

## **Museum and Town Hall Project Statement**

I am Steven James Crowley, Service Director – Commercial at North Hertfordshire District Council. I have worked for NHDC since 2001, first as an Operation Manager at Hitchin Swimming Centre and I was the Contract's and Projects Manager when the Museum and Town Hall project was undertaken.

My first involvement in the project was as a Project Advisor in 2012, at that stage I assisted Ros Alwood. I was then asked to take over the Project Management responsibility in September 2012 (approximately, based on the first Highlight report I produced for Project Board).

I have been a qualified Project Manager since September 2003 (nearly 16 years) and have been responsible for project managing or advising on many projects on behalf of the council, these include but are not limited to:-

- Project Manager for the build of three dance studios, replacement of changing rooms to village and air conditioning units £1.6 million. Providing a revenue reduction of £146,000 per annum to the council (2014).
- Project Advisor for capital improvement scheme to Howard Park and Gardens in Letchworth £2.7 million (2012) with £1.84 million from the Heritage Lottery Fund and Big Lottery Fund through the 'Parks for People' scheme.
- Project managed the procurement and tendering of the council's three leisure management contracts on three separate occasions
- Project managed the procurement, tendering and contract management of the council's outdoor markets. Provided in excess of £65,000 per annum revenue savings
- Project managed the 'design and build' of a £5 million wet and dry leisure centre (Royston).
- £1.5 million refurbishment of fitness suite, 2 dance studios, health suite, 4 squash courts and ancillary facilities (2006). Provided £125,000 annual revenue saving to the council.
- £1.5 million refurbishment of a reception area, cafeteria and plant room at one of the council's leisure centres (2007).
- Project Advisor for North Hertfordshire District Council on the introduction of a new waste management system to improve the council's recycling and waste minimisation.

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I am happy to be called as a witness, however this statement provides a general overview which I hope is useful.

When I first got involved in this project I noticed there was tension between members of Hitchin Town Hall Ltd (HTHL) and the Council, however, I tried to put that to one side and do my job. I was most impressed with John Robinsons' (Project Executive) professionalism during meeting, as there were times when representatives from HTHL were very direct and close to being aggressive, however, John always remain calm and professional.

Quite early on in the construction phase we came across an issue which required a storeroom in the Town Hall to be modified due to the current stair case. I sent over architect drawings and explained they had to be turned round quickly and they did. This meant the project could continue without any delays and a small price increase.

Unfortunately the next issue that was identified was the wall that had been built around the stage. This lead at HTHL accusing the council of being in breach of the Development Agreement (DA). From this point the project become very difficult to manage. HTHL wanted access to the site very often to check on the progress, which caused issues with the contractors (Borras, who could be called to provide evidence) as members of HTHL would turn up on site expecting to be shown round. The DA agreement stated HTHL could have reasonable access to the site, however, our contractors felt they were attending site too often which was impacting on their progress.

John Robinson (Project Executive) chaired project meetings and ensured consultants were present when required to ensure technical issues were presented and discussed. However, it wasn't clear if HTHL had the relevant professionals to fully understand the technical aspects. This was apparent a number of times (conduit in main hall and ventilation to name two, other examples can be provided if required) which caused issues and delays on site resulting in increase cost to the project.

#### Conduit and ventilation issue

I was due to show David Leal-Bennett (from HTHL) around site, upon entering the Mountford Hall he asked me why there was a conduit running the length of the hall. I explained it was to house the IT cables and electrics. It was clear that he wasn't expecting this and thought the cabling would have been imbedded in the brickwork. David also noticed the new ventilation which had been installed in the hall (above the balcony) and questioned this, I explained these were shown on the plans, however, he disagreed with me. This resulted in a delay of the project as Listed Building application has to be obtained and works could not progress during this time.

As mentioned above, I think one of the biggest issues was the lack of relevant professionals on HTHL board. I believe this had a major impact on the project as HTHL seemed to focus on the strategic aspects, but did not understand the detail which is where the council ended up disagreeing on, this then lead to significant impacts on the length and cost of the project.

I believe the issue with the wall on the stage was a signification turning point on the project, as from that point the Council and HTHL hardly ever seemed to agree. From my experience, once trust is lost in a project it is very difficult to deliver within the time and cost, and this is what happened with this project.