

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

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PRESS RELEASE

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Heritage Lottery Fund Grant provides boost to North Herts Museum project

North Herts District Council (NHDC) has received a huge boost to its plans to create a new museum for North Hertfordshire in the form of a grant from the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF).

This HLF first-round pass*, including £123,400 of development funding, means that the council can progress to the second-round of the HLF application process, where they will be applying for over £830,500 for the actual fit-out of the museum.

The museum project involves combining the collections of the current Hitchin and Letchworth museums into one accessible new North Hertfordshire Museum alongside Hitchin Town Hall and forming part of the Hitchin Town Hall Community Facility and North Herts Museum complex. This project will transform the much-loved historic Hitchin Town Hall into both a community facility run by Hitchin Town Hall Ltd, and the council-run North Herts museum alongside it. The £4.23 million project is being funded from a number of sources: £850,000 from Hitchin Town Hall Ltd in the form of a grant and loan from Futurebuilders England Ltd; the grant from HLF for the museum fit-out and the remainder of the project will be funded by NHDC.

As well as improved physical access to the museum, there will be modern museum displays with improved opportunities for participation and far more of the heritage of North Herts on display than is currently possible. There will also be a dedicated

learning and activity space for schools and special interest groups, opportunities for volunteers of all ages, and easier access to local history.

The initial grant from HLF will fund the appointment of a specialist designer to ensure the new museum is fit-for-purpose and an Audience Development Officer to involve communities in shaping what the museum has to offer and to advise on ways of appealing to different types of visitors.

Cllr Tricia Cowley, NHDC Portfolio Holder for Community Engagement said: "We are delighted that the Heritage Lottery Fund has given us this support. It helps bring us one step closer to achieving our vision of creating a modern accessible museum that plays an active role in the life of the District. The grant will ensure we can effectively safeguard the heritage of North Herts that we look after and will help inspire a passion for that heritage amongst visitors, the local community, volunteers and staff."

Roy Swanston, from the Heritage Lottery Fund East of England committee: "We are excited about this project which has the potential to create fantastic new opportunities for visitors to engage with these special collections. People will have the chance to explore their local heritage and bring their stories to life. There will be a new programme of schools activities and opportunities for volunteers to help care for the collections. There is still work to be done in developing the project but HLF will be offering their full support in taking their application further."

David Leal-Bennett, Director of Hitchin Town Hall Ltd said: "This is excellent news for the overall scheme to restore the historic listed Hitchin Town Hall to its former glory alongside a first-class museum. We hope that Hitchin Town Hall will become a real focal point for the community."

ENDS

Notes to editors

*A first-round pass means the project meets HLF criteria for funding and has potential to deliver high-quality benefits and value for Lottery money. The application was in competition with other supportable projects, so a first-round pass is an endorsement of outline proposals. Having been awarded a first-round pass, the project now has up to two years to submit fully developed proposals to compete for a firm award.

About the Heritage Lottery Fund

Using money raised through the National Lottery, the Heritage Lottery Fund (HLF) sustains and transforms a wide range of heritage for present and future generations to take part in, learn from and enjoy. From museums, parks and historic places to archaeology, natural environment and cultural traditions, we invest in every part of our diverse heritage. HLF has supported over 30,000 projects, allocating £4.6billion across the UK. Website: www.hlf.org.uk

Further information

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