



## Arts, Museums & Heritage Forum Briefing

November 2010

A meeting of the Arts, Museums & Heritage Forum's Facilities Working Group took place on Thursday 4<sup>th</sup> November at Hitchin Town Hall and was chaired by John Robinson, Strategic Director for Customer Services. Copies of the Report prepared for NHDC's Council meeting to be held on 11<sup>th</sup> November were distributed and discussed.

The following Questions and Answers were posed:

Q. In Section 3.10.2 of the Report you state " Both proposals meet the overall objectives set out by NHDC in respect of service provision, community use and costs". However I believe that the loss of the main hall does not meet the Communities objectives?

A. The parameters set by the Council may differ from those of the Community. This is a political question which Councillors will need to address.

Q. Where will current hall users go?

A. Both schemes hope to accommodate many of the existing building users in the areas of the building that are retained for hire. However there is a recognition that not all users will be accommodated in either of the schemes, as only one hall remains in each plan. Both plans have set out the expected impact on the groups likely to be affected.

Q. You say the Council's Architectural Advisor says that listing does not stop either scheme, but wouldn't you need to ask English Heritage ?

A. Yes. As the report says any change will be subject to Listed building consent. However we are reassured to note that English Heritage understands the need to maintain buildings in viable use, and that they do not expect listed buildings to be 'preserved in aspic'.

Q. Surely only the main hall is listed, not the later Workmans Hall addition?



- A. We have asked for clarification on this matter as the listing papers suggest it is the whole site, including the two linked buildings. Either scheme is likely to need Listed building consent.
- Q. Does the NHDC scheme depend upon getting grant funding?
- A. The figures used by NHDC are for the total project amount. We have said we would like to secure external funding towards the museum “fit out” element of the project, but the project is not dependent upon that.
- Q. Is the Community Builders funding going to be secured?
- A. Current progress with Community Builders is progressing positively. This funding stream is important to ensure the Big Society aspirations of Government are achieved, so it is possible that this funding may be available to support the project.
- Q. There is a large variation in the figures in the Cash Flow Financial Summary for the Gym retained scheme and the Hall retained scheme; does this mean the Hall retained scheme is better value for money for the Council?
- A. No. The financial impact of both schemes for the council is exactly the same as set out in paragraph 5.6 of the report. This is because the Gym retained scheme includes all of the costs relating to public ownership and investment of the building which are described as the Cost of Democracy and the operation of the Museums service. The Cash Flow summary for the Hall retained scheme identifies the additional income and expenditure relating to that scheme.

John Robinson confirmed that he will advise Council of the feedback from this meeting, that generally those in attendance were supportive of the Hall retained scheme for Hitchin Town Hall.

