**The North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society**

**Hon. President: Dr. Francis Pryor MBE**

**Chair: Mrs Diane Burleigh OBE**

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Dear Editor,

On behalf of the North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society I express deep concern at the latest affliction to hit the development of the new North Herts Museum.

This Society and its members have been involved with our local museums and their development from the inception of the Society in 1960. We have always worked closely with Museum Service staff, with a lot of the work of our members reflected in the collections and exhibitions.

Of course we regretted that the NHDC did not proceed with its planned Museum Resource Centre project, and found it difficult to accept the closure of two well- loved museums, the Letchworth Museum and Art Gallery, (the main centre for archaeology) and Hitchin Museum. However, we have been persuaded by the expert team that is the North Herts Museum Service that the new North Hertfordshire Museum, planned as part of the re-vitalising of Hitchin Town Hall, would be a truly excellent Museum, of National Class, and of which all of North Herts would be proud. This has, indeed, proved to be the case as the Museum has developed to date. And so it is that our members, and those of many other organisations, have supported the development of the new North Herts Museum and the hard work of its staff.

It is astonishing, then, to find that a charity, established as its objects say “to manage Hitchin Town Hall as a social enterprise to meet the social, recreational, cultural and educational needs of the Beneficiaries (of the charity)”, and which entered into an agreement with the NHDC specifically “to provide a North Hertfordshire-wide Museum and retain Hitchin Town Hall as a first rate community facility”, has now changed the locks on the entrance to the Museum so that the staff are temporarily housed in one of the proposed new galleries, working out of boxes as they attempt to deliver us all a new Museum by the end of the year.

At the moment, as I plough through all of the available documentation, I take no sides in whatever dispute there may be between the NHDC and Hitchin Town Hall Ltd. I hope at least three questions will be answered swiftly; the first is why did the NHDC enter into an agreement with a newly formed Charity, one with no background in raising money or running a community facility, expecting it to raise £1 million pounds and run a business that could repay any loan; the second is why did a Charity borrow nearly £500,000 when it appeared to have no workable plan to repay this sum, let alone to raise further monies as obliged under its agreement with the NHDC? and the third is, why has the Charity denied the Museum Staff access to their office and produced a situation that threatens the National Class status of the new North Herts Museum and possibly delay the opening of whatever museum the staff can salvage from this situation?

Quite simply, Editor, we want our new North Herts Museum as it was planned to be, and we want it now.

Yours sincerely,

(Mrs) Diane Burleigh OBE, Chair, North Hertfordshire Archaeological Society