

Thank you for this opportunity to supply additional information/correction in respect of the above.

I believe that the future of local government depends on Local Authorities learning how to engage with and use volunteers from the local community. In the overall situation of limited resources, the community has many people who have expertise that Local Authorities can neither afford to employ in-house or buy in. This failed to work in this project and what I saw and read reinforced the conclusion that I had already reached that NHDC's project director (John Robinson) and latterly his portfolio holders simply did not want to work with us. We were just considered to be a nuisance by them.

The opening statement of Cllr Cowley was an insight into the attitude of NHDC to volunteers and the community generally. In her address, when referring to the directors of Hitchin Town Hall Ltd she said something like (her exact words will be on the transcript) "... Mr Smith who claimed to be an architect but we found wasn't and Rosemary Read – whoever she was". I clarified the matter regarding myself, Rosemary was the community director who we were obliged to have by NHDC in their requirements for the new company (and she did an excellent job). They had made it clear that it could not have just Hitchin Initiative directors despite it being Hitchin Initiative who the community groups had agreed to represent them. Cllr Cowley displayed a staggering lack of knowledge of the project.

Expanding on the expertise that I believe that I brought to the project, I was the senior partner of a firm of architects and surveyors for some 25 years and during that time we gained a total of over 20 awards and commendations in the NHDC Civic Award scheme (sadly abandoned some years ago) along with other awards and successes in competitions. I was chairman of the Hertfordshire Building Preservation Trust and subsequently a member of the National Committee of the UK Association of Preservation Trusts and chairman of both its London and South-East England regions. I was a member of the panel advising the South-East Assembly on the historic environment. I served on the casework committee of the Twentieth Century Society, the statutory consultee for applications relating to buildings listed after 1914, and am therefore familiar with the requirements of Listed Building legislation. Locally, I was a founder of Hitchin Town Centre Initiative (now Hitchin Initiative) some 25 years ago, have been a director ever since and was its chairman at the time of this project. I was a director for about 10 years of Hitchin Markets Ltd, a subsidiary of Hitchin Initiative which took over the running of Hitchin Market. I worked with the group that saved the Llewellyn & Perks pharmacy (part of which is now in the District Museum) and produced all of the drawings for the necessary alterations to the museum for it to be displayed and the drawings for the Physic Garden. I was also part of the group that saved the Hitchin British Schools and my firm did the drawings for its alterations and restoration entirely pro bono. I am a trustee of Hitchin United Charities. I am sure, like everyone, I could have done more in my life but I do object to being dismissed in the way that I was, there was certainly no one in the authority with my depth of knowledge or experience in working on Listed Buildings. I am sure that my fellow directors would have felt the same regarding the considerable talents that they brought to the project.

Another telling example of this attitude to us is in the written statement of John Robinson. He states "*Increasingly HTH Ltd sought to influence public and political opinion*". He can only be referring to the three votes of full council as they showed no other concession to local public opinion. Surely the support of the elected councillors is not something to be suppressed. We enjoyed the support of councillors throughout, including initially the portfolio holder – indeed I always tell people that we could not have got as far as we did without Cllr Cowley. The other council officers were also supportive, we only seemed to have Mr Robinson against us (but that was more than enough).

There was no support in the town for any of the feasibility studies being considered by NHDC, all of which lost the Town Hall. I think that I have assisted by generating a better solution. It is just a pity that NHDC made such a meal of it. The end result is acceptable but nowhere near as good as it could or should have been. Imagine how vibrant it could have been with Hitchin Initiative being based in the building, community volunteers running the Town Hall and Hitchin Historical Society being involved in the museum.

I hope that there can be future projects. If so, they must be kept as simple as possible. The legal costs on this project were completely out of kilter with its contract value. Most community groups simply could not afford the massive costs which we bore. We had the fees of the social bank which were unavoidable (but excessive), we could not have proceeded without the generosity of a local firm of solicitors and one of their former partners working pro bono.