



# THE HODDESDON SOCIETY

Charity No 234800

11 February 2020

Dear Councillor Hutchings

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

As your portfolio for the county includes Public Health, I'm sure you are familiar with the immense 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.

The cultural loss of Lowewood 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 should be maintained for posterity.

Lowewood Museum puts on a number 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 decision to close Lowewood Museum was arrived at prematurely, without adequate consultation of the public and particularly of local interest groups, such as The Hoddesdon Society and The Friends of Lowewood Museum, who were not given the opportunity to address the council on the topic of closure.

It is my understanding that Hertfordshire County Council were not consulted on closure despite many of the museum's activities being financially supported by regional organisations, including the Herts Heritage Fund, SHARE Museums East and the Herts Association of Museums Service. It follows therefore that a decision of such import should not be made by just five councillors that make up Broxbourne Council's Cabinet since this cultural and heritage centre has significance beyond the borough's boundaries.

Lowewood Museum 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 would be a very poor decision which will restrict the number and scope of cultural activities that can take place in Hoddesdon and indeed the county as a whole, not just this year, but in the years to come.

I note with commendation Hertfordshire County Council's commitment to our cultural heritage through its grants and subsidies to museums in the area. Whilst Broxbourne Council cite financial reasons for closing Lowewood Museum, it is worth looking beyond 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 arguments for safeguarding and enhancing our local heritage are therefore overwhelming.

As the county councillor representing Hoddesdon North, please prevail upon Broxbourne Council to make a similar investment in preserving our heritage for future generations. I do hope Hertfordshire County Council can share their expertise in successfully supporting and running museums in the county with Broxbourne Borough Council, in order to safeguard our valued cultural and heritage centre for future generations.

Yours sincerely

Caroline Day  
The Hoddesdon Society