

CABINET
Tuesday 13th December 2022

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

Any queries must be directed to the Democratic Services Manager

TITLE OF REPORT: Adoption of the Museum Strategy 2022 - 2026

REPORT OF: Culture and Facilities Service Manager

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Councillor Keith Hoskins, Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts

COUNCIL PRIORITY: PEOPLE FIRST / SUSTAINABILITY / A BRIGHTER FUTURE TOGETHER

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

This report requests approval and adoption of the new North Herts Museum Strategy 2022 – 2026. North Hertfordshire Museum Service has produced a draft North Hertfordshire Museum Strategy, 2022 to 2026. The strategy describes the museum service's four main aims, which relate to: Audience, Finance, Collections, Organisation. Each aim is then explained in more detail. The document is illustrated throughout with recent images from the museum.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

- 2.1. That the current draft of the Museum Strategy 2022 - 2026 be approved.
- 2.2. That the Council / Committee adopt the strategy for the years 2022 – 2026.

3. REASONS FOR RECOMMENDATIONS

- 3.1. The previous Arts, Museums and Heritage Strategy expired some years ago and a new strategy will guide the ambitions of the museum service in the years ahead.

4. ALTERNATIVE OPTIONS CONSIDERED

- 4.1. The alternative option would be to continue without a strategy guiding the work of the museum service in the years ahead. This would lead to a lack of strategic direction for the service and potentially risk the work of this service area becoming un-coordinated and lacking an ultimate goal or ambition.

5. CONSULTATION WITH RELEVANT MEMBERS AND EXTERNAL ORGANISATIONS

- 5.1. The Executive Member and Deputy Executive Member have been consulted on the strategy document and the strategy has also been taken to Political Liaison Board and Leadership Team.

In June 2022 the draft strategy was sent out with the regular online museum newsletter, asking for comments. This newsletter goes to over 9000 email addresses; a mix of visitors who have completed forms in the museum, and people who ticked an interested in museums/heritage option when signing up for North Herts Council's email newsletters. It was also sent to key members of local societies who have always expressed an interest in the museum, such as the Letchworth Garden City Society, the Hitchin Historical Society, the North Herts Archaeology Society, and the Letchworth Naturalists.

3262 people who received the newsletter opened it (a good response rate – much higher than the average email open rate of 21.5%), and of these, 52 actually clicked on the link to open the strategy. Ten then emailed in with comments. These were overwhelmingly positive about the new museum, but they included some helpful suggestions, particularly about things that had mistakenly been omitted – such as mention of our important natural history collection. One correspondent noticed that the strategy didn't actually mention the fact that the museum was wheelchair accessible, while another suggested we mention our talks to U3A. The current draft strategy now includes alterations made as a result of these comments.

6. FORWARD PLAN

- 6.1 This report contains a recommendation on a key Executive decision that was first notified to the public in the Forward Plan on 4th November 2022.

7. BACKGROUND

- 7.1. This report has been written as a recommendation for approving and adopting a new strategy for the museum service was due, given the previous strategy document has now expired. Following a 2004/5 Best Value Review of the Museum Service, North Herts Council proposed the closure of the former Hitchin and Letchworth Museums, and the opening of one new North Herts Museum on a town centre site. In order to apply for almost £1million Heritage Lottery grant-aid towards the internal fit-out of the proposed new museum, the grant application required a published strategy. This was to ensure that Lottery funding went towards projects that were already in the public domain, with clear aims, and strong support from the parent organisation, in our case, North Herts Council.

Following a huge amount of consultation, with regular meetings across the district, in 2007 North Hertfordshire Museum Service published the Arts, Museums & Heritage Strategy 2007-12. The AMH Strategy clearly stated that one of the Council's main aims was to replace its two museums in Letchworth and Hitchin with one town centre museum and gallery facility. The strategy was very much of its time, when the Council, the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, and County all had more resources and more staff than is the case now. North Herts Council had run a couple of Book Festivals, and there was more funding for cultural partnership projects of this type. The strategy had an ambitious Action Plan, covering music, dance, and drama, as well as museums and heritage. It referenced North Herts Council's earlier Leisure & Cultural Strategy, 2001-2005, and also mentioned its Play Strategy 2006-2009, and was a wider-ranging document than the new strategy.. The AMH Strategy was successful in its unwritten aim

of helping gain grant aid, as in 2011 the museum service gained Phase 1 Lottery funding to develop plans for the new museum, and in 2014, a major Phase 2 grant for the museum fit-out was agreed. Although the Museum Service intended to update the AMH Strategy, this was never a priority once the new museum began to take shape.

8. RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1. Since full opening of the new North Herts Museum in 2019, staff realised that it was becoming increasingly important to produce a current strategy, to show to potential grant-giving organisations such as the Arts Council and the National Lottery Heritage Fund. Staff wanted a document that would demonstrate that North Herts Museum is a professional modern museum which works to deliver our vision of creating ‘a welcoming museum that plays an active role in the life of the district.’ When we looked at the old *AHM Strategy*, it became clear that this could not be updated, as so much has changed since it was written. We would need to start again, this time concentrating on the museum service rather than a wider cultural strategy. A draft strategy was produced by the museum team, based on strategies produced by other high-performing museums. The layout was then designed by Diane Town using a wide range of recent images of the museum and its activities.

The new strategy is half as long as the previous one, at 12 rather than 24 pages, yet it contains far more detail about what the museum aims to do. These aims fall into four areas - Audience, Finance, Collections, Organisation, and each area is then broken down further, into bullet points, each with an informative paragraph. The bullet points for each aim are as follows:

1. Audience aims

- Give the people of North Herts and beyond the opportunity to access high quality heritage, art and culture
- Involve a wider range of people in the heritage and culture of North Herts.
- Exceed visitor expectations

2. Finance aims

- Ensure that the museum is financially sustainable
- Maximise opportunities to generate income
- Engage with grant-giving organisations where appropriate
- The museum plays a part in boosting the local economy

3. Collections aims

- Improve museum storage to ensure best care of our collections
- Continue digitisation of collections
- Organise inspiring programme of exhibitions, talks and workshops, in person and online
- Use collections to become a learning and a teaching organisation for all ages
- Continue to develop the collections further, continuously improving interpretation of the district's past

4. Organisation aims

- Work towards the council's climate change agenda
- Become more resilient, enabling long-term sustainability
- Through the museum, help deliver the council's aims of putting people first and delivering sustainable services, to enable a brighter future together
- Cultivate community partnerships
- Attract and retain a wide range of volunteers
- Retain Museums Accreditation
- Give people opportunities to develop new skills and become more creative

Each bullet point is accompanied by a paragraph giving more detail.

The committee is asked to review the content of the strategy document and if satisfied, to adopt the strategy as a guiding document for the service areas work in the years ahead.

9. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1. Cabinet's Terms of Reference include at 5.6.1 the power 'to prepare and agree to implement policies and strategies other than those reserved to Council'.
- 9.2. The Public Libraries and Museums Act 1964 and the Local Government (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 1976 confirms the Council's statutory power to operate a Museum. S111 of the Local Government Act 1972 confirms that a local authority has power to do anything (including in relation to finance and property) which is calculated to facilitate, or is conducive or incidental to, the discharge of any of their functions.

10. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 10.1. There are no direct financial implications as a result of approval and adoption of the strategy document, however the strategy makes reference to other ambitions and projects, such as the creation of a new museum collection storage facility, which the committee will need to be satisfied adhere to current and future financial plans.

11. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 11.1. Failure to agree a Museum Strategy could lead to a lack of direction and an un-coordinated approach to Museum activities This could negatively impact on the Public's experience of the facility.
- 11.2. Not having a Strategy in place could affect our ability to submit successful funding applications to organisations such as the Arts Council and National Lottery Heritage Fund.

12. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 12.1. In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

12.2. The museum strategy aims to ensure the museum service reaches as wide and diverse an audience as possible. With regards to the Public Sector Equality Duty, this strategy document will help to align the development of the service with our responsibilities under the duty but will also guide how we hope to deliver services to all residents and visitors of North Herts over the coming years.

13. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

13.1. The Social Value Act and “go local” requirements do not apply to this report.

14. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

14.1. There are no known direct Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to the actions recommended in this report. However, the report does make reference to other projects such as the development of a new store for the museum collection, which will have environmental implications. These projects however are not the subject of this report and will be subject to their own approval process in isolation, including consideration of environmental implications, separate to the strategy document. The committee should however satisfy themselves that the ambitions and projects covered in the strategy document conform and align with the Councils environmental commitments for the years ahead.

15. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

15.1 There will be no impact on staff as a result of this strategy document, other than to guide their work in their service area over the coming years.

16. APPENDICES

16.1 Appendix 1 is the Museum Strategy 2022 – 2026 and is the subject of this report.

17. CONTACT OFFICERS

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18. BACKGROUND PAPERS

18.1 There are no background papers provided with this report.