision. New forms of management will be explored to ensure that optimum value can be given to these services. The capacity of the public, private and voluntary sectors will be examined to see how each can support the other. NHDC, in particular, wishes to develop its enabling and coordinating role.



DEVELOPMENT OF EXCELLENCE

Each of the towns in North Hertfordshire and the rural areas has the capacity to develop centres or services of cultural excellence, be they arts, museums or heritage. The principal model of a 'hub and spoke' will be adopted to identify which services or facilities could be a lead to develop, support and resource arts, museums and heritage in their respective areas.

REGIONAL/INTERNATIONAL OPPORTUNITIES

North Hertfordshire is well placed to collaborate with a range of arts, museums and heritage providers that are outside its immediate geographic boundaries, but which can help provide improved services for residents and visitors. For example, the Olympic Games in 2012 will provide a range of opportunities and lasting benefits far wider than the month of the actual games.

MONITORING AND EVALUATION

We need to know that any changes made as a result of this strategy benefit the residents of the district. In order to do this, we will monitor and evaluate on a regular and frequent basis.

In some NHDC services, there are already government Best Value Performance Indicators (BVPIs) which we will continue to use to monitor performance. Examples are the Museum Service PIs, which show the

number of visitors, usage of the museums, and number of school groups which visit Hitchin and Letchworth Museums.

All seven museums in North Hertfordshire contribute to an annual benchmarking scheme run by the County Museum Development Officer, and this will continue to be used to evaluate performance. For those organisations with a Service Level Agreement with the Council, there is already an agreed process of monitoring.

The Action Plans will be reviewed and updated annually against agreed criteria.

ABBREVIATIONS

ACE	Arts Council England
AV	Area Visioning
BVPI or PI	Best Value Performance Indicator
ECM	Every Child Matters Government paper
EH	English Heritage
HLF	Heritage Lottery Fund
LAC	Letchworth Art Centre
LGCHF	Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
LSP	Local Strategic Partnership
MiNHG	Museums in North Herts Group
MLA	Museums, Libraries & Archives Council
ROTW	Rhythms of the World

APPENDICES

APPENDIX 1 - Membership of the Project Board

MEMBERS: Cllr. Paul Clark, Cllr. Tricia Gibbs, Cllr. Gary Grindall, Cllr. Terry Hone, Cllr. Ian Knighton

NHDC OFFICERS:

John Robinson (Project Executive), Ros Allwood, Patrick Candler, Lorrae Hunter (minutes), Lynn Saville

COUNTY: Annie Hawkins

APPENDIX 2 - Membership of AMH Strategy Working Group

Ros Allwood (NHDC), Jane Arnold (Hitchin Society), Patrick Candler (NHDC), Ellie Clarke (Hitchin Forum), Scilla Douglas (Hitchin Historical Society), Cllr. Julian Cunningham (NHDC), Keith Fitzpatrick-Mathews (NHDC), Cllr. Tricia Gibbs (NHDC), Mary Goldsmith, Roger Hawkins (Arts Council for North Herts), Muriel Hardman (North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society), Fiona Haines (Archaeology volunteer), Cllr. Terry Hone (NHDC), David Hodges (NHDC), Alan Howard (LGCHF), David Howlett (Hitchin Historical Society), Lorrae Hunter (NHDC minutes), Maria Iredale (NHDC/LAC), Mick James (North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society),

Trevor James (Hertfordshire Natural History Society), John Jarvis (Hertfordshire Medical & Pharmaceutical Museum Trust), Peter Ketteringham (Trustee Royston & District Museum), Brendan King (Baldock Museum & Local History Society), Bob Mardon (ROTW Organiser), Cllr. Lynda Needham (NHDC), Paul Palmer (North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society), Cllr. Michael Patterson (NHDC), William Prime (Royston Town Council), Terry Ransome (Hitchin British Schools Museum), David Rice (Hitchin Art Club), Cllr. Robert Smith (Royston Town Council), Dorcas Sanders (NHDC), Jillian Steyne (Letchworth Art Society), Juliet Stockford, Alison Tebbitt (St. Christopher School), Kate Thompson, John Webb.

APPENDIX 3 - NHDC Strategies referenced (available on the NHDC website, www.north-herts.gov.uk)

LEISURE & CULTURAL STRATEGY 2001-2005

This aims to encourage participation in the arts, and to preserve and interpret the heritage of the past. It is now in need of updating, and the AMH Strategy will be incorporated in any new Cultural Strategy



COMMUNITY STRATEGY (UPDATE 2004)

This aims to improve the quality of life for all local people. It uses information gained from the 'Area Visioning' processes, by which NHDC consults with communities.

TOWN CENTRE STRATEGIES – HITCHIN (2004), BALDOCK (2006), LETCHWORTH (DRAFT 2006)

CONSERVATION AREA REVIEWS – NEWNHAM (DRAFT 2007), ROYSTON (DRAFT 2007)

SOCIAL INCLUSION STRATEGY 2005-2008

This encourages community development, to offer opportunities as widely as possible, in order to improve the quality of life for all our citizens.

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT LOCAL PLAN NO.2

This plan outlines the planning guidelines for the district, and describes the rich historic environment of North Hertfordshire. (Also see www.planningportal.gov.uk)

PLAY STRATEGY 2006-9

This sets out the priorities and identifies the significance of play in North Hertfordshire. Learning through play is an aim of the arts and in the Council museums, in their popular Under-5s sessions.

APPENDIX 4 - National and Regional Strategies Referenced

The main strategies consulted during the production of this document:

REGIONAL

A BETTER LIFE: The role of culture in the sustainable development of the East of England (Living East, 2006)
www.livingeast.org.uk

The latest regional cultural strategy, which has the following four main themes:

- **Embedding culture in growth and regeneration**
- **Developing creativity**
- **Growing cultural tourism**
- **Capturing the benefits of the 2012 Olympics and Paralympics**



These themes provide a focus for investment and decision-making in the region over the next 10-20 years.

ENJOY! A cultural strategy for Hertfordshire 2002-2007

(Hertfordshire Cultural Partnership, 2002 – revision expected shortly)

www.hertsdirect.org/infobase/docs/pdfstore/hertsultstrat.pdf



The County Strategy has the following six key messages:

- **Making Hertfordshire a more prosperous and attractive place to visit**
- **Offering children, young people and adults the opportunity to reach their full potential through access to learning and information**
- **Encouraging children and young people to access and enjoy cultural and leisure activities**
- **Enabling all members of the community to have more and easier access to different cultural and leisure pursuits**
- **Valuing and supporting the diverse range of cultural and leisure activities enjoyed across the county**



- **Working in partnership with national, regional and local agencies to deliver a range of cultural and leisure activities effectively**

ARTS

Arts Council England, Annual Review 2006 (Arts Council England, 2006)

www.artscouncil.org.uk/publications/

Agenda for the Arts in the East of England 2006-8 (Arts Council

England, 2006)

www.artscouncil.org.uk/regions/publications.php?rid=1

ARTS MATTERS: How the arts can help meet the needs of children and young people (Arts Council

England, 2006)

www.artscouncil.org.uk/publications/

MUSEUMS

INVESTING IN KNOWLEDGE: A five year vision for England's museums, libraries and archives (MLA, 2004)

www.mla.gov.uk

Understanding the Future: Museums and 21st Century Life (DCMS, 2005)
www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Publications/

MUSEUMS FOR THE FUTURE: A development strategy for Museums in the East of England (MLA East of England, 2006)
www.mlaeastofengland.org.uk

BROADENING PARTICIPATION: A Summary of the East of England Museum Hub Plan 2006-8 (Renaissance East of England, 2006)
www.renaissance-east.org.uk

UNDERSTANDING THE FUTURE: Priorities for England's Museums (DCMS, 2006)
www.culture.gov.uk/Reference_library/Publications/

HERITAGE

THE HISTORIC ENVIRONMENT: A Force for Our Future (DCMS, 2001)
www.culture.gov.uk

Heritage Counts: The State of the East of England's Historic Environment, 2006 (English Heritage, 2006)
www.english-heritage.org.uk

GENERAL

VALUES AND VISION: The Contribution of Culture (Arts Council, MLA and others, 2005)
www.nationalmuseums.org.uk

LOCAL AUTHORITIES: A Change in the Cultural Climate? (Demos, 2006)
www.demos.co.uk

APPENDIX 5 - Inventory of Arts, Museums & Heritage Provision in North Hertfordshire

This is a living document, available on the NHDC website unless a paper copy is specifically requested. It includes names and web addresses (where available) of all groups/organisations that responded to the Inventory questionnaire sent out during production of the Strategy.



CONTACT DETAILS

Correspondence and requests for information should be made to:








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AMH Ref. No.	Target	Lead organisation/partners	Outcome	Timescale	Resources	Traffic Light Status
1.1	To run a successful Book Festival throughout the District	NHDC, LAC, libraries, bookshops, museums	Month-long Book Festival, enabling residents to enjoy reading and creative writing; possible future tourism benefits	March 2007 and annually thereafter	NHDC, LGCHF, Civic Trust, private sector, volunteers	
1.2	To deliver professional theatre performance and poetry sessions to N. Herts. pupils	LAC, N. Herts. schools, libraries, QMT	Children and young people participating in and understanding live theatre/poetry	2007/08 and on-going	The Princes' Trust (finance for 07/08 approved)	
1.3	To provide and encourage after-school arts activities for young people	LAC, N. Herts. Music Service, ROTW, Rap Aid	Young people enjoying and understanding music	2007/08 and on-going	Arts Council England, PRS Foundation, NHDC	
1.4	To secure longer-term funding for the Letchworth Arts Centre	LAC, NHDC, LGCHF	Creation of self-sustaining art centre	2009 onwards	External funding to be sourced	
1.5	To facilitate outreach arts provision in rural areas	LAC, NHDC	Residents in rural areas can more easily participate in the creative arts	2007/8 and on-going	Within existing budgets	
1.6	To explore the possibility of providing more artists' studios in the District	NHDC	Local artists are more likely to remain within the District, giving social, economic and cultural tourism benefits	2008/9	Within existing budgets; private sector	
1.7	To review arrangements for the support given to creative arts activities eg. Eastern orchestral Board, Rhythms of the World, Arts Council for North Herts.	NHDC	Improved access to and attendance at quality artistic events SCRUTINY (18.05.09)	2007/8	Within existing budgets; new sources of funding	






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2.1	To publish a joint leaflet covering all North Herts. Museums	NHDC, MiNHG	Improved promotion of all museums within N. Herts. Cultural tourism.	2007	NHDC, LGCHF and museums	
2.2	To use the web to promote museums and heritage sites in North Herts.	NHDC, MiNHG	Improved web marketing; cultural tourism	2007/8 and on-going	Within existing NHDC budgets, Herts Direct	
2.3	To create new audiences at museums via community and school projects	NHDC, museums, schools, Partners in Time, Diverse Herts.	Range of projects for new audiences such as 'Learning Links' and 'Partners in Time' educational projects; 'Diverse Herts' county project	2007/8 and on-going	Within existing NHDC budgets; external funding.	
2.4	To increase enjoyment and understanding of the heritage of North Herts.	NHDC, MiNHG, local groups eg Hitchin Society	Engagement in national events such as Archaeology Day, Heritage Open Day , with joint marketing	2007 and on-going	NHDC, LGCHF, Civic Trust, volunteer time	
2.5	To deliver outreach programmes to schools and community facilities eg. residential homes /Parish halls, particularly in rural areas	NHDC, schools, LSP, HPT village history societies	Travelling displays/loan boxes delivered in NHDC Community Development & Cultural Services van, enabling officers to deliver service across district; van also used by NHDC playscheme staff	2007/8 and on-going	2007 and on-going Funding to be sourced for van from internal and external sources	

SCRUTINY (18.05.09)

AMH Ref. No.	Target	Lead organisation/ partners	Outcome	Timescale	Resources	Traffic Light Status
3.1	To improve public access to museum objects	NHDC, possibly LGCHF, other museums	New collections centre for N. Herts. Museums, in partnership with other interested museums/users	2008/9	NHDC, potential partners eg LGCHF; also external funding	
3.2	To give on-line access to museum collections	NHDC; other museums	NHDC; other museums Implement programme of digitising N.H.D.C Museum collections; possibilities for digitisation partnerships with other interested museums	2008 onwards	External funding to be sourced from HLF, MLA East	
3.3	To explore sustainable future for Baldock Museum	Baldock Museum & Local History Society	Improved longer-term arrangements for Baldock Museum, with better display and storage facilities	To be decided	External funding to be sourced	
3.4	To explore longer-term arrangements for Royston & District Museum	Royston & District Museum; Royston Town Council	Improved provision for Royston & District Museum	2007	Royston Town Council, External funding to be sourced	
3.5	To explore the development of a first-class heritage centre (Garden City Centre) in Letchworth	LGCHF, NHDC	Accessible heritage centre in town centre telling the story of the Garden City from prehistory to present.	To be decided	LGCHF, external funding to be sourced from HLF	
3.6	To explore the provision of a first-class museum facility to display NHDC Hitchin and non-Letchworth material	NHDC	Accessible town-centre multi-functional museum/ gallery for Hitchin collections, district archaeology, natural history, social history, local history, art and temporary exhibitions	2011	External funding to be sourced from HLF, and other museum-specific grant-giving bodies	
3.7	To redevelop Howard Park ensuring a synergy with the refurbished Howard Hall	NHDC, Rap-Aid	Redesigned and improved open air facility SCRUTINY (18.05.09)	2011	NHDC, HLF	

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4.1	To increase opportunities for partnership-working between museums in North Herts	Museums in N. Herts.	Establishment of Museums in North Herts Group (MiNHG)	End Jan. 2007 and onwards	Within existing budgets	
4.2	To increase professionalism of museums in the District	NHDC, museums	Museums to aim for/gain Accreditation Status. NHDC Museum Service to continue to give curatorial advice/loans to other museums in the District as requested.	On-going	Within existing budgets	
4.3	To improve access to items from all North Herts. museums for schools and community facilities	NHDC, other museums in N Herts., schools	Re-developed Loan Box scheme by NHDC in partnership with other museums.	2008/9 and onwards	NHDC, external funding to be sought eg.Esmee Fairburn Foundation, HLF	
4.4	To organize art, drama and music festivals across the District	NHDC, festival committees	Community arts festivals across District; social economic and tourism benefits	ongoing	NHDC, LGCHF, private and voluntary sector	
4.5	To explore joint working with private sector (eg pubs /clubs) in entertainment /performance field	NHDC, private sector	Increased cultural offer in range of venues	2007/8 and ongoing	NHDC, private sector	
4.6	To explore new forms of management and funding of art, museums and heritage provision, eg: self managing trusts.	NHDC, LGCHF	Better managed facilities, improved partnership-working, increased investment	2012	NHDC, LGCHF, private sector, external funding	
4.7	To increase access to local historical knowledge through partnership-working between local heritage groups and museums	NHDC, local societies	Display in museum or local facility (eg Parish hall); joint publication of booklet/web pages	2007/8 and ongoing	Within existing budgets; external funding sought as necessary	
4.8	To explore partnership and collaboration across NHDC boundaries	NHDC, nearby local authorities	Increased/improved art and heritage provision SCRUTINY (18.05.09)	2007/8 and on-going	NHDC, other authorities, private and voluntary sector	

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5.1	To increase use and awareness of arts, museums and heritage by BME groups, and greater recognition of the contributions of these groups	NHDC, LAC, NHMEF , Univ. of Herts.	Work with N Herts. Minority Ethnic Forum, Ravidassia Centre, leading to increased use of community arts and heritage facilities. University of Hertfordshire /LAC project	On-going	Within existing budgets; Awards for All grant already approved for University project	
5.2	To increase use of NHDC museum/gallery by disabled people (both individually and in groups), older people, people with pushchairs, school parties	NHDC, working groups	Provision of a fully-accessible museum and gallery, with public WCs and community space	2011	External funding to be sourced from HLF and others	
5.3	To increase awareness of arts and museums among N. Herts. homeless people	NHDC, Hitchin night-shelter	Project with users of the Hitchin night-shelter and Hitchin Museum	2007/8	Within existing budgets	
5.4	To support community festivals such as Rhythms of the World, which aim to help promote cross-cultural understanding	NHDC, Festival committees	Free community events accessible to all	On-going	NHDC, volunteers, private sector	
5.5	To use visual arts and the Plus Strategy initiative to help families with literacy and numeracy (ECM4,5)	LAC, CSF	Families become more confident, and more able to engage more actively with each other and in the community	2007/8	LAC, Arts Council England (finance 07/08 approved)	
5.6	To provide outreach arts activities for 'hard to reach' young people, and for those not able easily to visit art/museums/heritage sites eg in rural areas	LAC, NHDC, LSP	Project via LAC aiming to help young people develop into confident adults; outreach projects via museums in village and community centres, and residential homes SCRUTINY (18.05.09)	2008/9	Existing budgets plus external funding sourced from Arts Council England or similar	

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6.1	To increase awareness of North Herts. arts and heritage activities leading to more cultural tourism	NHDC, TICs, libraries, MiNHG, Knebworth House	More effective distribution of joint promotional material. Sector making best use of internet	2007/8 and on-going	Within existing budgets	
6.2	To link any new museums/galleries to town-centre regeneration projects where appropriate	NHDC, LGCHF, Town Centre partnerships	High-quality 'flagship projects' in visible town-centre sites acting as tourist magnets. The re-use of historic buildings for arts and museums venues can set a quality benchmark for the surrounding environment.	2009 - 2011	External funding to be sourced from HLF and others	
6.3	To develop cultural town offer to promote arts/museums/heritage sector, eg: Letchworth Cultural Quarter	NHDC, LGCHF, Town Councils Town Centre Initiative, Chamber of Commerce	Greater support of the local cultural offer from Town Centre partners, leading to more awareness, better events and increased tourism.	2007 and ongoing	Various	
6.4	To develop a rural/heritage offer to promote North Hertfordshire heritage /archaeology/countryside	NHDC, societies, museums, Knebworth Park	Better use of limited resources to attract local residents and tourists	On-going	NHDC, East England Tourist Board, HCC	
6.5	To review NH Conservation Areas	NHDC	Updated Conservation Plans for relevant parts of the District	Royston 2007, Newnham 2007 and on-going	Existing budgets. Area Visioning	
6.6	To ensure that the District makes the most of opportunities offered by the 2012 Olympic and Paralympic Games	NHDC, County, schools, societies	Range of benefits including increased tourism, new audiences, opportunities for volunteers SCRUTINY (18.05.09)	2008 and on-going	Existing budgets; East England Tourist Board, HCC	