

## North Hertfordshire District Council

### Minutes of the Heritage & Culture/Museums & Galleries Project Board Meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> March 2008 (Ninth meeting)

#### 1. Present:

##### Members

Councillor Gary Grindal (GG)  
Councillor Paul Clark (PC)  
Councillor Tricia Gibbs (TG)

##### NHDC

John Robinson (JR)  
Patrick Candler (Pca)  
Ros Allwood (RA)  
Lorrae Hunter (LH) - minutes

##### HCC

Annie Hawkins (HCC)

##### Apologies:

Councillor Terry Hone (TH)  
Councillor Ian Knighton (IK)  
Lynn Saville (LS)

#### Action

#### 2. Minutes of the meeting held on 5<sup>th</sup> September 2007

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

RA advised that the leaflet publicising all seven N. Herts. Museums had been presented at the recent Forum and a copy had been sent out to all members.

#### 3. Matters Arising

AH and RA have met regarding the 'Building Schools for the Future programme' and the school loans scheme project. AH advised that there has been a change in Manager of the programme, who is taking a different approach and starting with Head Teachers. JR asked if there was tactical merit in expressing an interest? AH advised that it might be better to write to John Harris: She will look into this and discuss with RA.

#### 4. Highlight Report

The Highlight Report gave details of exception reporting only, with the following comments noted.

##### 4.0 Tasks Completed

RA/PC have met the Heritage Foundation, who have expressed a strong interest in the project. RA/PC would like the Collections Centre project to be separate from the Town Centre Development project. One possible semi-industrial site in Letchworth has been identified for the Collections Centre.

The Museum Forum took place in February in Royston, with a good attendance. The Arts, Museums & Heritage Strategy was reviewed, and the museum leaflet presented. Roger Houldcroft gave a talk on the Royston Caves.

The next phase of the project will begin once work for the Collection

Centre and Business case has been agreed. Suggested Terms of Reference for the Facilities Working Group were presented to the Forum.

## 5. Project Issues and Problems

### 5.3 Heritage Lottery Funding

Application forms will be available from 1<sup>st</sup> April 2008.

AH stated that if the HLF advised us to apply for the new museum and collections centre in a phased approach, rather than run both together, the Project Board should take this advice. PCI noted that the correct wording here should be 'new or refurbished museum'.

## **5. Project Documentation for Consideration**

### Draft Business Case

RA talked through the Draft Business Case, which RA/PC will refresh following this meeting of the Project Board.

### Vision

The vision for the Collections Centre was discussed at length at the Collection Centre Working Group and was presented to the meeting of the Forum in February.

The Heritage Lottery Fund requires a coherent vision for grant applications.

### Storage

RA confirmed that the project scope was produced by the Collection Centre Working group.

In answer to the question of disposal of items, RA stated that it is not necessary or desirable for NHDC to keep all the items currently stored, but the Museum Service would need to follow national disposal guidelines, and offer items to other organisations prior to disposal. Disposal of items involves considerable administrative work in confirming ownership; loaned items need to be offered to the original lenders.

AH advised that Jill Barber may have some storage space.

It was noted that it is important that any new facility is DDA compliant, not just for the disabled but for people with hearing difficulties or partially sighted.

JR asked if can we make the project more affordable? RA advised that the proposal asks for 1/3 as much storage space again, although the National History Museum recommended that the Service could use double the current space. Given better storage facilities, and being realistic about funding, this seemed excessive.

It was noted that internal space should say 'indicative' space.

### **Constraints**

Assuming the new store was in Letchworth, LGCHF would be the major partner. TG asked if the LGCHF would have to pay rental if they were to

be involved; this has not yet been decided.

Baldock Museum, Hitchin British Schools and Stevenage BC have all expressed interest in storage space, but we are not yet in a position to give rental costs.

Discussion of the Business Case Location Draft Options  
(numbers relate to Options document)

1. Burymead. Has significant refurbishment been looked at? No, there is no way the garages at Burymead could be refurbished.

3. Nearby sites. A possible site further down the road at Burymead has been looked at

4. There could be potential savings on running costs on a rebuild on the Femark site rather than a conversion.

5. In with LGCHF; no site costs are given. PCI stated that a lot of sites in Letchworth are currently being developed for housing.

TG asked how long will it be before we know whether or not the LGCHF want to come in on the project? Once we have this information, an HLF bid could be made by July this year with a decision in December.

It was agreed that the first paragraph of the Draft Business Case should be deleted as it was not relevant to the document.

1.1.5 Access. It was agreed to add hard to reach groups to this section, to ensure as wide an audience as possible, and to strengthen any Lottery bid.

RA confirmed that the 'Collections Centre' was the working title for the building, and not the final name, which would probably be more user-friendly.

JR asked if the Project was in the Capital Programme, and noted that we will need a steer from Asset Management. He feels that it is important to secure resources first, and that we should hold back on the Business Case. There is flexibility in the Capital programme but cash is running out. PC stated that there is an outline capital bid for the project. If the Business Case is approved then the application to the HLF can be made.

### Risks

The success of the HLF bid will depend on whether the LGCHF want to be involved in the project.

GG agreed that this is a risk but the HLF may still not grant money.

JR stated that we need to consider if our preferred option is to work with the LGCHF. We would need a firm commitment or a statement of intent from the LGCHF to enable us to move forward. We also need to make a formal bid to secure capital funds to the next Cabinet.

PC asked whether the Collection Centre could be the main museum hub, where the majority of staff could be located (rather than in the new/refurbished museum)? This could lead to the savings proposed in the original FSR; a draft staffing structure is currently being worked on.

It is important to be clear about the relationship between the Collection Centre and the original FSR, and any associated disposal of land assets; to clarify how much could reasonably be claimed for museum services. The question of HLF grant-aid for a new building was raised, however RA explained that this is rarely given nowadays. HLF is funding a new build Collections Centre in Uttlesford, but this was planned some years ago.

### Options

One option is to leave everything as it is for the moment, but PCL state that the Burymead site is inappropriate for storing the NHDC collections.

AH suggested that if we were looking to audit and rationalise there may be treasures to sell off. RA explained that the vast majority of NHDC collections are of limited financial value; there are no unidentified treasures in store, although there is much that the public would love to see. Museum Accreditation has a policy for disposal, with a general presumption against the sale of museum objects.

PC said that we may need to commission further work, now that we have identified 2/3 options. These may need to be reviewed after an HLF bid.

The fall back position if the HLF bid was refused was discussed, as the project would need increased funding from NHDC and other sources.

Another option is to wait until 1<sup>st</sup> April HLF to see if the criteria have changed.

It was decided that RA would aim to present a clear picture of the LGCHF views for the next meeting, with the different options with regard to museum display and collections storage.

The meeting closed at 5.55pm.

## **6 Date of Next Meeting**

4<sup>th</sup> June 2008 at 4.30pm to be held in CR2, Council Offices, Gernon Road, Letchworth.

## **7 Future Meetings**

3<sup>rd</sup> September, 3<sup>rd</sup> December. All to start at 4.30pm.