

North Herts Council
Museum Storage Solution
Options Appraisal

Overview and Scrutiny Committee 12/11/2024

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1. Executive Summary

N.B. Please read in conjunction with the Executive Summary Grid provided in Appendix 2

- 1.1 North Herts Council's new central museum opened in July 2019, located adjacent to Hitchin Town Hall in Brand Street, Hitchin.
- 1.2 The main facilities for storage of the museum's collection is at the Resource Centre on Bury Mead Road Industrial Estate, Hitchin, with additional storage at the former Letchworth Museum on Broadway Gardens. The collection moved to Bury Mead Resource Centre in the 1980s in what was intended to be a temporary solution at that time. The Museum Service has a responsibility to safeguard and preserve the collection for the benefit of future generations and the items are held in trust for the benefit of North Herts residents and their descendants.
- 1.3 The current facilities are not fit for purpose, with insufficient capacity and have fallen into a state of disrepair. This is increasing the risks posed to the collection objects, staff working within the museum service and the continued accredited status of North Herts Museum Service.
- 1.4 The North Herts Museum collection is of great regional, academic and scientific importance and contains many notable items and objects within its range of collections, as shown in Appendix 3.
- 1.5 This reports outlines the importance of suitable storage facilities, ongoing risks of not having this and options to address the museums pressures and needs, both in the short and longer term
- 1.6 The financial implications for each option are projected, along with setting out the key advantages and disadvantages with regards to collections, estates, social and environmental considerations.
- 1.7 Based on the research undertaken, there are three general categories that these options fall into:
 - Low cost, short term options
 - High cost, long term options
 - Alternative and partnership options
- 1.8 The report recommends the option(s) to pursue further and those to discount on the basis of the work undertaken to date.
- 1.9 A summary grid (Appendix 2) has been prepared to highlight the top level detail of each option, however the decision is best informed through the wider background and context provided in the body of the report.
- 1.10 Based upon the findings in the report, the recommended options to review in more detail with a view to informing onward decision making are as follows:
- 1.11 Introduction of a mezzanine floor at Unit 3 (Option C) represents the best low cost short term option based upon the research undertaken, though this option also has a number of disadvantages.

- 1.12 If the Council is in a position to make a more substantial investment in order to secure a long term solution then redevelopment of the existing site (Option D) or the purchase of a freehold property on the market (Option E) represent the most favourable ways to achieve this, based upon the research undertaken.
- 1.13 The Council does not have an alternative facility within its property portfolio which would be suitable as a solution to solve the museum storage pressures. However, the option of a partnership arrangement with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (LGCHF) does appear to offer a number of unique advantages and officers recommend exploring this possibility further.
- 1.14 In summary, if the Council is not in a position to make a significant investment then Option C should be pursued, whereas if there is the possibility of a more significant investment then Option D and E and H should be explored further.

2. Introduction

- 2.1 North Herts Museum is the leading accredited museum in the district, dedicated to preserving the history of the district and the only local museum able to host travelling exhibitions within a (high value) government indemnity standard exhibition gallery space. Alongside the core collection objects, the museum also holds the Hertfordshire County Herbarium, the most complete collection of local news archives, the bulk of the planning records from the former Hitchin Urban District Council and is the designated receiving site for archaeological depositions resulting from development within the district.
- 2.2 In 2019, North Herts Council completed a project to modernise the museum service of North Hertfordshire. The project included the closure of the former Letchworth and Hitchin Museums in favour of the creation of a central district museum adjacent to Hitchin Town Hall in Brand Street.
- 2.3 Alongside this move, there was originally an intention to address the long standing storage pressures facing the museum collection, which, since the 1980s, has been stored at the Museum Resource Centre on Bury Mead Road Industrial Estate in Hitchin.
- 2.4 The Bury Mead Road facility is operating beyond capacity and the Museum Service needs additional space to store artefacts. Further, the building is deteriorating, operating well beyond its considered economic life. In 2024 the Council commissioned a survey on the building. The report found that the facility is anticipated to cost an estimated £175k to maintain for the next 10 years at its current standard, leading to an additional £39k incurred each year to the Councils revenue budget.
- 2.5 The current risks to staff and the collection would remain regardless of this investment, including the risks of gradual deterioration and damage of the objects, safety and fire concerns for staff and the lack of space to effectively manage the collection.
- 2.6 An independent audit and accompanying report by external auditors, SIAS, on the state of museum collection storage and the potential for rationalisation was completed for the Council in 2018, This confirmed that the museum service was managing its collection in line with best practice and established policies and that it would not be possible to address the storage pressures through rationalisation alone. For most objects there are no alternative museums or collections to which the museum service

can seek to rationalise, as other museums cover a different subject matter to that stated in the [North Herts Museum Collections Development Policy](#).

- 2.7 Museum collections are constantly expanding as history is created. The growth of the North Herts Museum Collection has been limited in recent years (<1m² per year on average), assisted by a very clear and updated [Collections Development Policy](#) governing the criteria for accepting further objects into the collection. However, this level of growth cannot account for any major finds, donations or bequests which may occur in the coming years, all of which could lead to above average growth.
- 2.8 The North Herts Museum collection is of great regional, academic and scientific importance and contains many notable items and objects within its range of collections, as shown in Appendix 3.
- 2.9 The collection as a whole is estimated to feature over 1 million individual items as detailed in Appendix 4.
- 2.10 The stored collection is currently occupying a floor area of approximately 750m² across a number of Council owned facilities. Officers have calculated that this could be condensed to around 500-550m² with use of contemporary storage techniques, such as roller racking (also known as mobile shelving), if a future facility could support such an installation.
- 2.11 Due to a number of unforeseen delays and complications with the primary ambition of opening a new cutting edge museum in Brand Street, Hitchin, the secondary objective of addressing the museum collection storage pressures was pushed back in favour of focussing capacity and efforts on the launch of the new customer facing facility.
- 2.12 The new North Herts Museum launched in July of 2019. Having then faced the complications brought about by the Covid Pandemic in early 2020, it is now fully operational and hosts a diverse programme of engaging and thought provoking exhibitions.
- 2.13 Alongside its changeable programme, the museum also hosts and displays the best examples of the district's heritage, ranging from prehistoric to modern social history.
- 2.14 The collection also allows the Council to aid wider research and education. For example, the natural history collection can be used to plot the impact of climate change and biodiversity changes in the locality through time. The social history collection captures the prominent businesses and institutions which were started or based in the district, whilst the art collection ensures the works of various local artists are retained for the enjoyment of the wider public.
- 2.15 Since the North Herts Museum is now in full operation, attention has turned again to the storage pressures and how best to resolve these. Officers have explored a number of options with regards to how the storage pressures can be eased in the short term, together with longer term proposals. This report details the alternative solutions, along with the costs and risks of each option to provide recommended next steps and the leading proposals to explore further.
- 2.16 The North Herts Museum Service has a responsibility to safeguard and preserve the collection for the benefit of future generations. The museum collection is the instrument through which the stories of the district can be told and its visitors and residents can discover the heritage of the local area. These items are held in trust for the benefit of North Herts residents and their descendants. Furthermore, if the service were to stop

collecting objects then the continuation and value of the collection as a continuous record is lost. North Herts Museum service is the only museum with a remit to capture the history of the district in its entirety.

3. Background

- 3.1 North Herts Museum is an accredited museum, which is a mark of quality and adherence to best practice in the sector in accordance with the guidelines published by the Arts Council.
- 3.2 Accreditation not only signifies the quality standards of a museum, but it also provides the museum with access to apply for a range of grants and additional funding which would otherwise be unavailable to a non-accredited museum. In the last 10 years, North Herts Museum Service has benefitted from grants totalling circa £1m in Capital investment towards the North Herts Museum itself and a further circa £250k of grants towards various projects and fixed term project roles.
- 3.3 Accreditation standards cover a range of matters but are primarily concerned with the care and preservation of historical artefacts. An accredited museum is tasked with maintaining a register of accessioned items which have legally been transferred into the museum's ownership. Accession records track the origin of the object and its relevance to the museum's [Collection Development Policy](#).
- 3.4 It is expected that accredited museums, having been charged with the care of such objects, which are often family heirlooms or items of considerable nostalgic value to their former owners; will take all reasonable steps to care for and preserve the objects for the enjoyment of future generations, along with enrichment of the historical stories they help the museum to tell about the local area.
- 3.5 For this reason, any decision to de-accession (permanently remove) an object from a collection must follow a strict process. Specifically it must first be acknowledged that the object does not align with the museum's [Collection Development Policy](#) (duplication, degradation, more aligned with another museum's collection policy) and then a documented transfer or disposal process must be undertaken and recorded.
- 3.6 As a result, it is not an acceptable practice under museum accreditation standards to dispose of objects purely in the pursuit of cost savings or space limitations. If the museum were to follow this course of action, then it would suffer adverse PR, risk being stripped of its accreditation and in turn risk losing access to the vast majority of sources of grant funding which it is currently able to apply for.
- 3.7 The museum collection currently occupies space within Council facilities which, if vacated, could potentially be put towards other uses, or to provide income or capital receipts. The facilities currently housing elements of the museum collection include North Herts Museum, Bury Mead Resource Centre (former window manufacturing plant) and the former Letchworth Museum on Broadway Gardens.
- 3.8 The facilities at Bury Mead Resource Centre alone are not large enough to accommodate all of the museum collection and the buildings at this location are in poor condition. Poor storage facilities pose a risk to losing historical records and damaging irreplaceable objects. Other buildings at the site are no longer accessible for safety reasons, though the museum team have taken steps to limit the impact of this on the museum collection.

- 3.9 Most of the collection moved to Bury Mead Resource Centre in the 1980s in what was intended to be a temporary solution at that time. Given the short term nature of the solution, no investment was made at the time to convert the facilities into more appropriate storage for historic objects and there was limited expenditure on repair and maintenance. The collection has remained on this site since this date. The Bury Mead Resource Centre has housed the collection without any form of temperature or humidity controls, other than partial central heating. Officers have taken steps to limit the impact of this on the collection objects by moving elements of the collection to other temporary locations, such as the former Letchworth Museum. However, some deterioration has already been sustained to museum objects as a result of the storage conditions and this is only likely to increase in the coming years. Appendix 5 details the damage, deterioration and mitigating steps officers have taken in years gone by to protect the collection to the best of their ability.
- 3.10 The collection includes social history, geology and archaeology, natural history, textiles, paper archives, records and art. All these collections should ideally be kept at strict temperature and humidity ranges dependant on their characteristics and unique sensitivities.
- 3.11 Other museums also face storage pressures. The most complete modern solutions have taken the form of new purpose-built warehouses with temperature and humidity controls. The facilities have also typically offered an educational and outreach offering to the local community through providing unique access to the storage of the local museum collection, for example:
- Behind the scenes tours
 - Classroom sessions
 - Conservation workshops
 - Academic study sessions

These services diversify the benefits such facilities can provide as they allow the community to get hands-on with the collection and discover the ongoing work to preserve the history of the region, expanding the range of social benefits and services a museum service can provide. Such activities not only enhance services but help to inspire and train the curators and archaeologists of tomorrow. None of this is currently possible at the Bury Mead Resource Centre which is at full capacity and not suitable as an outreach and engagement offering.

4. Financial Context and General Assumptions

- 4.1 Where the Council incurs capital expenditure that it cannot immediately fund, through capital receipts or external funding, then it must make a charge to its revenue budget known as a Minimum Revenue Provision (MRP). This allocates the cost of the asset over its useful life. For example, spend of £1m on a new building (presumed to have a useful life of 40 years, the maximum such investments can be spread over) would be a cost of £25k per year. Capital expenditure either reduces investment returns that could have been generated or requires external borrowing. Currently the cost of external borrowing is around 5% per year, so spend of £1m results in an additional annual cost of £50k. Every £1m of spend on a new building is, therefore, a revenue cost of the interest, plus MRP ie a total of £75k per year (every year for 40 years).

- 4.2 This report also seeks to compare the differing capital and revenue requirements, and timelines of the options to enable comparison. A recommendation is provided based upon the research gathered, however colleagues in finance will add further financial input before the next steps are finalised, including the wider financial considerations facing members and the competing priorities requiring funding across all areas of the Council.
- 4.3 The disposal of the Bury Mead Road site could generate a capital receipt of around £500K. If it was cleared of all buildings and left with a levelled hardstanding surface it is expected to generate an income of around £50,000 per annum as a secure yard. The cost of demolishing the existing buildings and levelling the site would require the services of a Quantity Surveyor to fully quantify. However, from experience, officers have estimated the approximate cost of this work to be in the region of £30-50K. Should half the site be available as a result of a museum storage solution being built on part, but not all of the land then it is reasonable to assume that the above figures would roughly half in value. If the current site layout should remain in its current form, then this currently comprises a separate raised, self contained area with perimeter fencing, which could be let for around £12 to £15k per annum.
- 4.4 Should the chosen option involve redevelopment of the existing site and facilities, the museum collection may need to be temporarily housed elsewhere for a period of up to 2 years. Based on previous quotes the cost of moving and storing the museum artifacts temporarily is estimated to be between £70,000 to £200,000 depending on whether the artifacts can be stored at a property owned by the Council, such as the former Letchworth Museum or whether it is necessary to pay for specialist storage. A lesser cost may apply to some of the other options for the wholesale relocation of the museum collection, though these costs are difficult to accurately predict and would need to be investigated further depending on the option pursued.
- 4.5 In addition, the cost to fit out any space will vary depending upon whether a roller racking system is introduced or a more basic storage system is used. The cost of a roller racking system and other fit out works such as desks etc may be in the order of £200,000 but the cost of this would need to be considered against the reduced space requirements needed. The cost of the fit out would be accounted for in the year the money was spent.
- 4.6 The Council's Climate Change Strategy outlined later in this report promotes the aim that the activities of the Council should be as environmentally sustainable as possible. To this end, a sum of money has been suggested to upgrade any building acquired to achieve net zero carbon emissions (where this is considered possible). The best general indication of this figure, which will vary depending on the age of any building acquired or leased, is in the region of an additional 15% cost as a proportion of the overall cost for building a new building to this standard as opposed to current building regulation standards. As the achievement of net zero carbon emissions is not possible for all options considered, this has been identified as an additional sum where such action is applicable.
- 4.7 Consideration should also be given to the possibility of grant funding towards this project. Appendix 6 details the possible grant funding sources and the criteria for the larger grants identified. Whilst grants are available, the application process for most large value grants is highly competitive and the informal advice officers have received to date is that a project to resolve storage issues lacks the more tangible deliverables

of other grant project submissions. Officers have previously applied unsuccessfully for a number of grants for storage requirements but an ongoing review of potential funding opportunities continues.

5. Options Explored

5.1 Several options have been explored by officers to provide as full and complete an options appraisal as possible and these are set out below and grouped into categories. The options recommended not to take forward, based on the work to date and with member engagement, are shown in italics and greyed out below.

5.2 The Low cost short term options are as follows:

- *Option A - 'Do nothing': which is included to provide a baseline for comparison.*
- *Option B - 'Make do for now': Prolong the life of the existing facilities for a further 5-10 years. This will involve carrying out the minimum work necessary to keep the building wind, watertight and operational but would not address risks to collections and staff, in addition to providing no capacity for further acquisitions.*
- Option C - '*Renovate or enhance the existing facilities*': Renovation of the facility at Bury Mead Road by removing internal walls to create a more open and useable space has been explored, supplemented with additional storage by way of portacabins or modular temporary structures on site or alternatively by adding a mezzanine at Unit 3 City Park, Letchworth Garden City. None of these options would be considered as suitable long term options and risks to the collections would remain as a result of gradual deterioration brought about by the environmental conditions.

5.3 The high cost, long term options are as follows:

- Option D - '*New build at the existing site*': Construct a new build facility at Bury Mead. This was explored via the SCAPE procurement framework, from which Ashe Construction, based in Hitchin, produced an indicative feasibility report and cost plan, and through engagement with consultants over a more standardised single storey steel portal frame approach.
- Option E – '*Purchase of a freehold/long leasehold*': An option which may be available on the market. This could potentially be split into two parts with the purchase of a site with a contract for construction of a new building or the acquisition of an existing building which would need to be adapted to suit.
- Option F – '*Lease a building as an alternative to purchase*': It would depend on a building of the right size or larger being available on the market. An alternative to this option would be leasing a property from an owner who is prepared to renovate a dilapidated building to suit the Council's requirements.

5.4 The alternative or partnership options are as follows:

- *Option G – 'Explore whether there are any suitable buildings owned by the Council': Could any facility or facilities be made available to accommodate the museum storage.*

- Option H – *‘Explore a partnership solution’*: Pursue discussions with another museum provider in the district to provide a shared facility.

6. Limitations

- 6.1 This report is intended to aid onward decision making and narrow down the options. Further work will then be completed before final decisions are taken on the way forward.
- 6.2 Additional costs of occupying an alternative property such as rates and utility costs cannot be calculated at this stage until full details are available.
- 6.3 As previously mentioned, the costs of fitting out and moving costs can only be estimated at this stage and will vary depending on whether a roller racking system is installed for example or a more basic storage system. The precise climate control requirements are also unknown at this stage.
- 6.4 The aim of this report is to provide a high-level overview to enable a recommendation to further pursue one or more options in greater detail which may involve additional expenditure on external consultants to work up full costings.
- 6.5 This options appraisal is not, therefore, intended or able to accurately define the final costs of each option, but to give an indicative range of the costs of each option to help inform the next steps in the decision-making process.
- 6.6 Consideration of the Council’s Climate Change Strategy is a key aspect. Whilst a new build solution is likely to present the best route to meeting the Council’s desired environmental targets, it may also be possible to achieve this via a comprehensive refurbishment and retrofit of an existing building and in both instances, it may be possible to buy or lease the completed building.
- 6.7 Many options explored have alternative uses or possibilities for future use, which this report does not cover. For instance:
 - The onward renovation and future use of Letchworth Museum
 - The use of the land at Bury Mead, either alongside a museum storage solution or the full use of the site if the collection storage is relocated elsewhere.
 - Any commercial use of Unit 3 and the IT infrastructure considerations which would need to be made to unlock this.
- 6.8 To make the report as objective and comparable as possible, several assumptions have been made as follows:
 - The museum storage solution must be within the district boundary.
 - The minimum the Council aims to achieve is to vacate Letchworth Museum to facilitate the onward sale or letting of the property.
 - Assuming a modern, condensed storage method (such as roller racking) is applied, the minimum museum storage the Council aims to facilitate is 550m² (for the current size of the collection). However, this is increased to 650m² for options

requiring a large or long term financial investment to allow for future expansion to be incorporated. Given that any facility would also require a limited amount of circulation space, toilets and office/desk space as a minimum, the overall minimum footprint of any solution will need to be around 750m² (8,073sq ft).

- The options include acquiring, letting or renovating a new or existing building and the current building regulation standard and energy performance of each option will vary. Any additional investment to achieve greater environmental standards can only be considered as a provisional sum at this stage without detailed investigation.
- 6.9 Another consideration is the wider storage pressures facing the organisation as a whole. This report does not detail the storage pressures facing other departments but highlights the Council does not currently have permanent solutions for the storage of various other items. Such items include ballot boxes and voting booths, along with surplus office furniture and is currently stored across various temporary storage locations, including the ground floor of the former Letchworth Museum. In addition, the archives and IT servers are currently stored at Unit 3, City Park, Letchworth Garden City and occupy a significant floor area. With the exception of the IT servers, all of these elements of Council storage could be relocated elsewhere and possibly combined with the future museum storage solution. Should members wish to evaluate the wider council storage pressures then it is understood that a subsequent report will be required.
- 6.10 The possibility of a partnership project has been raised in the past with various approaches made to prospective partner organisations. This has not previously resulted in any clear interest until recent communication with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, which is outlined in the option below. The organisations approached are as follows:
- Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation
 - Herts County Council
 - All of the 9 other Local Borough and District Councils in Hertfordshire
- 6.11 Additionally, it should be noted that there are discussions at a county level regarding the possibility of a county-wide archive. North Herts could benefit from such a project, however discussions have been progressing for several years without any firm agreement. If a new county archive were to come to fruition, officers understand that this would be for the deposition of archaeological materials and not for general museum collections. Consequently, such an archive would only offset around 10% of the North Herts Museum storage requirements and NHDC would still require a long-term storage solution for the rest of its collection.
- 6.12 The Arts Council have stripped other museum services of their accreditation, predominantly as a consequence of decision making over the selling or voluntary destruction of collections. Officers are not aware of the Arts Council removing accreditation due to storage falling into disrepair, but this remains a significant risk, especially in the event an item (or items) of high value or importance sustaining damage or complete destruction as a result. Museums are required to periodically renew their accreditation documents and can be inspected as was the case at the former Letchworth Museum several years ago. If collections are considered to be at

risk due to unsuitable storage conditions, this heightens the risk of accreditation coming under threat in such instances.

- 6.13 For the reasons stated, officers have attempted to provide a menu of options, with as much clarity as possible without incurring excessive fees pursuing all options.
- 6.14 Finally, the major limitation for leasing or acquiring a completed building will depend upon what is available on the market at that point in time.

7. Climate Change Strategy

- 7.1 In 2019, the Council passed a motion to declare a Climate Emergency. In this motion the council pledged their commitment to do everything within its power to make North Hertfordshire Carbon Zero by 2030. This declaration asserted the council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements.
- 7.2 This revised Climate Change Strategy updates the Council's plans and commitments to build on the results of the work with the community and with other Councils across Hertfordshire. It firstly sets out what the Council will do to reduce its own carbon emissions to achieve a carbon neutral position by 2030. It then sets out what will be done to help achieve a net zero carbon district by 2040, both by creating policies which enable others to reduce their emissions, and by encouraging residents and businesses to reduce their own carbon emissions.
- 7.3 As a result of the ambitions detailed within the Climate Change Strategy, officers have ensured that each option has been considered not solely from a financial and museums/outreach perspective, but also from an environmental standpoint. The Council has strived to do all within its power to seek out environmental benefits and reduce its impact through its various activities, but this is balanced against the budget pressures and practical considerations of each option.

THE OPTIONS

- 8. **Option A – Do Nothing This option has been investigated but is not considered to be one of the preferred options as it does not change the current situation and does not release the former museum in Letchworth Garden City.**

OPTION A - COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 8.1 *The facility is not fit for purpose, with limited climate control and some of the artifacts are likely to deteriorate with a possible loss of the Museum's accreditation if conditions are not improved. In addition, the artefacts are currently split between Bury Mead Road and the former Letchworth Museum. Spreading a museum collection across multiple facilities and geographic locations is detrimental to its access, management and public engagement opportunities.*
- 8.2 *Were the decision made to continue using the Bury Mead site in its current form without any further investment or increase in capacity it would have a detrimental impact on the collection with accessioned items coming under threat or irreparable damage.*
- 8.3 *This in turn, with no plan to address and correct the situation, could lead to a loss of accreditation from the museum collection being put at risk of avoidable harm.*

8.4 *Loss of accreditation and deterioration of objects we have been entrusted to preserve on behalf of the public would lead to reputational damage.*

OPTION A - ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

8.5 *This does not change the current situation and does not release the former museum in Letchworth Garden City for sale or letting.*

OPTION A - FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

8.6 *This option involves minimal costs beyond that which are already incurred in the form of rates and utilities.*

9. Option B - Prolong the life of the existing facilities for a further 5-10 years. This option has been investigated but is not considered to be one of the preferred options as it is only a short-term measure which prevents further dilapidation of the building. It does not release the former museum in Letchworth Garden City and it does not provide a longer term solution to the existing storage pressures.

9.1 *The details of this option have been informed through a planned preventative maintenance survey of the existing facility. This option is intended to maintain the existing facility at its current standard and prevent any further dilapidation.*

OPTION B - COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

9.2 *This option is to undertake the minimum action required to keep the building useable for the next 5-10 years to preserve the current storage conditions of the artefacts, although there would be no environmental stability in terms of temperature and humidity and there would still not be enough room to store the full extent of the collection on one site. The collection would remain at risk of harm from the sub-standard environmental conditions within the current facilities, although officers would do all that they could to mitigate the environmental conditions during this period.*

OPTION B - ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

9.3 *This option has limited estates considerations as it has no impact on any wider property considerations.*

OPTION B - FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

9.4 *The cost of carrying out works to keep the building useable for the next 5-10 years is estimated to be £39k per year in terms of the calculated net annual revenue impact. There are a number of high priority works identified within the report including a new external render and extensive replacement of the existing windows.*

10. OPTION C - Renovation of the existing facilities.

10.1 Four variations on this solution were considered as part of this options assessment: Remodelling the existing primary facility, investing in shipping containers, investing in portacabins or modular solutions or installing a mezzanine floor at Unit 3, Works Rd Letchworth. These options have been considered as the most affordable ways of

addressing the overall storage capacity pressures, whilst stopping short of delivering the ideal environmental stability for museum collection objects.

OPTION C – COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.2 Retrofitting the largest building on the site is one option that officers have engaged with the construction sector to explore.
- 10.3 The footprint of this facility is 470m² split over two floors, which is still short of the 650m² target floor area. However, the inefficient use of space and subdivision of the areas within this building further impact its ability to effectively store the museum collection in as small a space as possible.
- 10.4 It is accepted practice within the sector that the pursuit of efficient use of space is maximised by introducing roller racking to storage areas, which is mobile storage racks stemming from a single aisle through which each rack can be accessed in turn.
- 10.5 The option of remodelling the primary building on the Bury Mead site will not allow us to improve the environmental conditioning of our objects or of the building. However, it would be an improvement on the existing storage conditions.
- 10.6 If the remodelling option were to be selected, then the museum collection would also need to move location to facilitate the construction works on the site. The most economical way in which to facilitate this is to make use of the former Letchworth Museum site in Broadway Gardens, Letchworth and to supplement this with other temporary storage solutions such as rentable storage space or shipping containers on a temporary basis for some of the less sensitive items in the collection.
- 10.7 If parts of the collection were to be moved into a shipping container style structure then they would be highly likely to come to harm. Shipping containers, though relatively inexpensive as a storage option, suffer problems with condensation and a government indemnity advisor has also cautioned museums that these can be the target of theft. These containers can be treated to provide limited improvements to their environmental profile, however the standards would vary and they would be far from ideal as museum storage solutions.
- 10.8 If porta-cabins or modular solutions were to be pursued then these could represent an improved possibility over and above the shipping container option however these are more expensive, especially in the form of a hire arrangement and are still susceptible to a lack of environmental stability. Bought or hired from new, these become very expensive compared to conventionally built solutions. Second hand options can be sourced but these are an unknown quantity and generally of lesser quality. Costs in the second hand market vary but this is not seen as a sensible solution due to the number of unknown factors such as the environmental stability they can deliver.
- 10.9 A mezzanine floor has also been considered at unit 3. The conditions at unit 3 are not considered ideal however it is considered that this solution perhaps represents the best way in which to increase the storage capacity for the museum collection and relieve some of the pressure in the short term. The other disadvantage to this particular solution is that the collection would still be split across multiple locations.

- 10.10 None of these options would resolve the long term collections storage and this would need to be revisited in the future to explore a long term solution. In addition, objects such as fine art and textiles could come to harm if any of these solutions were selected.

OPTION C – ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.11 The removal of beams and columns from the existing building structure would be needed to create clear floor space to allow for the installation of roller racking.
- 10.12 This option would involve detailed investigation by a structural engineer to ensure that it will support two floors of roller racking and the weight of the museum collection. It will also require the stripping back and rerouting of services. It would be extremely difficult and costly to achieve a building that had a satisfactory EPC rating let alone one that looks to achieve a net zero carbon building.
- 10.13 Even an extensive renovation will not fulfil the overall storage footprint required to safeguard the future of the museum collection. As a result, this solution alone will not solve the museum pressures but could help to relieve them in tandem with another scaled down solution in the form of one of the other options.
- 10.14 However, advice from the private sector, including Ashe Construction, has strongly suggested that this is not considered to be a viable option. The building is not considered suitable for renovation to comply with current building regulations and any works to address this would require the building being stripped back and altered to such an extent that it appears it would be more economical to demolish and rebuild. Appendix 7 provides the advice received from Ashe Construction.
- 10.15 The most straightforward ways in which basic storage could be expanded in a cost-effective manner are through renting or purchasing portacabins or shipping container-style storage units and placing them on the Bury Mead site.
- 10.16 Additional capacity could also be secured through the introduction of a mezzanine floor at Unit 3, which would provide a second level at that site which could accommodate the overspill of museum objects from Bury Mead.
- 10.17 The installation of additional storage capability by providing shipping containers or installing a mezzanine should enable the former Letchworth Museum to be released for sale or letting following suitable refurbishment and investment.

OPTION C – FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 10.18 All of the solutions costed within Option C would be supplementary to the costs detailed in Option B and as such the overall net annual revenue impact detailed below and in appendix 2 reflects this.
- 10.19 Given the complexities expressed through engagement with the private sector over the option of remodelling the current primary building at Bury Mead, detailed costings were not pursued further.
- 10.20 The cost of providing shipping containers or portacabins is estimated to be between £10k and 20k depending on the quality of the units purchased. Hire options have also been explored, however these represent very expensive options over a long term hire.

- 10.21 A modular solution would deliver preferable environmental stability for the collection however at a cost of £1m to top up the storage capacity on the existing site this represents a prohibitive cost for a short term solution.
- 10.22 If additional storage is provided by the installation of a mezzanine floor at Unit 3 City Park, Letchworth Garden City this will provide an additional 266 sq m of storage and will cost in the region of £103k.
- 10.23 The annual net revenue impact of the renovation and/or provision of additional storage capability will therefore be between £47k and £136k depending on the option chosen. This will result in an increase to the annual museum service budget of between 5% and 19%.

11. Option D – Redevelop the existing site

- 11.1 A redevelopment of the current site has been looked at in the form of an initial Feasibility Report from Ashe Construction. It should be noted that in officers view, an over allowance for circulation and office space has been proposed in this report (overall footprint of 900m² compared to the 750m² minimum working assumption in other options), meaning there are likely to be some savings in the finances proposed if this option is taken forward. However, the Feasibility Report was originally provided 12 months ago, so there may also be some inflation.
- 11.2 The Ashe proposal was based on a purpose-built facility to suit the museum collection with minimal windows and it could not easily be used for any other use. The Estates team have further reviewed this proposal and provided details below for construction of a 750 sq m building on the site, based on a single storey steel portal frame industrial building with an outline specification to provide a high-level costing. Most of the current museum storage buildings could remain in situ whilst a new building is constructed, but this would be subject to further detailed work with associated professional fees. The initial step would be to work up a scheme to a standard where it could be fully costed and submitted for planning permission, as outlined below.

OPTION D – COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.3 As the current buildings on site are falling into a state of disrepair, the most straightforward option to resolving the museum storage pressures would be to redevelop the entirety of the Bury Mead Road site and seek to build a facility which would solve and future proof the museum storage for the foreseeable future.
- 11.4 By building a facility from scratch this facility would avoid the need to compromise on aspects of environmental conditioning or space as demonstrated with later options and would ensure that North Herts is fully addressing the needs of the collection, both in terms of its storage capacity and the stable environmental conditions it would facilitate.
- 11.5 If this option were to be selected, there may be a need for the museum collection to move location, at least in part, in order to facilitate the construction works on the site.

OPTION D – ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.6 The Ashe proposal is predicted to last around 2 years from initial surveys through to obtaining planning permission, mobilisation and final construction, so the costs are based on this timescale.
- 11.7 If the Ashe Construction option was to be progressed the next steps would be to sign a pre-construction services agreement which would commit the Council to a spend of around £400k and lead to a fixed design in approximately 3 months' time. This would include the full cost of working up a scheme to a detailed design along with all the necessary surveys and investigations required. Prior to moving forward with the planning process and construction a revised cost plan for the facility, factoring in any other costs arising from the preliminary surveys, would also be presented.
- 11.8 We have obtained outline cost estimates from three building surveyors based on a single storey steel portal frame industrial building with adaptations to suit the museum storage facility. Reviewing these indicates a professional fees budget required to work up a scheme to a standard suitable for a planning application in the sum of £30,000. This fee would include consultant's fees for a scheme that could be submitted for planning permission and provide us with a detailed building construction estimate which would be reported back to Cabinet prior to the submission of a planning application.
- 11.9 Once realised, this option would leave no remaining museum storage at Letchworth Museum, facilitating the letting or sale of that property along with clearing the area at the front of the Bury Mead Road site for some form of alternative commercial venture.
- 11.10 During the feasibility investigations with Ashe the costings of a second storage facility for commercial and private storage was explored. Officers from the Enterprise team engaged with a consultant to look at the possible return on investment from such a venture along with the local competition. Through these investigations the surplus space available on the site was not sufficient to generate a return on investment, even when this was spread over a 40-year timeframe.
- 11.11 Whilst the intention of utilising the surplus land for a commercial and private storage facility has been discounted, any surplus land at the front of the site after redevelopment could still be let as open storage which would involve minimal upfront cost whilst generating an income for NHDC. This land could be explored as a possible storage solution for the wider Council, as officers are aware that there are further storage pressures in other departments such as Democratic Services.
- 11.12 The original costings put forward to Political Liaison Board were based on the Ashe Construction proposal as this is a comprehensive proposal including the employment of all professionals and obtaining planning permission and other necessary consents. The fee estimates from the three building surveyors are based on them working as the employer's agent, overseeing external consultants as required and tendering the building contract. This would require early input from Estates and the museum team and ongoing discussion with the employer's agent, but it is intended that the consultant appointed would have primary responsibility to deliver a building that suited the Council's requirements.
- 11.13 As the land and buildings are already owned by the Council this option keeps matters entirely within the control of the council and enables this to be progressed at an early stage, although planning permission and further preparatory work is still required. It

also enables the former Letchworth Museum to be sold or let once a new facility is delivered.

OPTION D – FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 11.14 The construction of a new facility has been costed through a feasibility report compiled by Ashe Construction. This feasibility report assessed the plot of land at Bury Mead Road and proposed a solution on the land available.
- 11.15 The cost of demolition, landscaping, construction and fit out along with all services, consultants' fees and preliminary surveys costed by Ashe Construction is projected to be £3.2m for a facility which meets current building regulations standards.
- 11.16 If the Council wished to ensure this building met net zero carbon in operation, then it was suggested that this would add a premium of approximately £600k to the original cost, requiring an overall investment in the region of £3.8m.
- 11.17 The net annual revenue impact of this option is estimated to be £316,550. However, this could rise further if the total costs of the new build including the upgrade to net zero carbon emissions and relocation costs are considered. A like for like comparison would not be possible if the figures for achieving net zero were included as not all options will facilitate this possibility. Therefore, the estimated costs of achieving this environmental standard, where applicable, have been provided separately for additional consideration.
- 11.18 The other cost estimates to construct a single storey steel portal frame industrial building with adaptations to suit the museum storage facility at Bury Mead Road are in the region of £2,250,000 to include all professional fees, demolition and fit out. However, if Cabinet could approve the spending of £30,000 in professional fees, we can work up a scheme to a standard to more accurately provide a cost estimate and to a stage to enable submission of a detailed planning application. The cost estimate would then include for all professional fees and for the consultant acting as the Employer's agent. This figure would be looked at internally and discussed with procurement to make sure that the building could be delivered in accordance with the Council's procedures and would then be reported back to Cabinet. If a planning application was submitted but it was subsequently decided to pursue another option which presented itself, securing planning permission will potentially make disposal of the site easier to achieve and improve the sale price compared to the site being sold with no permission in place.
- 11.19 The net annual revenue impact of this latest option, once net zero enhancements and the anticipated investment in fit out costs are considered, is estimated to be £200,300 per annum.

12. Option E – Purchase of a freehold/long leasehold building (new or existing)

OPTION E – COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.1 The option of purchasing a new build or existing building is an important comparable for the options appraisal as it enables us to compare option D with properties available on the open market.

- 12.2 Such an option also puts less strain on internal staffing capacity in terms of developing a major capital project whilst arguably there is less overall risk as the facility is either already in existence or is to be constructed by others.
- 12.3 The issue with most existing industrial properties is the limited environmental control and they are typically not well insulated. The collection may still be exposed to changes in temperature and humidity without further investment. If this option were to be pursued then consideration would need to be given on a case-by-case basis as to whether the proposed property offered, or could be adapted to offer, the desired levels of improvement to environmental stability.
- 12.4 Depending on the property concerned, the Council may need to invest further to upgrade insulation, replacing main access doors or perhaps supplemented with a secondary lobby area. Furthermore, some element of heating and humidity control would be required to ensure the collection is managed and maintained effectively and allow staff the ability to configure the internal environment, in line with best practice.

OPTION E – ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.5 If a warehouse/industrial building were to be acquired these are normally of standard construction and are typically equipped with offices and welfare facilities which the museum team would require.
- 12.6 The placement of industrial/warehouse buildings is typically in employment areas which may not be ideal from the perspective of maximising community engagement. This would also be the case for a new development at Bury Mead Road but should be considered in contrast to Option H.
- 12.7 If this option were to be pursued, consideration should be given to potential revenue generation or capital receipt from surplus land and buildings at Bury Mead and possible offset, against the revenue cost of providing the new facility elsewhere.
- 12.8 The availability of suitable buildings or sites on the open market is difficult to predict and NHDC would be competing with others seeking commercial space. As a result, if this is to be the instruction, officers will need to be empowered to act swiftly, subject to agreed due diligence, to seek acquisition of a property which meets the Council's requirements and move through any conveyancing process in step with the committee cycles.
- 12.9 Various sizes of buildings all with their own set of unique considerations in different locations come up for sale on the open market from time to time and it is likely that some compromise will be needed from the Council's ideal specification.
- 12.10 As this would be a high value capital purchase, it is reasonable to aim to achieve an overall floor area of at least 750m², for both the collection and additional circulation/office areas, so that the option can continue to accommodate the museum collection for many years into the future and ensure that the issue is solved on a long-term basis.
- 12.11 In terms of acquiring an existing building either on a freehold or long leasehold basis it is unlikely that a building of exactly the right size will become available on the market, and it will be necessary to look at buildings from 750m² (8,073sq ft) to 930m² (10,000sq ft). In addition, the age and quality of the existing building will vary depending on when it was built. This could produce a wide range of values from

(£1,000 to £2,150 per m²) but against that the refurbishment cost for an existing building of poor quality will be much greater.

- 12.12 It is possible that an agreement could be reached with Urban & Civic for a new build facility on the allocated employment land at Royston Road, Baldock. However, the masterplan for the whole site, including the residential allocation, is currently still in negotiation and it is unlikely that a building will be available for occupation until at least 2026, if not later. This would be built to the latest standards as required under building regulations and if agreement could be reached with Urban & Civic, additional measures could be introduced at the Council's cost to achieve a net zero carbon building.

OPTION E – FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 12.13 Based on today's values a newly completed building of around 750 sq m (8,073 sq ft) is likely to cost between £1.8-1.9M, plus any costs required to fit out and upgrade the building, plus the possible cost of upgrading the building to net zero. A new build property is likely to be built to a standard approaching an EPC (Energy Performance Certificate) A, already an energy efficient rating and detailed consideration would then need to be given as to whether it is necessary to seek an upgrade to net zero. There is of course still the cost of fitting out of the unit and the cost of transferring the artifacts to the new building which will be in the order of £300-400K plus any environmental requirements. Potentially the additional cost could reach £500k but this would need to be reviewed by an external Quantity Surveyor and based upon a specific building. This will have a net revenue impact of £263,700 per annum.
- 12.14 If a good quality existing building of precisely the right size were to be marketed it may prove to be a cheaper option than buying a newly constructed building, even with the cost of upgrading. Without precise details of what it would cost to refurbish an existing building until one has been identified it is difficult to give other than indicative figures. A possible option could cost between £1.8M and £1.9M to acquire. An older building is likely to be more expensive to renovate than a building constructed in the last 5-10 years and the cost of any renovation would need to be carefully considered by an external Quantity Surveyor. However, for indicative purposes at this stage an allowance of between £500k for a newer building ranging to £1M for an older building may be required for fitting out, removal of artifacts and renovation. The total cost may not be that different to acquiring a newly completed building if this proves to be possible.
- 12.15 Officers would require Cabinet to approve the spending of up to £20K in professional fees to assess the suitability of any freehold/long leasehold properties that may be appraised to allow a further detailed report to be considered by Cabinet. This should also include looking at properties under option H.

- 13. Option F – Leasing a building (new or existing) This option has been left as a possibility at this stage although taking a lease of a building would significantly limit the museum team from applying for any grants and the capital cost of environmental requirements and adaption of a leased building will result in an additional revenue impact to the Council on top of the rental payments.**

OPTION F – COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.1 This option has many of the same considerations as Option E in the section above. The way in which the option is funded, along with the risks this introduces over a longer timeframe are the main additional considerations.
- 13.2 The benefit of a rental option is that the Council could fund this from revenue budgets and therefore the costs of borrowing are eliminated.
- 13.3 Should adaptations be required to the building to specifically suit museum storage the freeholder is likely to require these works to be removed at the end of the lease.

OPTION F – ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.4 In the case of a rental, the Council's covenant would be attractive to landlords, and it should be possible to achieve a lease of at least 20-25 years and in some instances, it could be possible to agree a 40-year lease. If a lease of 20 years or more is agreed, we could seek to include suitable break options in the Council's favour only to give the Council flexibility should they wish to reconsider their options in the future. Against this, if a lease of 20-25 years is all that can be achieved then there is a potential risk as to what would happen beyond this timeframe. However, officers would look to ensure that any lease had Landlord and Tenant protection so that there would be limited grounds on which the landlord could require the Council to give vacant possession, but this needs to be highlighted as a potential risk.
- 13.5 There is, therefore, a potential risk that the Council find itself in the same position in 25 years or less, with no permanent home for the museum collection, whilst rents and construction costs will continue to have risen in the meantime.
- 13.6 It may be possible to rent a newly completed building where the Council's requirements may be incorporated at an early stage of the process. Alternatively, the council could seek to rent an existing building which would then be refurbished by the landlord.
- 13.7 We are aware of a dilapidated building situated on a plot of land held on a long lease from the Council. It may be possible to agree terms with the leaseholder for the building to be taken back to the frame and refurbished to suit the Council's requirements. The Council could then lease this for a period of, for example, 40 years subject to break clauses in the Council's favour. This is a two-storey former office building split into separate areas, and it may lend itself to museum storage in a better way than a standard industrial/warehouse building. The building may be refurbished to look more like an industrial property similar in many ways to the Ashe Construction proposal.

OPTION F – FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 13.8 The cost of leasing such a facility will vary depending on whether it is a new build or refurbishment and will cost from £104,000 per annum at the lower end of the size range to around £145,000 per annum for a building of 930m² (10,000sq ft). In addition, there will be a capital cost to alter and upgrade the building depending on the specification.
- 13.9 The cost of altering and upgrading an existing building to make it suitable can only be properly ascertained by an external Quantity Surveyor when a building is identified. The costs will depend on the age and structure of the building. Indicative costs from an article posted by Hollis Real Estate online (April 2023) suggest that a figure of £40 per sq ft or £430 per sq m is reasonable as a central assumption, however the Council may wish to include an allowance to get to net zero which would add up to £400K depending on the size of the building. It would be possible to disregard the

improvements from any future rent review. In addition, to this there will also be the costs of moving the artifacts to the property and the costs of fitting out.

13.10 The net annual revenue impact of this solution is estimated to be £282,775.

14. **OPTION G – Relocate the museum storage to another building the Council owns. This option has been investigated but is not considered to be one of the preferred options as there are no other buildings owned by the Council that are available and suitable for occupation by the museum service for the purposes of storing the museum collection.**

14.1 *Officers have reviewed the availability of existing facilities and land within the Councils portfolio. No land appears to lend itself to the construction of a new facility, whilst most of the existing buildings are already being put to other uses. Appendix 8 provides a list of the properties considered.*

OPTION G – COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

14.2 *If the necessary modifications could be made to an existing Council owned building, or buildings, to deliver a stable internal environment for the collection, then this would be preferable over the current environmental conditions at Bury Mead.*

14.3 *The collection is too large to be accommodated within any individual building available and as such, this would lead to the collection being housed in multiple locations across the district. This would be detrimental to the museum services ability to manage the collection and deliver outreach and engagement offerings.*

OPTION G – ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

14.4 *Excluding buildings of less than 100m², The Council currently owns the following buildings which are either available or could be made available:*

- *Third floor District Council Offices - Circa 325m² (3,500ft²) - This would not be suitable for storage purposes as it is too small and would be expensive when the rates and service charge are factored in. The office nature of the accommodation with windows on both sides would not support the museum storage although it does have air conditioning.*
- *Thomas Bellamy House, Hitchin - 328 sq m (3,528ft²) - Again, this is too small and unsuitable for storage being an older building with separate rooms and no lift.*
- *Charnwood House, Hitchin - This building is already earmarked to become a community hub and is already being marketed as such. It is also too small to accommodate the full collection.*
- *Former Letchworth Museum – Circa 470m² (5059ft²) - Currently used for storage, but is too small to accommodate the full collection and its location means it might be more ideally suited to alternative future uses.*
- *Former Iceland Unit, Churchgate Shopping Centre, Hitchin. This unit is 697 sq m (7,500 sq ft) net which would be big enough for the museum storage, but this is a retail location, and this would not be a permanent solution as Churchgate Shopping Centre is likely to be redeveloped. In addition, there would be rates and service charges to be paid on the basis of it being a retail unit.*

- *First floor above Former Nat West, Churchgate Shopping Centre, Hitchin - This would not be a permanent solution as Churchgate Shopping Centre is likely to be redeveloped.*

OPTION G – FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 14.5 *Due to the lack of details over a specific property on which to base any calculations, a financial view on this option is difficult to provide at present.*

15. OPTION H - Partnership solutions with other museum providers in the district

- 15.1 To explore possibilities for a partnership solution, officers contacted other similar local organisations. The Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation have proposed a partnership solution involving a particular site in Letchworth. These discussions are in their infancy and as such there is a greater level of uncertainty over the financial figures involved with this option than with other options.

OPTION H – COLLECTIONS CONSIDERATIONS

- 15.2 If a partnership project could be undertaken with another museum service then this could represent a good solution from a collections standpoint. Museum collections will have similar general requirements in terms of the need for a stable internal environment, whilst there could be a possibility for crossover and collaboration on any outreach and engagement opportunities.
- 15.3 Access and security risks would need to be considered as the Council may be reliant on another organisation to some extent in terms of the management of the building and the maintenance of any environmental and security working practices/equipment. There is also a greater risk in terms of overall loss of heritage through fires, floods or other disasters by storing multiple museums collections within the same building.
- 15.4 Depending on the agreement and arrangement entered into, Cultural Services officers may also be restricted in their current ease of access to the collection as a result of requirements placed upon them by the partnership organisation. As a result, the intended operational practices expected by either party within a shared facility would need to be agreed in advance of further discussions to ensure these are not overly onerous or unacceptable to either side.

OPTION H – ESTATES CONSIDERATIONS

- 15.5 Other local authorities have been contacted by Anthony Roche regarding their own museum storage needs. None of these have led to discussions which are likely to be productive as any Councils are taking the same approach as North Herts Council and are looking for museum storage to be within their own administrative area.
- 15.6 However, a meeting has recently taken place with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and there may be a possibility of having a joint facility with them. This would be a leasehold situation and the building they highlighted is Vantage Point on Works Road at the junction with Pixmore Avenue in Letchworth Garden City.
- 15.7 This is a building that has been vacant and dilapidated for some time. LGCHF would like to see the building brought back into use and would be prepared to invest in the property if the Council were to take a lease and would be more than happy to grant a term of 40 years in which we would want to build in break clauses.

- 15.8 This was a preliminary meeting, and no floor areas were available, so this would need to be discussed further with LGCHF. LGCHF have suggested they could lease a floor or two when refurbished at an indicative rate of £12 per sq ft plus £5 per sq ft service charge.
- 15.9 The building does need comprehensive refurbishment, but there is a lift shaft in the facility and the building is of solid construction.

OPTION H - FINANCIAL CONSIDERATIONS

- 15.10 This option is estimated to have a net annual revenue impact of £335,325 per annum, though it is worth noting that discussions are in their infancy and this could therefore change.

16. Report Recommendation and Conclusion

- 16.1 Based upon the findings in the report, the recommended options to review in more detail with a view to informing onward decision making are as follows:
- 16.2 Introduction of a mezzanine floor at Unit 3 (Option C) represents the best low cost short term option based upon the research undertaken, though this option also has a number of disadvantages.
- 16.3 If the Council is in a position to make a more substantial investment in order to secure a long term solution then redevelopment of the existing site (Option D) or the purchase of a freehold property on the market (Option E) represent the most favourable ways to achieve this, based upon the research undertaken.
- 16.4 It should also be noted that Option D and Option E would both potentially meet the criteria for eligibility to apply for a National Lottery Heritage Grant. More information on this can be found in Appendix 6.
- 16.5 Although Options F and H are not currently seen as the most advantageous options, the Council is at no disadvantage by retaining these options whilst others are pursued further.
- 16.6 In officers view, the Council does not have an alternative facility within its property portfolio which would be suitable as a solution to solve the museum storage pressures. However, the option of a partnership arrangement with the Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation (LGCHF) does appear to offer a number of unique advantages and officers recommend exploring this possibility further.
- 16.7 In summary, officers recommend the following actions be taken in light of the detail contained in this report:
- That Cabinet note the current projected costs, advantages and disadvantages of each option.
 - That Cabinet approve use of the allocated £4m budget in the current capital programme for this project to develop more detail on the costs of Option D and to acquire the necessary details for a planning application to be made.

- That Cabinet approve use of the allocated £4m budget in the current capital programme for this project to develop more detail on the costs of Option E, should a suitable property become available.
- That Cabinet consider and give approval for officers to apply for grant funding towards the investigations mentioned in these recommendations and recognise the need to align investigations with grant funding timetables in this instance.
- That Cabinet resolve to discount options A, B and G and recommend that they are no longer developed or explored further.
- That Cabinet indicates which of the other options outlined within the report (C and F) should be pursued further and which should be discounted.

16.8 Supporting information in the financial calculations made for all of these options can be found within Appendix 9.

17. Definitions

Carbon Neutrality

This is defined by Oxford Languages, as ‘making or resulting in no net release of carbon dioxide into the atmosphere, especially as a result of carbon offsetting’. Net Zero Carbon is typically held to indicate the same concept, often being described as the balancing of carbon emissions with removal (i.e. you offset or sequester the same amount of carbon emissions that you emit). Though, as The Carbon Trust noted in November 2019, ‘Net Zero’ does in fact lack an official or commonly agreed definition.

Zero Carbon

This is typically considered to mean that there is no emission of carbon dioxide at all from a product or service, with no need for offsetting.

Further Appendices:

2. Executive Summary Grid
3. North Herts Museum Collection Summary
4. North Herts Museum Collection Objects
5. Damage and Deterioration Details
6. Grants and Fundraising Considerations
7. Remodel Advice
8. List of Council Buildings Considered
9. Supporting Financial Calculations

10. Equalities and Environmental Impact Assessment