

24th August 2016

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Dear Judi,

RE: NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE MUSEUM AND HITCHIN TOWN HALL

We are writing to you as Chair of Hitchin Committee and to all Hitchin Councillors to formally offer to attempt to broker an arrangement between NHDC and HTH Ltd that would see North Hertfordshire Museum and Hitchin Town Hall fully opened as soon as possible for the benefit of the whole North Hertfordshire community.

We note that NHDC are confident that the Museum can be opened without the new entrance and the building on the land at 14/15 Brand Street. We do not dispute that this can physically be done and that it is one of a number of options available for consideration by full Council. However, we firmly believe that the facility would be compromised without the new entrance, and that other areas of the building would be difficult to access. Before it is too late, we would wish to do all we can to revive the original vision and move on from a long, dragged out, ghastly public battle that serves no one well.

Hitchin Initiative was the organisation that worked on behalf of the Community Groups to obtain the £1million grant and loan funding from SIB (formerly ACF) which bought in the land and buildings at 14/15 Brand Street. It was a proud and emotional moment after years of work by a strong, committed, joint team when the ACF board confirmed their offer of funding. The vision was on the way to becoming reality - a fabulous North Hertfordshire Museum and a saved Hitchin Town Hall – a win,win for NHDC and the community.

It was ACF who understandably insisted that a separate Company be formed to ensure independent governance, and HTH Ltd an entirely separate legal entity was formed. Hitchin Initiative has had no further role in the project. Interestingly members of that initial, committed team included the same key personalities from NHDC and HTH Ltd. that today seem so locked in battle. Those individuals were and remain an integral part of the project and I believe that their continued involvement is key to finding a solution that can be recommended to NHDC Full Council. Individual members of Hitchin Initiative have an understanding of the sometimes complex issues plus have the experience of working on this project with the key individuals from NHDC and Hitchin Town Hall Ltd. We can offer no guarantees regarding a solution but our team can offer the following to assist - impartiality, confidentiality, respect of the individuals involved and understanding of the sometimes conflicting drivers and responsibilities of the organisations.

We fully understand that each of the options available to NHDC will need to be fully costed before Officers will report to full Council for an ultimate decision. At Hitchin Initiative we are committed to using our best endeavours to ensure that one of those options is one that is closest to the original vision and that is proven to be deliverable. Our aim (and we are well aware of what a tall order this is) will be to broker a solution that HTH Ltd and their bankers are able to accept and that Officers can recommend as the preferred option to full Council. From that point the ultimate decision is one for Councillors.

We urge Hitchin Councillors irrespective of political persuasion to promote this offer to fellow District Councillors. We are looking to you to take a lead in breaking what we still see as deadlock, and to be seen publicly to be driving to secure the best value solution.

Kind Regards

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Morag Norgan', with a stylized flourish underneath.

Morag Norgan

Chairman Hitchin Initiative

07710 660060

Given the history of the project briefly outlined above there are clearly cross over and sometimes potentially conflicting positions. For clarity and transparency we make the following comments.

Brent Smith is a Director of both HTH Ltd and HI. He will take no part in the HI negotiating team.

Judi Billing is a Director of HI, serving Cllr and Chair of Hitchin Committee she will take no part in the HI negotiating team.

Morag Norgan, Director and Chairman of HI is a creditor of HTH Ltd, this is in the form of an interest free loan to HTH Ltd