

**Overview and Scrutiny Committee**  
**6<sup>th</sup> January 2025**

**\*PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

**TITLE OF INFORMATION NOTE: Museum Collection Facility Update**

INFORMATION NOTE OF THE: Culture and Facilities Service Manager

EXECUTIVE MEMBER: Cllr Tamsin Thomas, Executive Member for Enterprise and Arts

PRIORITY: Thriving Communities

**1. SUMMARY**

- 1.1 This Information Note provides an update on the Council project to deliver a new facility to house the museum collection of North Hertfordshire.

**2. STEPS TO DATE**

- 2.1 Efforts to address the deteriorating conditions at the current museum collection facility on Burymead Road, Hitchin have been ongoing for several years with numerous options explored.
- 2.2 In late 2024 a detailed options appraisal was prepared with the intention of gaining support for the pursuit of a small number of specific solutions available and to formally discount other options from consideration.
- 2.3 The options appraisal and accompanying report was taken to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 12<sup>th</sup> November 2024, where members of the committee signalled their support for some options to be discounted, whilst a limited budget was to be allocated for officers to explore some of the leading proposed solutions.
- 2.4 Cabinet approved the discounting of some options and the allocation of budget to pursue leading options on 19<sup>th</sup> November 2024.

Options discounted were as follows:

Option A – ‘Do Nothing’

Option B – ‘Prolong the life of the existing facilities’

Option G – ‘Relocate the museum collection to another council owned facility’

Options where budget was approved to develop further understanding were as follows:

Option D – ‘Redevelop the existing site’

Option E – ‘Purchase of a freehold/long leasehold building’

Options retained to explore further were as follows:

Option C – ‘Renovate the existing facilities’

Option F – ‘Leasing a building’

Option H – ‘A partnership solution with other local museum providers’

- 2.5 One such option which officers explored further was to secure the long leasehold interest in a local suitable property coming to the open market. Unit 1, City Park, Letchworth was one such building and officers were able to use the allocated budget available to carry out due diligence and pull together a business case and report on the

building. This facility was considered to boast a number of distinct advantages over other options. It represented a comparatively cost effective proposition, which both allowed for the long term future preservation of the collection to be secured whilst it also would allow for sufficient contingency in terms of space.

- 2.6 A proposal to purchase the long leasehold interest in Unit 1, City Park was presented to Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 11<sup>th</sup> March 2025 for review and the committee signalled its support of this proposal which was then taken to Cabinet.
- 2.7 Cabinet approved the acquisition of the long leasehold interest of Unit 1, Works Road at its meeting of 18<sup>th</sup> March 2025, with a view to this being converted into the new long term home for the museum collection of North Hertfordshire.
- 2.8 Members of Overview and Scrutiny requested an Information Note and update on the project be presented to the committee at its January 2026 meeting.

### **3. INFORMATION TO NOTE**

- 3.1 The long leasehold interest in Unit 1, City Park has been formally acquired. At the time of acquiring the long leasehold interest, the property had a sitting tenant in place until January 2026.
- 3.2 The Project Board has been formed, and all standard project management documentation has been prepared and is being followed (Terms of Reference, Project Plan, Risk, Lessons and Issues Logs, along with Highlight Reports).
- 3.3 An expression of interest to secure additional grant funded roles to support the project has been submitted and the Council have been invited to submit a full application to be considered further.
- 3.4 A Communications Plan for the project has been drafted and adopted, with outreach and engagement with relevant stakeholders actively taking place.
- 3.5 Officers are in advanced negotiations with a potential contractor to deliver the Professional Technical Services support necessary to advise the Council and take the Project through the design phases. This expertise will allow the output specification as defined by officers to be converted into a technical specification with which to procure a suitable renovation contractor to begin the conversion works.
- 3.6 As the design phase and project timescales will not lead to renovation works starting until the summer, the Council has agreed an extension to the sitting tenants lease, which now concludes in July 2026, allowing time for the design work and procurement of a principal renovation contractor to conclude whilst securing an ongoing income stream in the meantime and avoiding a void period.
- 3.7 An indicative plan for the recruitment and engagement of volunteers to support the project has been drafted, with the intention that this phase of the project will follow on from the renovation.

### **4. NEXT STEPS**

- 4.1 Officers are aiming to appoint the Professional Technical Services team early in 2026.
- 4.2 The Design work and refinement of the technical specification will be born out of the work and supporting surveys this team undertakes. It is intended that this element will conclude around March 2026.

- 4.3 Concluding the design works around March 2026 will facilitate the procurement of a suitable works contractor to deliver against the technical specification created, with a view to appointing this contractor in time to start work shortly after the expiry of the current sitting tenant's lease.
- 4.4 Whilst it is not possible to be exact with regards to further milestones until work on designs and procurement timescales begin to crystallise, an Indicative Top Level Gantt Chart has been included as an appendix and an indication of the milestones is as follows:
- March 2026: Design works conclude.
  - June 2026: Works contractor is procured and mobilised.
  - July 2026: Existing tenant departs and works begin on renovation.
  - August 2026: Collection strand project roles are recruited.
  - December 2026: Volunteers are recruited and trained.
  - December 2026: Works complete on renovation.
  - January 2027 to December 2027/early 2028: Collection relocation takes place.
  - Mid to late 2028: Burymead fully vacated.

## **5. APPENDICES**

- 5.1 The following appendices are included:

Appendix 1 - Indicative Top Level Gantt Chart

Appendix 2 - Aspirational Images

## **6. CONTACT OFFICERS**

- 6.1 Robert Orchard, Culture and Facilities Service Manager  
(and Project Manager – Museum Collection Facility)  
[robert.orchard@north-herts.gov.uk](mailto:robert.orchard@north-herts.gov.uk)  
01462 474287

## **7. BACKGROUND PAPERS**

- 7.1 There are no background papers other than the reports regarding Museum Collection storage pressures presented at the following committees:
- Overview and Scrutiny Committee (12<sup>th</sup> November 2024)  
(<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=3616&Ver=4>)
  - Cabinet (19<sup>th</sup> November 2024)  
(<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=3593&Ver=4>)
  - Overview and Scrutiny Committee (11<sup>th</sup> March 2025)  
(<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=134&MId=3619&Ver=4>)
  - Cabinet (18<sup>th</sup> March 2025)  
(<https://democracy.north-herts.gov.uk/ieListDocuments.aspx?CId=133&MId=3596&Ver=4>)