THE HODDESDON SOCIETY

Charity No 234800

13 February 2020

Dear Councillor Monaghan,

I am writing to you about the proposed closure of Lowewood Museum, Hoddesdon, in June of this year.

As your Cabinet role includes Community Services, you may be familiar with the value museums offer community in terms of enhancing well-being and quality of life. The 2019 Heritage and Society Report produced by Historic England revealed that "*visiting heritage sites is estimated to save the NHS over £193.2 million by reducing demand for GP visits and psychotherapy*". The report reveals people believe investing in heritage is a good use of public money. Moreover, people expect public authorities to lead the protection of our heritage and 66% of UK citizens agree that public authorities "*should allocate more resources to cultural heritage*" and 92% agree that they would be upset if a meaningful place was lost in their area. This is demonstrated locally by the fact well over 3000 people have now signed a petition against the loss of Lowewood Museum.

The cultural loss of this museum would be immeasurable. It will entail the scattering of unique artefacts documenting local history which are of enormous significance to people who live here. A visit to Lowewood takes you on a fascinating journey through history, stretching back to the early settlements in the Lee Valley. The beautiful Georgian building and garden bequeathed to the people of Hoddesdon in 1936 should be maintained for posterity.

The museum has been described as having 'relatively low levels of usage'. This is not the case. The usage figures for 2018/19 reflect this; the total visits number of in person (visits to the museum, event attendance on and off-site, school workshops) was **17,826** of which **8,121** were schoolchildren. The total usage (all of the above plus remote usage, e.g. web and social media engagements, research enquiries) reached **95,988**. Lowewood Museum understands that to succeed a museum must make itself invaluable to the wider community and has indeed kept itself relevant in changing times.

The museum puts on a variety of educational events for people of all ages; it has an integral role to play in educating school children about history and many local schools have benefited from this unique resource over the generations. It has also had a beneficial impact on the health and well-being of the older population connecting the elderly and those suffering from dementia with their memories through the extremely successful 'Memory Boxes' project, subsidised by the Herts Association of Museums.

The museum has played a central role in key heritage projects, attracting funding for the Borough's heritage assets. For example, it obtained £86,900 of National Lottery Heritage Funding for The Pulhams of Broxbourne project (which conserved the brick kiln and puddling mill and produced a touring exhibition) and £68,500 for the Stephen Warner project. These examples show the added value that the Museum can bring to the area.

Lowewood Museum also received Arts Council funding for a prize-winning transformation and won resounding praise from Broxbourne Council as recently as last year. To close its doors in the

Hertfordshire Year of Culture will restrict the number and scope of cultural activities that can take place in Hoddesdon and indeed the borough as a whole, not just this year, but in the years to come.

Whilst there appears to be a financial justification for closing Lowewood Museum, it is worth looking beyond just its running costs; for every £1 invested in a heritage asset, approximately £3.50 of social and economic return is generated, the Envoy Partnership Report of 2017 finds. The cost of reimbursing grants given to the museum and re-distributing the fifty thousand artefacts contained within the museum would also be considerable.

The arguments for safeguarding and enhancing our local heritage are therefore overwhelming.

We request you kindly revisit the decision to close Lowewood Museum.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Day
The Hoddesdon Society.