

**NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL**

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# PRESS RELEASE

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## **Councillors back Town Hall plans**

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) Councillors voted unanimously in favour of a £4.2 million scheme to develop Hitchin Town Hall at a packed council meeting last week (Thursday 11 November).

The adopted scheme was one of two proposals considered, both aiming to convert part of the building into a new museum for North Hertfordshire while retaining the Town Hall's use as an important community venue.

Of the two proposals put forward, Councillors voted for one that had been supported by a number of local community groups, and coordinated by Hitchin Initiative. This will see the main hall refurbished and used for community activities, while other parts of the building are converted into a new, modern museum for North Hertfordshire. An alternative plan had proposed using the main hall for the new museum and retaining the building's gymnasium for community events.

Portfolio Holder Cllr. Tricia Cowley said, "This is excellent news and, as far as I am aware, the largest joint working project the Council has undertaken. We now have a lot of hard work ahead of us alongside Hitchin Initiative to deliver a modern museum service for the whole of the district as well as an improved and refurbished community venue.

"The proposals that we have adopted are down to the hard work of a number of local organisations that have shown commitment to working with us to provide the best future for the Town Hall. Now we look forward to the next phase of detailed work that will deliver something of which Hitchin, and the whole district, can be proud."

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The project will cost an estimated £4.23 million, £790,000 more than the alternative version of the scheme originally put forward, for which £3.5 million of capital funding had been set aside. The additional funding required is planned to be raised by a national Community Builder's Fund (CBF) which Hitchin Initiative is in the process of applying for.

Keith Hoskins, manager of Hitchin Initiative, said: "There's still a way to go yet and hurdles to negotiate but this is such a positive message from the local authority. The backing of the Council makes the case for CBF funding much stronger and final moves to try to secure a part grant, part loan from this £24m pot can now be made before the November 30 deadline."

A decision on the funding application might be made as early as December. Meanwhile, council staff and the Hitchin Initiative team will start working on the management arrangements and timetable for the work. Those interested can keep up to date by checking the NHDC website Hitchin Town hall pages.

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**For further information, contact:**

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