



THE HODDESDON SOCIETY

Charity No 234800

thehoddesdonsociety@gmail.com

13 February 2020

Dear Councillor

Closure of Lowewood Museum

We are writing to urge you to take what steps you can to ensure that the decision to close Lowewood Museum is revisited, for the following positive reasons:

1. **Its outreach programmes offer real value to the Borough's schools and most vulnerable residents**

Extraordinarily, the report on Lowewood placed before the Cabinet in December did not refer at all, except in the Equality Act section, to the rich outreach programmes. The report made no assessment of the benefits these programmes offer the Borough's schools, the elderly and dementia patients, and it provided the Cabinet with no information about them. Many Councillors may not be aware that these successful programmes exist.

We have obtained usage figures for 2018/19 from Epping Forest District Council (EFDC) confirming that **8,121** school pupils benefited from the educational outreach programme (which offers a variety of workshops both in and off site) in that year. In the same period, Hertford Museum had only 1,600 individual pupil visits for its school programme (which is offered at a cost). The Council did not carry out any consultation with schools to understand the value they place on this programme and the impact of closure.

The Museum plays a supportive role in the Borough's residential and nursing homes, through its outreach programme for the elderly and dementia sufferers. Lowewood is a museum which is at the forefront of the relatively new understanding of the value museums can offer in terms of healthcare and wellbeing.

Lowewood Museum has actively and successfully engaged with the changing world for museums (as many have not). The outreach programmes reach over 12,000 individuals per year (including the schools figure above). This is real value and represents a good return on the Council's current investment. These programmes genuinely make a difference to the lives and experiences of your constituents, and they are valued by them.

Lowewood Museum should be something that the Council is very proud of, and publicises far and wide. It is difficult to understand why the Council makes so little of the fantastic outreach work that complements its own policies on education, social cohesion, health and wellbeing.

2. The museum has been described by the Council as having “relatively low levels of usage”. This is not the case.

The usage figures for 2018/19 are as follows:

- Total visits in person (visits to the museum, event attendance on and off-site, school workshops): **17,826** (of which **8,121** were schoolchildren).
- Total usage (all of the above plus remote usage, e.g. web and social media engagements, research enquiries): **95,988**

Lowewood Museum has kept itself relevant and understands that to succeed a museum must make itself invaluable to the wider community.

3. Closure would – unacceptably – leave our Borough with no other repository for local history and heritage

This would be a shameful state of affairs in a relatively wealthy and well-run borough the size of ours.

Your constituents place value on their heritage and history. Museums contribute to communities' sense of shared history and identity: as Sir Antony Gormley said in his letter to you, they are “a *unique and critical part of any community's] ability to inspire and educate*”. Losing our only heritage centre would be an immeasurable loss to the Borough, its residents, and its schools.

4. The Museum actively attracts funding to the Borough and would continue to do so

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 Warne r project. These examples show the added value that the Museum can bring to the area.

5. Our Borough can afford to keep Lowewood if it chooses to do so

The Council said in February 2019 that its 2019/20 budget was balanced and it “*therefore continues to reap the benefits of its self-sufficient financial position, allowing [it] to fund expenditure without having to cut or reduce service levels*”. In the 2018/19 accounts it was stated that the Council would be able to “*balance its annual budget for the foreseeable future as well as being able to continue to make a significant contribution to its capital programme*”. There was a £2m revenues surplus in 2018/2019.

We do not understand why the report on Lowewood paints a conflicting picture of the Council's finances, because our questions on this have not been answered.

The usage figures above show the value Lowewood Museum provides to the Borough's schools and elderly. There is a wider value to our communities that cannot be measured but is invaluable. If these aspects are valued by the Council in the way they are valued by your constituents, then we do not doubt that the funds to run Lowewood could be found.

Please support the campaign to save Lowewood Museum and do what you can to ensure that this unique community resource is preserved for future generations.

Yours sincerely

Guy Lipyeat
Chair

Nicola Cowan
Secretary