

North Hertfordshire Museum

Outreach Policy

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North Hertfordshire District Council
Museum Service
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1: Introduction

- 1.1 North Hertfordshire Museum was established on a town centre site in Hitchin as a new venue using the service's existing collections. Delays in opening, initially projected for 2015 but finally achieved in July 2019, led to the intensification of digital engagement as a means of outreach. The museum has three main galleries, a dedicated space for major temporary exhibitions, a display wall for local artists, a local studies library and work area, an education room, shop and café. The Museums Resource Centre at Burymead Road in Hitchin remains the main museum store. North Hertfordshire Museum, and the adjoining Hitchin Town Hall events venue, are managed together as part of North Hertfordshire District Council's Enterprise Department.
- 1.2 The museum team falls under the overall oversight of a Portfolio Holder, currently Cllr Keith Hoskins, with senior management from the Service Director of the Commercial Department, currently Steve Crowley. The Museum and Hitchin Town Hall are managed by and Operations and Facilities Manager, Robert Orchard. The Cultural Services Manager, Ros Allwood, manages the museum service and other cultural support across the district; direct responsibility for the museum building and the collection falls to the Museum Curator and Heritage Access Officer, Keith Fitzpatrick-Matthews, whose role is also to promote the heritage of the district; the Assistant Curator, Matthew Platt, supports the curator with collections care, exhibitions and events. The Learning Officer, Cas Sanders, is responsible for educational work with all age groups and abilities, both in the museum and the community. The part time Digital Engagement Officer, Rebecca Barkus, engages the public with events and activities for both the Museum and Hitchin Town Hall. The Museum Technician, Ian Day, provides technical support for exhibitions, displays, education and events. The museum team benefits from two apprentices. Alison Bates who assists the Learning Officer and Evan Tanswell who assists in digital and social media work for the museum and Hitchin Town Hall. The front of house team comprises four permanent Visitor Services Assistants – Brenda Downie, Alexandra Ioannou, Joelle van Giap and Nicola Viinikka, with a bank of casuals.

2: Ambition

- 2.1 The Museum Service's Mission Statement is "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, past and present, who have lived and worked here. Our vision is to create a welcoming museum that plays an active role in the life of the District."
- 2.2 Any museum should be more than its collections. The objects North Hertfordshire Museum displays and holds in trust for the communities it represents are only one tangible part of the district's heritage. Other elements include the built heritage, the natural environment and the buried archaeology. The museum acts as a public hub where information about these disparate elements is available and, at least partly, interpreted.
- 2.3 As part of its vision, the museum has always promoted a broader understanding of the district's cultural heritage through outreach. Such outreach is not limited to events within the building but includes external activities. They should also include both passive and active/participatory community involvement. Examples of the former might include public lectures, guided walks and so on; the latter might include archaeological test-pitting, investigating the history of specific buildings, or mentoring smaller museums in the district. These types of involvement may also be combined, for instance, a workshop that begins with formal teaching leading on to a practical activity.
- 2.4 The Museum has tried actively to represent different groups through exhibitions dealing with Black History, LGBTQ+ History and so on. We recognise that the district has many diverse

communities and interest groups, which the Service needs to welcome and include in what it offers to users. Such inclusivity is both a means of engaging with the under-represented and a way of educating others about the views and experiences of communities to which they do not belong.

- 2.5 The ambition is to encourage all the communities of North Hertfordshire to engage with the heritage of the district through a targeted programme of outreach activities of different types. The greater the engagement, the more value that heritage will have to the communities that are its stewards and the better they will understand and protect it for future generations. Further, by broadening the disparate communities' appreciation and understanding of each other, the museum can help promote social cohesion.
- 2.6 Disparate communities may feel that large elements of the heritage are not theirs. Recent arrivals in North Hertfordshire may believe that it does not represent their origins; some people may think it pointless to engage with the heritage of minority communities; others may feel that heritage is too intellectual a concept and does not speak to them. A museum must challenge these and similar viewpoints through outreach activities that appeal to the widest audiences possible.
- 2.7 Outreach is an integral part of Museum Accreditation. All museums hoping to achieve this standard are expected to include outreach in their access strategies. The guidance specifies that the museum 'should work with partners to facilitate effective learning experiences, for example special interest groups, local community groups, further education providers or adult learning'. Outreach also contributes to the Arts Council England's Let's Create outcomes of Creative People (Everyone can develop and express creativity throughout their life), Cultural Communities (Villages, towns and cities thrive through a collaborative approach to culture) and A Creative and Cultural Country (England's cultural sector is innovative, collaborative and international).

3: **Organisational Values**

- 3.1 The Museum Service pursues its ambitions by being:
- Interesting, Engaging and sometimes Unexpected – we want to communicate information and knowledge to our audience in ways that will both inform and spark curiosity
 - Approachable – we are friendly and want to encourage our audience to engage with us
 - Trustworthy – there is no doubt that the museum is offering correct information – people believe us, and we are the first place to find out about the history and culture of North Herts
 - Open and Honest – in displays; in dealing with visitors; in our information
 - Friendly and Helpful – staff are happy to engage and go the extra mile
 - Dynamic – a place where there is always something new or different happening
 - The Cultural Hub of the District

4: **Situational Analysis**

- 4.1 The museum's collections fall into discrete categories: Archaeology, Art, Costume, Natural History, Numismatics and Social History. However, they are not separated out in the museum displays, where elements from any collection may be used to tell a specific 'story' or group of 'stories' about the district. Storytelling is an important element in how the museum communicates, both within the building and outside.
- 4.2 All curatorial staff give talks on a variety of subjects to different groups. Some are based on the museum's collection, while others are based on the heritage of the district or more general historical themes that can be illustrated using our collection. Often, talks are given externally

following a request from a special interest group; others are arranged as part of a lecture programme within the museum, mostly using the Learning Centre.

- 4.3 Since the opening of the new museum building in 2019, there has been a small demand for guided tours, both from special interest groups (mainly local history societies) and from young people's groups such as Scouts. Such tours can be formal, informal, partly self-guided or even unplanned.
- 4.4 Curatorial staff are sometimes asked to provide guided walks, both in the historic towns and in the countryside, looking at elements of local heritage and wildlife. These have tended to be reactive, in response to request from external groups. Although there was long a relationship with Hertfordshire County Council's Countryside Management Service and the programmes of health walks it runs, this has fallen into abeyance because of staff changes.
- 4.5 Staff have always provided professional museum support and advice to the smaller museums in North Hertfordshire. This has included mentoring new and often inexperienced staff as well as giving guidance to volunteer-run museums.
- 4.6 Letchworth Museum's schools' loan service was one of the first to be established in the UK and has been operating for almost 90 years. As well as offering loans of objects in a specific collection arranged by subjects aligned to the National Curriculum, the service includes direct outreach in the form of workshops. Schools can subscribe to the service, which covers the whole of Hertfordshire and neighbouring parts of Bedfordshire.
- 4.7 The museum service carried out archaeological excavations from the 1920s, initially as a means of acquiring objects for display. From the 1950s, these excavations came to involve the local community and, by the late 1970s, had become a major element in the Museum Service's outreach. After 2003, they were described as community excavations, as their main reason was to engage members of the public directly with investigating their own heritage. Following the deletion of the Archaeology Officer post in 2017, only small-scale test pit projects carried out at weekends have been possible.

5: **Strategic Objectives**

- 5.1 To play a significant cultural role in North Hertfordshire
- 5.2 To work with local communities to raise our profile and to engage wider audiences
- 5.3 To develop our reputation for learning
- 5.4 To develop cost-effective services

6: **Organisational Goals**

- 6.1 Greater engagement with audiences to improve awareness and outreach
- 6.2 Increase access to the collections, curatorial expertise and knowledge
- 6.3 Broaden interactions with visitors both within the museum and outside
- 6.4 Commercialisation of revenue streams through targeted outreach
- 6.5 To become a valued and trusted part of the North Herts community
- 6.6 To broaden our outreach to reach new audiences
- 6.7 To offer targeted outreach streams

Strategic goal 1

Be proactive in creating a programme/programmes of outreach

How this goal supports the museum's mission:

We aim to improve local residents' understanding and appreciation of their heritage, meeting the People First priority and the Our Environment and Our Places themes of the Council Plan 2022-27.

1. Staff will continue to deliver a programme of outreach designed to broaden access to information about the rich heritage of the district.
2. Staff will use both in person and online channels to deliver this programme.

Strategic goal 2

Be responsive to requests for specific types of outreach

How this goal supports the museum's mission:

Continue heritage outreach offer by continuing heritage outreach

1. Staff will continue to respond to requests from special interest groups for talks on local or broader heritage issues as part of their lecture programmes.
2. Staff will use both in person and online channels to deliver this programme.

Strategic goal 3

Continue to offer informative web-based content

How this goal supports the museum's mission:

Develop the website to offer improved collection records, informative blog posts and other resources

1. Staff will maintain the website as a first port of call for prospective visitors.
2. Aim to develop and maintain the website as the principal source of online information about the heritage of the district.

Strategic goal 4

Provide support to community archaeology projects

How this goal supports the museum's mission:

Continue heritage outreach offer by continuing some community archaeology

1. Staff will support community-based archaeology projects, including survey work, fieldwalking and excavation.

Strategic goal 5

Provide support/advice to smaller museums in the district

How this goal supports the museum's mission:

It enhances our role in promoting the culture of North Hertfordshire

1. Staff will provide advice and support to smaller museums (such as Museum Mentor for Ashwell Museum) when required.