



## Arts, Museums & Heritage Forum Briefing

11 April 2011

### North Herts. Museum and Community Facility

Following the exciting decision to proceed with the Hitchin Initiative sponsored 'Community' proposal for Hitchin Town Hall and North Herts Museum, and the good news in February that Hitchin Initiative had received confirmation of an £850,000 grant/loan from the Community Builders Fund, NHDC officers and the community group have been working hard to:

- Clarify the grant/loan conditions with the Community Builders Fund, and ensure that these are incorporated in the overall agreement.
- Draft a 'development agreement' – a binding agreement containing the principal features of construction and payment arrangements, management arrangements and leases/agreements from NHDC and the Trust to Hitchin Initiative.
- Conclude further work on behalf of the Trust to ensure that the development agreement is capable of meeting its and Charity Commission requirements.

The Community Builders Fund deadline was 31<sup>st</sup> March, but on 30<sup>th</sup> March NHDC was informed that a new National Endowment Fund had been set up, to provide a long-term framework for the distribution of the Community Builders financial support. The grant and loan to the Hitchin community group will now come from the National Endowment Fund, which is:

*'...an endowed fund - owned and administered by the Adventure Capital Fund. It supports neighbourhood-based, community-led organisations to become more sustainable through a mixture of loans, grants and business support... The purpose of the endowment is to allow the Community Builders Fund to become fully established for the foreseeable future and to ensure stable and continued management. It will allow for greater efficiency and financial planning, increasing value for money all round. It also creates an evergreen fund where loan repayments are recycled back into the sector, as well as the prospect of growing the fund by topping up the original amount with money from other investors, foundations or even philanthropists.'*

We are now waiting for the National Endowment Fund to issue a revised timescale for concluding negotiations on the grant/loan conditions, and until this is received, no further substantive work on the development agreement is possible. The two main areas where the grant/loan conditions and the preferences of the local organisations need further specific agreement from Council and the Trust are:

- The 'disposal' by way of long term lease to Hitchin Initiative of parts of Hitchin Town Hall not within the footprint of the Mountford Hall, currently in the ownership of NHDC and the Trust, to operate a café and catering facility for the hall.



- The corporate structure and 'community' representation on the proposed operating company Hitchin Town Hall Ltd – to ensure that the long term interests of local people are adequately represented.

### **What's next?**

Once we have received confirmation of conditions from the National Endowment Fund (the Adventure Capital Fund), officers will finalise the development agreement, negotiating with Hitchin Town Hall Ltd to ensure that both sides agree the company structure and arrangements for community participation.

Officers will then prepare reports to the Council and Trust to consider a final agreement, and arrangements for the temporary closure of Hitchin Town Hall and the transfer of collections from Hitchin and Letchworth Museums will be put in place.

The museum service has just been fortunate enough to employ two young 'Funded Interns', paid for by the government-funded Future Jobs Fund. This was set up to place young people aged 18 -24, who had been unemployed for at least six months. We are shortly to employ two more. All four interns are highly qualified, extremely keen, and will be a great help with the initial behind-the-scenes work. We now also have a waiting list of volunteers who have kindly offered assistance with the museum transition, and I will contact all of you later this summer.

If you have any questions please contact Ros Allwood, Cultural Services Manager on 01462 435197 or [ros.allwood@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:ros.allwood@north-herts.gov.uk)

