

North Hertfordshire Museum

# MUSEUM STRATEGY

2022 - 2026



# OUR VISION

Our vision is to provide a welcoming museum that plays an active role in the life of the district

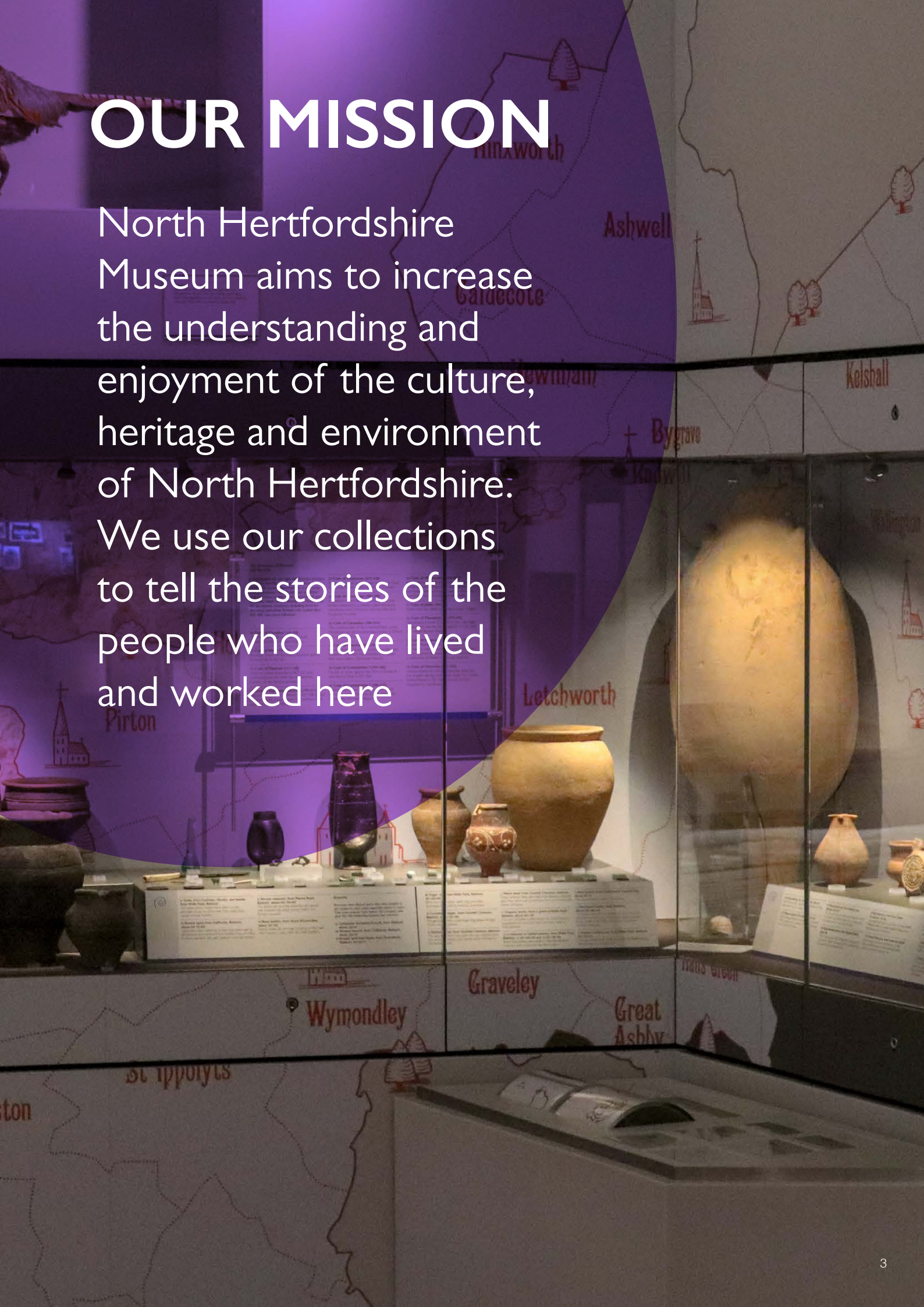
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# OUR MISSION

North Hertfordshire Museum aims to increase the understanding and enjoyment of the culture, heritage and environment of North Hertfordshire. We use our collections to tell the stories of the people who have lived and worked here



# OUR AIMS

These fall into four areas;  
**Audience, Finance, Collections,  
and Organisation**

These are highlighted here  
and explored in more detail  
later in the strategy

## 1. Audience aims

Give the people of North Herts and beyond the opportunity to access high quality heritage, art and culture, with national quality temporary exhibitions

Involve a wider range of people in the heritage and culture of North Herts

Exceed visitor expectations

## 2. Financial 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 collection 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

# I. Audience aims

## **Give the people of North Herts and beyond the opportunity to access high quality heritage, art and culture**

We will programme a wide range of temporary exhibitions, from local artists and groups in the Arches Gallery, to touring exhibitions of national and international quality in the main exhibition gallery, such as *Matisse, Drawing with Scissors* (2017) and *Rembrandt in Print* (2020). Some exhibitions will be hired in, others generated in-house from the museum collections. We will ensure that some exhibitions appeal to families and children (such as the 2021 *The Tiger who came to Tea*, the British Library's *Paddington* exhibition in 2022 or the 2023 *Drawings for the BFG* while others, such as the *Back to the Drawing Board* art exhibition in 2022 are aimed more at adults. We will engage high quality artists and speakers to run talks and creative and heritage-based workshops linked to temporary exhibitions, displays, or national events.

## **Involve a wider range of people in the heritage and culture of North Herts**

We will improve our market research to ensure that we have a greater understanding of our current audience. We can then use our social media and print to better target those people who may not know about the museum or feel that it is for them. We will continue to engage with national events like Black History Month, S. Asian Heritage Month and Pride events so that these audiences want to visit the museum. We will also advertise our major exhibitions further afield, working with other local attractions to promote the museum and district as a tourist destination. We will run an active programme of displays, talks, art and creative activities for all ages and abilities to build a core audience of loyal supporters. By ensuring that there is something new to see on every visit, whilst remaining loyal to the focus of displaying the core heritage of the district, we aim to attract new visitors, and convert them to becoming repeat visitors.

We aim to ensure that the museum is accessible to as many as possible, with wheelchair access to all floors, accessible toilets on ground and first floors, and Braille labels available at reception. We aim to provide a first-class service for adults and children with diverse needs, including opening the museum at quiet times when it is normally closed, such as Mondays. We aim to increase the number of schools using our Education Service in the museum, and externally, in schools and digitally.

## **Exceed visitor expectations**

The museum staff pride themselves on their professionalism while being open and welcoming. Our visitor service standards are high, and we aim to exceed visitor expectations in the quality of the collections, the displays, the ambitious exhibition programme, the shop and café. The front-of-house team gain well deserved praise from the visitors, and we intend this to continue. Praise for the range and quality of our social media shows that this is much appreciated, and we aim to increase online engagement.



## 2. Financial aims



### Ensure that the museum is financially sustainable

North Herts Museum will continue to charge for many of its talks (both in the museum and as outreach) and workshops. Workshop prices will vary in price depending on the activity (to include cost of materials, and freelance tutor if appropriate) and the targeted audience. The income gained this way has been increasing steadily, and we expect this to continue. A few activities for children (such as storytelling or museum quizzes) will be free or at a nominal cost to ensure we are providing an engaging service to everyone, including families on low incomes.

The Museum Education Service will also continue to operate a subscription scheme, which includes teaching sessions and school loans.

The museum will generate income from its gift shop with attractive ranges of products; from locally sourced giftware and souvenirs, to special ranges relating to temporary exhibitions or events which the museum will be running.

The museum café is crucial in helping maintain commercial sustainability. Its offer will change with the seasons, and where possible will offer meals and snacks relating to museum exhibitions or events. It is building a reputation for somewhere with

® locally-sourced and Fairtrade products, with a range of vegan and vegetarian options, and this is a selling point we aim to advertise more widely. The kitchen has been fully equipped to cater for large scale events in the Mountford Hall next door, enabling a variety of events catering.



### Maximise opportunities to generate income

The museum now has a contactless card donation point to supplement the existing cash donation box, which is already generating a useful regular income.

We intend to offer tours for small groups led by our knowledgeable front-of-house staff, which will raise income through suggested donations.

The museum plans to resurrect previous income-generating activities, such as the popular Escape Rooms, and explore new income streams such as Nights at the Museum.

We also aim to create a charitable arm through a membership scheme, such as a Friends or Supporters group. In return for an annual fee, the members will receive benefits including discounts in the gift shop and café, discounted venue hire at the museum, and possible priority access to booking events and invitations to preview evenings. This group could also act as an additional consultation forum for the museum.

The museum will investigate possible sponsorship of exhibitions, leaflets and any new museum vehicles as a way of generating additional funds. Advertisements in museum leaflets or on the website could create further revenue streams. The museum will explore publicising bequests as a tax-efficient way of giving for legacy donors.





**Apply for grant-aid to achieve our aims where possible**

North Hertfordshire Museum has been particularly successful in applying for grant aid; gaining almost £35,000 in 2020-21 from V & A/Arts Council England, Hertfordshire Heritage Fund, Royal Opera House Bridge, Hertfordshire Association of Museums, and the Institute of Conservation. Additional funds were gained in partnership with Stevenage Museum from the National Lottery Heritage Fund. The grants helped the museum produce digital learning resources for families and for schools, conserve local archaeology, acquire a William Ratcliffe painting, purchase digital storage, and employ freelance artists for a digital project, and a lockdown project for people with dementia. North Hertfordshire Museum is hugely grateful to these funders, as this work would not have gone ahead without the grants. The museum will continue to engage with grant funding organisations as appropriate, by ourselves or in partnership with other museums.

**Aim for the museum to play a part in boosting the local economy**

The museum aims to develop closer partnership working with local organisations such as the local BIDS and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation as a way of maximising the tourism offer of the District. We will explore shared advertising, and discounted tickets to multiple attractions, restaurants or accommodation, so that all the stakeholders can share the benefits of a vibrant visitor economy.

The sourcing of local contractors, goods and materials from local sources is encouraged and supported by the authority's *Go Local* policy.

# 3. Collections aims

## Improve museum storage to ensure best care of our heritage

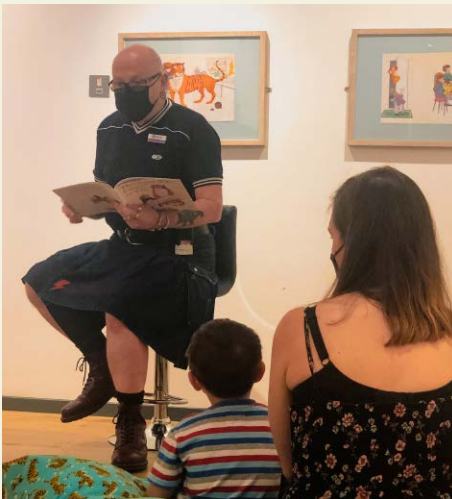
The museum service store at Burymead Road is reaching the end of its life. It was never built as a museum store, and is overcrowded, inaccessible for the general public and does not meet modern storage standards. Although there is some onsite storage at North Hertfordshire Museum, most of our storage is offsite at Burymead. By 2025, North Hertfordshire Museum aims to have demolished the current store and built a completely new modern museum store with high-quality security and environmental controls. The new store will be accessible for staff, volunteers and the public, including school groups, as well as having a dedicated research room. This will ensure that the heritage of North Hertfordshire can be preserved more effectively for the future.

## Continue digitisation of collections

During the unexpected lockdown in 2020-21, the museum's digitisation programme suddenly became the only way of reaching our audiences. We received an Emergency Coronavirus grant from Arts Council England to improve our online offer, and we now have a You Tube channel, and post on Facebook, Instagram and Twitter almost daily. Digitisation is now an embedded part of what the museum does. Almost four and a half thousand from the museum's collections are available to view online on our website, through the eHive collection management system, and this is added to weekly.







**Organise inspiring programme of exhibitions, talks and workshops; in person and online**

North Hertfordshire Museum is fortunate to have a purpose-built exhibition gallery with the high-quality security and environmental conditions necessary to gain a Government Indemnity (or insurance), enabling us to borrow artworks from national collections. Following the success of the *Rembrandt in Print* exhibition in 2020, the museum aims to continue to hire in or borrow works by well-known artists, which would not otherwise be seen in the district. Our visitors' book was full of comments such as 'More like this please'; clear evidence of local demand for high-quality art. Where possible we will make links with works in our own collections, such as the Griggs exhibition from the Ashmolean, where we displayed prints and ephemera relating to this Hitchin-born artist. We will also put on exhibitions of art or objects from our own excellent collections, including archaeology, natural sciences, local and social history, and programme some specifically for children and families. The museum aims to run a busy programme of talks for the general public on all aspects of the museum collections and will ensure that where appropriate all temporary exhibitions have a programme of related talks and workshops. Curators also offer talks to local societies and U3A groups either in the museum or externally.

**Use collections to become a learning and a teaching organisation for all ages**

North Hertfordshire Museum has a long history of working with schools, both through teaching in the museum and in schools, and through the extensive School Loans Collection, one of the most comprehensive in the Eastern region. We aim for this important work to continue, and with the involvement of local schools are also exploring how we can offer digitised educational resources. We work with children and young people with a range of needs and can offer some teaching in BSL. The museum is also keen to offer historical and creative sessions for adults as well as children, and to increase usage of our reminiscence boxes.

**Continue to develop the collection further, continuously improving interpretation of the district's past**

North Hertfordshire Museum will continue to develop its collection in line with its Collections Development Policy and will evaluate the prospect of accessioning new objects into the collection through a range of means. This may include anything from public donations and archaeological finds through to auctions of artworks. Wherever our curators consider the acquisition of an object to enhance our current ability to tell the stories of North Herts, serious consideration will be given as to whether it should become an accessioned object in line with our policies.

# 4. Organisation aims



## **Work towards the council's Climate Change agenda**

In May 2019 North Herts Council declared a climate emergency. The Museum Service aims to use the Climate Change Strategy throughout its activity, ensuring that our actions and purchases support the council policies, in particular with regard to carbon reduction. The café has already phased out all single-use plastics possible, and the museum aims to use renewable and recycled materials wherever possible, and ensure that all future developments, such as a new museum store, are built with the council's climate change agenda in mind.

## **Become more resilient**

By increasing the income streams to the museum, through our commercial activities such as the shop and café, through charging for some museum activities, such talks, workshops and *Behind the Scenes* tours of our stores, through hiring out the Terrace Gallery, through increased donations and through grant-aid, we aim to increase our financial resilience. We also aim to make more of our links with the adjoining Hitchin Town Hall and the events there, as working together increases the resilience of both parts of our organisation. We are aware of the importance of succession planning to the organisation, and aim to ensure that we have realistic and focused succession and business continuity plans. We also aim to embed ourselves in the community, ensuring that the museum plays an active part in the life of the district.

## **Through the museum, help deliver the council's aims of putting people first and delivering sustainable services, to enable a brighter future together**

We aim to do this in many ways; through our displays and exhibitions, our curatorial and educational work in the museum and out in the community. Our goal is for the museum, with its shop and café, to become the top tourist attraction in the district, for local people and visitors regionally

and nationally. It is also somewhere people want to work, and somewhere that creates employment and volunteer opportunities in the district.

## **Cultivate community partnerships**

Partnerships are crucial to the success of the museum and will continue to be so. Much of our grant-aid has been acquired for projects where we are working with other local museums, such as the British Schools Museum and Stevenage Museums (with the Museum Champions young people projects) and Stevenage Museum, Knebworth House and the Garden City Collection, for our Suffrage project. We have partnered with Stevenage Museum for the Doorstep Discoveries dementia project, and also for a lockdown digital education project. We have worked in partnership with many local groups, and aim to extend this work, particularly with groups representing audiences which are under-represented in our museum visitors, such as ethnic and other minority groups, and adults and children with particular needs. We aim to work more closely with Hitchin Library, particularly in terms of their special displays reflecting our exhibitions. We will continue to work with specific groups for children including Cubs and Brownies, and those with disabilities such as Angels, for children with attention deficit and autism spectrum disorders, and will seek to engage with other local groups of this kind. Museum staff have long supported other museums such as Ashwell Museum and Royston Museum and local history societies in this area, through museum mentoring, staff mentoring, as Trustees or committee members, and intend this to continue.

North Herts Museum will aim to work more closely with Hitchin and other local BIDs to become a more established part of the local business community and discover ways in which we can collaborate and assist each other, particularly in joint advertising and marketing ventures.

### **Attract and retain a wide range of volunteers**

North Hertfordshire Museum is fortunate to have a range of volunteers of all ages, doing extremely useful tasks, including cataloguing, scanning, creating databases and helping visitors, for which the museum is extremely grateful. Volunteers have so much to offer the museum, and we know that the museum service is equally important for our volunteers in terms of improved mental health, work experience, and opportunities to learn new skills. Some of our volunteers just want to give something back to the community and support a local service they value. The museum aims to continue to provide a diverse range of areas for volunteering. Some volunteers stay for years, some just want to help for a couple of days, but we welcome all volunteers, and aim to give as many people as possible a chance to support the museum in this way.

### **Retain Museums Accreditation**

Museums Accreditation is the industry standard for museums in the UK. Managed by Arts Council England on behalf of the UK Accreditation partners, it provides nationally agreed standards on how museums are run, how they manage their collections, and how they engage with their users. North Hertfordshire Museum is an Accredited Museum and aims to re-apply for successful Accreditation every few years, as necessary. Without it, the museum would not be able to apply for many of the available grants, or to borrow works from other Accredited museums, all of which increase our standing locally and regionally, at the same time as improving the services we offer.

### **Give people opportunities to develop new skills and become more creative**

North Hertfordshire Museum aims to provide staff, volunteers and visitors of all ages and abilities with a range of ways in which they can develop new skills and become more creative. These range from creative art and craft workshops to poetry, creative writing and dance projects. We will continue to think of ways in which the museum can stimulate creativity in our community, and digitally, even further afield. We also aim to give people a chance to learn behind-the-scenes museum skills, such as how to digitise museum collections, how to pack and store paintings and costume or family photographs, and how to research family history. The museum and Hitchin Town Hall already employ one local apprentice to learn digital marketing skills, such as social media, and the museum is about to employ an apprentice to assist with and learn about the museum Education Service. We currently host a disabled curatorial trainee on a national grant-aided scheme, 'Curating for Change', and would be delighted to do more in this way.



A draft copy of this Strategy was emailed to over 9000 individuals and groups for their comments. North Hertfordshire Museum thanks everyone who took the time to read it and send in suggestions for additions or alterations. We have tried to include as many as possible in this final document, which will be reviewed every four years by the council.



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