

CHARNWOOD HOUSE

Paynes Park, Hitchin, Herts

New lease of life



Charnwood House: Front (south-west) elevation. Photographed 11th June 2021

! HELP SHAPE CHARNWOOD'S FUTURE !

Final date for feedback:
Monday 1st November 2021

Community Engagement: Overview

North Hertfordshire District Council (NHDC) owns Charnwood House, the former museum. NHDC is engaging the community to help secure the long-term future of this cherished landmark building. The goal is for Charnwood to be given a new lease of life by sensitively transforming the building into a **COMMUNITY HUB**. NHDC wishes to see Charnwood House revitalised and repositioned as a core functional asset, serving & supporting the community.

NHDC is seeking a dedicated organisation to take on a lease of Charnwood House and refurbish, operate & manage the building as a community hub. As the first step in this journey, NHDC is reaching out to you, the community, to gather your feedback.

! Your Opportunity to Contribute !

NHDC invites and warmly welcomes your feedback on transforming Charnwood House into a community hub. Feedback can include:

- Ideas & opinions on future uses you need or want from a community hub.
- Proposals for a community hub that will complement & support local businesses.
- Knowledge & experience sharing on creating & shaping a community hub.
- Details on how you wish to participate in developing & operating a community hub.
- Your replies to the Questionnaire (see section headed “**Questionnaire**”).
- Anything else you think relevant – such as designs, plans & drawings.

Feedback is sought from organisations across NHDC’s community & district, including:

- Charities & other third sector organisations;
- Businesses – whether small, large, new or established;
- Schools, colleges & other education or training providers;
- Public sector bodies; and
- Other stakeholder organisations.

Feedback is also sought from individuals who anticipate they will benefit from Charnwood House or use the facility once it opens as a community hub. Feedback may include the uses you need or want from a community hub. Individuals across NHDC’s community & district are welcome to contribute feedback, including:

- Residents;
- Workers/employees; and
- Visitors/tourists.

Your responses will inform & influence proposals for refurbishing & adapting Charnwood House into a useful, creative & exciting community hub asset. This feedback will help NHDC ensure proposals meet your priorities, needs & aspirations for a community hub, and add value to what members of the community, local businesses & other community stakeholders do.

Questionnaire

NHDC also invites you to fill in and return the Questionnaire that accompanies. The Questionnaire comprises a series of open and more specific questions giving you opportunity to expand & enrich your feedback to NHDC. The Questionnaire can be downloaded by clicking on [\[electronic link\]](#). A hard copy can be requested by telephoning NHDC on **01462 474 377**.

How to submit Feedback & Questionnaire

Please submit your feedback & completed questionnaire to NHDC no later than **Monday 1st November 2021**, by:

- E-mailing: estates@north-herts.gov.uk;
- or*
- Posting to: Estates, North Hertfordshire District Council, Council Offices,
Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City SG6 3JF

How do I find out more?

Please refer to the section headed “Project Vision & Background” to learn more on:

- The community hub proposal;
- How the community hub concept began;
- What NHDC hopes to achieve from this community engagement; and
- Charnwood House.

For further information and [support](#) on this community engagement, to arrange a viewing of Charnwood House or to discuss the project, please:

- E-mail: estates@north-herts.gov.uk;
- or*
- Telephone: **01462 474 377**
- or*
- Write to: Estates, North Hertfordshire District Council, Council Offices,
Gernon Road, Letchworth Garden City SG6 3JF

What happens next?

Once NHDC has collected your feedback and questionnaire responses, we will consider & explore them in more detail to begin outlining the next steps in pursuit of Charnwood House becoming a community hub.

Subject to Covid-19 precautions, NHDC intends to meet with the community to clarify, expand & refine potential options and help decide what best supports NHDC's goal of establishing a community hub at Charnwood House. NHDC will discuss with organisations to assess their interest in taking on a lease of Charnwood House in accordance with NHDC's Community Asset Transfer ("CAT") policy.

Community forums open to all, or specific sessions with organisations and individuals, are intended to be conducted online or in person as the project moves forward. Locations & dates for forums will be published on NHDC's website www.north-herts.gov.uk and **social media** in due course.

NHDC will share project updates with you as the project progresses on both NHDC's website and social media page.

The website can be found at:

www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-performance-and-data/land-and-property

The social media page can be found at:

[electronic link].

Project timeline*

Phase 1: September – November 2021

Community engagement: seeking feedback & responses from the community.

Deadline for feedback: Monday 1st November 2021.



Phase 2: November 2021 – February 2022

Consider & explore feedback received by NHDC.

Meet community to begin mapping out options & proposals.

Gather formal expressions of interest from community to take on lease, refurbish, operate & manage Charnwood House as community hub.

Discuss NHDC's Community Asset Transfer ("CAT") policy.



Phase 3: February 2022 – March 2023

Follow the process of NHDC's CAT policy. To include requesting eligible parties to provide NHDC:

- Narration of business development process.
 - Business plans.
- Financial projections showing expected levels of income & expenditure for the next 3 years & assumptions made to arrive at projections.
 - Outline of how parties anticipate funding proposals.
- Outline of how parties intend to staff, operate & manage the community hub.
 - Proposals for lease terms.
- Information/advice parties may have obtained from other stakeholders, such as the Planning department.



Phase 4: March 2023 – December 2023

Work commences to transform Charnwood House to community hub.

Community hub opens.

**Dates are estimated guides only dependent on several factors, including timing of securing necessary consents, approvals or authorities.*

Data protection

All personal data that you provide NHDC as part of this community engagement shall be treated confidentially and processed by NHDC in accordance with NHDC's duties as data processor under the Data Protection Act 2018. For further information relating to how we use and process data please see our Data Protection Statement - <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/home/council-data-and-performance/data-protection/data-protection-statement>.

PROJECT VISION & BACKGROUND

The overriding goal is to sensitively & sustainably transform Charnwood House into a community hub, for and at the heart of the community, future-proofed for the 21st Century, and one the community will be proud to call its own!

Community Hub Proposal

The Vision for Charnwood House & community

- ❖ **Create focal point to foster community participation in activities with educational & vocational focus:**
 - Develop core skills such as numeracy & language, including skills for STEM subjects (Science, Technology, Engineering & Maths).
 - Tuition on digital & business skills to improve job prospects.
- Promote learning & engage in hobbies & interests, such as history, art, film & music.

- ❖ **Establish platform to support people starting or progressing their careers:**
 - Inspire school & college leavers.
- Networking opportunities for unemployed people to return to employment.
 - Guidance for people looking to change career or upskill.
 - Help improve life chances.

- ❖ **Lay foundations to improve community well-being and living standards:**
 - Provision of professional advice on physical & mental health issues.
 - Signposting to sources of support for vulnerable members of society.
- Safe place for communities to meet to combat loneliness, depression & dementia.
 - Provide space for indoor physical exercise & meditation activities/classes.

- ❖ **Provide facility to complement the business community:**
 - Place where businesses can meet potential employees & vice versa.
 - Cross-pollination of enterprising or innovative ideas & solutions.

! HELP NHDC & YOUR COMMUNITY ACHIEVE THIS VISION !



How community hub proposal began

On 15th December 2020, NHDC Officers presented a report to NHDC's Cabinet asking them to consider a proposal by Charnwood Community Management Association (CCMA). CCMA are a registered charity based in Hitchin who are dedicated to helping ensure Charnwood House is returned to its former glory as a key asset at the centre of Hitchin and wider community. CCMA's stated aims for the property are as follows:

"The aims of the association are to acquire and maintain the building for community use, providing a community hub for Hitchin residents with an emphasis on supporting those groups with an educational focus".

NHDC Officers asked NHDC's Cabinet to consider a potential letting or sale of Charnwood House to a community group. Cabinet decided upon the following action:

"That the principle of the option presented be progressed further with the widest possible community engagement on the proposals and use."

NHDC is keen to progress this action point and build on the interest shown by CCMA by galvanising interest from community stakeholders who share a similar vision for improving Charnwood House and reaffirming its position as a core community asset.

NHDC's aims for engaging with community

- To ascertain uses and services the community requires from the community hub proposed for Charnwood House, and the level of demand.
 - Galvanise organisations & individuals to propose practical solutions to refurbish & participate in running the building as a community hub.
- To ascertain common areas of interest and expertise amongst organisations & individuals to potentially seed a collaborative project or tenant group.
- To gauge appetite from community members in taking on a lease of the building & to inform future discussions with NHDC on the terms of the lease.
- To understand the resources & commitment people are willing & able to invest in Charnwood House's future, be it skills, experience or financial resources.
 - To seek feedback and help inform & drive designs, proposals & plans for the proposed community hub.
 - To establish how the hub will be delivered and to develop a lease for Charnwood House for a length of up to 99 years on terms to be agreed.



To give Charnwood House a new lease of life and secure its future as an integral part of the community, for the benefit of the community.

Charnwood House

Description & Location:

Charnwood House is a Grade II Listed semi-detached property in Hitchin built in the 19th Century, owned by NHDC. It once served as a public library and later a public museum. The public library is now provided from the adjoining property owned and operated by Hertfordshire County Council. The museum closed several years ago.

The building features an attractive, prominent two storey bay on the front (south-west) elevation with adjacent recessed front entrance.

Charnwood occupies an island site overlooking a mainly lawned and landscaped public area comprising a mix of mature deciduous and coniferous trees, hedging and shrub borders. The site is bounded by Nun's Close to the north, Paynes Park to the east, Old Park Road to the west, and tapers towards a roundabout to the south. Footpaths serve the building.

Charnwood House is close to Hitchin town centre and its variety of shops, restaurants, leisure & recreational facilities. Adjacent is the Physic Garden displaying a collage of fascinating plants and herbs. Public car parks are close by and bus services within convenient reach. Hitchin railway station is under 10 minutes away by taxi. The A1(M) motorway is circa 3 miles (4.8 kilometres) away. The property is in a Conservation Area.

Charnwood is now largely vacant since the museum collections and exhibits were moved to the new museum at Brand Street. A small amount of light storage is retained by NHDC, which will be cleared.

Accommodation & Facilities:

Charnwood House is configured over basement, ground floor and first floor levels with a mixed layout of larger open-plan rooms and smaller more cellular rooms. There is staircase access to the first floor but no passenger lift. Gross internal floor areas as follows:

- Basement: Circa 49 m² (527 square feet) – mainly storage space.
- Ground Floor: Circa 249 m² (2,680 square feet) – mainly display & storage space.
- First Floor: Circa 234 m² (2,518 square feet) – mainly display, office & storage space.

Charnwood benefits from 6 allocated car parking spaces in the adjoining car park. It also has use of two disabled bays shared with the library. The car park is accessed from, and exits onto, Nun's Close.

Ownership & Title:

NHDC owns the freehold interest in Charnwood House registered at HM Land Registry under title HD569981. The building is registered as an Asset of Community Value.

Business Rates:

The Rateable Value (1st April 2017) is £33,000. This is not the annual Business Rates amount. The Listed status may qualify the property for Business Rates relief when unoccupied. Interested parties should make their own enquiries with the local authority's Revenues department (telephone: 01462 474000).

Condition:

The building requires substantial repair and upgrading. There is evidence of water ingress, cracking render and plaster and deteriorating joinery and services. A full building survey and condition report is required for a comprehensive and detailed appraisal of condition.

Energy Performance Rating:

The property has an Energy Performance Certificate (EPC) rating of Band D-79. A copy of the EPC is available on request.

Thank you !

NHDC is grateful for your participation in this community engagement.

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- Every care has been made in the preparation of this document. However, the document's accuracy is not guaranteed and interested parties must satisfy themselves on all matters upon which their offer is based.
- Interested parties should seek independent professional advice.
- This document was produced on 29th July 2021.

**North Hertfordshire District Council, Estates & Asset Management, Council Offices, Gernon Road,
Letchworth Garden City SG6 3JF www.north-herts.gov.uk**