

North Hertfordshire District Council

Minutes of the Heritage & Culture/Museums & Galleries Project Board Meeting held on 22nd January 2008 (Tenth meeting)

1. Present:

Members

Councillor Gary Grindal (GG)
Councillor Paul Clark (PCI)
Councillor Tricia Gibbs (TG)
Councillor Terry Hone (TH)

NHDC

John Robinson (JR)
Patrick Candler (PCa)
Ros Allwood (RA)
Lynn Saville (LS)
Lorrae Hunter (LH) - minutes

Apologies:

Councillor Ian Knighton (IK)
Annie Hawkins (HCC)

Action

1. Introduction and Apologies

JR apologised for the short notice given for the meeting and explained that the purpose of the meeting was to consider the phasing of the project as there was an urgent need for NHDC to identify revenue savings as a result of the recent fall in interest rates.

PC has produced a report to Cabinet on behalf of JR which would be considered later in the agenda.

2. Minutes of the meeting held on 5th March 2008

The minutes of the previous meeting were agreed.

3. Highlight Report

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

4.0 Tasks Completed

The Museum Forum took place in June in Letchworth, with a good attendance. RA gave a Review of Year 1 of the Arts, Museums & Heritage Strategy. There were presentations from Keith Fitzpatrick-Mathews on Letchworth Archaeology, Alan Howard on Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and Anne Dixon on the work of Rap-Aid.

The draft business case for the Collections Centre has now been completed and the HLF bid has been prepared as far as possible.

5. Project Issues and Problems

5.1

Two Project Board meetings have been cancelled due to the difficulty in obtaining financial information for the museum service development options. This has now been received.

5.2

The Heritage Lottery Fund would also need figures from the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. The LGCHF has indicated that it remains interested in sharing a new Resource/Collections Centre, and has suggested a possible building for this in Letchworth.

Products Due Next Stage

To be consider later in this meeting.

Background Paper – Museum Options

The paper has been drafted to give an overview of the available options.

The Draft Business Case was prepared with no financial information. RA provided the original costings based on standard building rates, following instructions from Property Services. Finance has now provided this information.

Proposals for a new Collection Centre

The Project Board were asked to consider the 3 options for the Collection Centre. Option 1, a site in Letchworth, is the preferred location. Option 2, (Letchworth but without Heritage Foundation input) is not felt to be as good an option. Option 3 (Burymead) would put NHDC at a disadvantage as there would be no lottery funding without the involvement of the LGCHF. The Burymead site is not as accessible for visitors.

Proposals for a new/refurbished district wide museum

Option 1 (Hitchin Town Hall) would retain the sprung floor and some community space, which would comply with Heritage Lottery funding requirements. If a third party was also involved this would assist with the necessary repairs to the Hitchin Town Hall.

The net revenue saving from the establishment of this would be c. £120 k.

Option 2 (Hitchin Museum) is not considered large enough.

Option 3 (Hitchin Museum plus Library) would give enough space with the added benefit of also being close to the Town Centre, but the Library belongs to the County Council, not NHDC.

Option 4 (Letchworth Town Hall) would also be a good location, but the LGCHF has expressed its desire for the building as a major Garden City Museum.

The Project Board were asked if there were any general questions on the

above, but no questions were raised.

Draft Report on the future of the Museums

A draft report on the future of the Museums was tabled at the meeting and Project Board were given time to read through this.

4.38 Actual saving is between £60K-120K

Noted to amend 'Town Hall' with the relevant town name throughout the report.

6.8 Take out 'new'

Take out 'options' in table 3.

4.14 The figure needs to be amended as the correct figure is higher.

General Observations

PCI expressed concerns about the plans as well as the process, negative publicity and the identity of NHDC. Has public consultation been reflected? PCI was also concerned about the use of Hitchin Town Hall and how this will be seen by Hitchin residents. However, he stated that he has no problem with the Collections Centre being in Letchworth.

It was noted that NHDC's identity is linked to providing a service. The FSR was set up specifically to reduce long-term costs and improve customer service and volumes.

It was felt that reaction to the proposals should be fairly positive, but concerns may be raised about lack of community space.

The proposed closure of Letchworth museum would be primarily a financial decision driven by financial circumstances and is not a decision made by Project Board itself. It is important to be clear about why we have changed our position as this is an extremely contentious issue. The report shows the negatives but also gives two very good positives.

6 Date of Next Meeting

The date of the next meeting will be arranged when firm direction from Cabinet/Council is given.