

Arts Museum & Heritage Forum

Notes from 25th June 2008 (Mrs Howard Hall)

1, 2 Welcome and Introductions

Patrick Candler welcomed everyone to the meeting and noted apologies. PC thanked Anne Dixon of Rap Aid for the optional tour of the building she had arranged.

3 Museums Project Update

PC advised the meeting that NHDC proposed to make an application to the Heritage Lottery Fund for a new Collections Centre. However, this has not progressed as quickly as we would have liked, so no details are currently available.

A Facilities Working Group will be set up as originally planned, but it is unlikely that we will hold the first meeting until funding issues for the Collection Centre have been resolved.

Questions

Q. Does NHDC have a particular site in mind?

A. The preferred site would be in Letchworth, possibly in partnership with the Garden City Heritage Foundation. NHDC is currently considering a number of options, including new build and the re-use of an existing building.

Q. The meeting would be interested to know the range of options?

A. Once we have something definite to report, we will let the Forum members know.

Q. Surely Hitchin items would be better stored in Hitchin?

A. We are trying to create a building that visitors can access from all over the District. It was agreed by the Collection Centre Working Group that the best option would be to have one really good centre for the area. This may not be quite so convenient for some people, but the service – both for the public, and for the care of our collections - would be much better than at present.

Q. Is a town centre or out of town site proposed?

A. It will not be a town centre site, to reduce costs, but we hope that it would be somewhere easily accessible .

4 Review Year 1 of Arts, Museum & Heritage Strategy

RA gave a presentation illustrating some highlights from the first year of operations.

PC advised the Forum that at the meeting of the Cabinet on 24th June, £50K had been approved for health & safety improvements to Baldock Town Hall. NHDC has been working with Baldock Town Hall Stakeholder Group, and it is planned that they will be able to use the Town Hall for a range of events, including a special Arts Festival in October.

Peter Ketteringham stated that the Arts & Museums Strategy has 'concentrated the mind, and brought Royston nearer the centre, and they feel much better about that' and also that he was delighted that Royston Museum was included in the North Herts museum leaflet.

Bob Smith echoed this and was pleased that the Forum meetings had opened up discussions e.g. reference to external funding for Royston Museum, with district councillors about help with running costs.

PC said that the Royston Town Centre strategy was discussed at the Area Committee, and the longer-term plans for Royston are now being developed.

Terry Ransome advised that the British Schools Museum in Hitchin has published a new book on its former headmasters.

There was discussion of the NHDC support given to the schools concert at Knights Templar. This event had taken place in April 2008 and had been extremely successful. However, while noting that a good deal of funds is spent on one orchestral event in Baldock, could not similar amounts be spent on the dramatic arts & theatre?

There was a discussion on London 2012 and the Olympics. What happens after the Olympics? What does it mean to wider tourism?

RA advised the Forum of a 'People's Record' grant awarded to Hitchin and Letchworth Museums, enabling them to record people's thoughts about the Olympics, and also to put on an event to celebrate the launch of the Cultural Olympiad in September.

5. Archaeology in Letchworth

A fascinating presentation was given by Keith Fitzpatrick-Mathews, looking at archaeology in the Garden City, with particular reference to Norton, and the findings of the Norton Community Archaeology Group.

6. Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation

An excellent presentation was given by Alan Howard, showing future plans for Letchworth Town Centre as well as highlighting the work of the Heritage Museum.

7. Rap-Aid

Anne Dixon gave a talk on the work of Rap-Aid, a youth organisation for 14-19 year olds which has its HQ in Howard Hall. Activities include dance, drama & music workshops, plus Media Box, a project with a local radio station. Rap-Aid is also working with a group of young parents on a digital photo course and hoping to exhibit their work.

Anne reported that Rap-Aid had been unsuccessful with recent funding bids and that the Letchworth Festival would not be going ahead this year, but stated they were grateful for the support they had received.

The Official Opening of the extension to Mrs Howard Hall is planned for 7th July. It is possible to hire rooms – please contact Bobby Singh on 01462 681951 or email mhhcentremanager@sky.com

8. A.O.B.

Letchworth Arts Centre is running a project to produce a film on being a teenager in the town in the 1950s, and there will also be a 1950's Festival in Broadway Gardens on 2nd/3rd August.

9. Date of next meeting

The next meeting will be held on Wednesday 4th February 2009, Baldock Community Centre, Simpson Drive, Baldock, SG7 6DH

† Mary Goldsmith, a stalwart supporter of the North Herts. museums, particularly her much-loved Hitchin Museum, sadly died at the end of September. We will greatly miss her contributions to the Forum, and would like to pay tribute to her enthusiasm and commitment.