THE DACORUM HERITAGE TRUST LIMITED

Outline Proposal for a Heritage Centre at The Bury, Queensway, Hemel Hempstead

Current view of The Bury, Queensway, Hemel Hempstead

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1. Our Vision

A thriving heritage centre that acts as a hub for the community, preserving the rich cultural heritage of the region through excellence in collection care and active engagement to share the region's stories with, for and by its communities.

Proposal purpose: This document asks Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) to support an Agreement in Principle that enables The Dacorum Heritage Trust Limited (DH) to develop a fully costed, fundable and deliverable proposal for The Bury. The request is designed to be low risk for the council at this stage: it does not ask DBC to commit capital funding before surveys, design work, business planning and external funder due diligence have been completed. Instead, it asks the council to unlock the next stage of work so that the future of a vacant Grade II* civic asset can be tested properly, transparently and in partnership.

2. Executive Summary

This proposal sets out a comprehensive, strategic framework for DH to acquire the Grade II* listed building, The Bury, through a Community Asset Transfer with the support of grants (e.g. a National Lottery Heritage Fund (NLHF) grant). Vacant since 2016, this precious, landmark asset can be transformed from an active maintenance liability for the council into a thriving, self-sustaining cultural museum, archive and community centred facility. By providing a unified, permanent home for Dacorum's extensive historical collections, the building will serve as an educational and cultural anchor for Hemel Hempstead's Old Town, driving the local economy and building civic pride.

Crucially, this proposal represents a structural evolution from the unsuccessful 2018 NLHF capital application made by Dacorum Borough Council (DBC) in support of DH. Rather than seeking public money to fund a park café with some traditional-style exhibition rooms, this updated framework delivers a highly secure, completely self-contained community business model. It unifies all of DH's administrative, exhibition, and archival storage functions under a single roof, while reducing ongoing financial risk to the council.

To unlock this vision, DH does not require an immediate financial commitment from Dacorum Borough Council (DBC). Instead, we are requesting a formal **Agreement in Principle (Heads of Terms)** for a future freehold transfer or a long leasehold (125+ years) at a nominal or reduced fee, alongside a designated exclusivity window. This Agreement in Principle and exclusivity window will give DH the necessary leverage to unlock a project development grant from potential funders (e.g. the NLHF), which will fully fund the building condition surveys, architectural planning, and business development required before a final capital bid is made to funders and the works on site then undertaken. In return, once the renovation and build have been completed, DH will completely vacate the Museum Store at the Civic Centre site in Berkhamsted, leaving DBC entirely unhindered to pursue its full regeneration plans for that key asset.

Why this should matter to the council during Local Government Reorganisation: this proposal gives DBC a practical, low-risk route to protect a high-profile listed asset, reduce future holding costs, unlock regeneration value at Berkhamsted and strengthen Hemel Hempstead's cultural identity. It aligns with the council's published priorities around community engagement, vibrant communities, a sustainable future, clean, safe and green

places, and a proud and thriving borough, while responding to the LGR need for disciplined asset management, clear accountability and visible public benefit.

The central proposition is simple: DBC can make a controlled enabling decision now, retain appropriate gateway oversight, and allow DH to test deliverability through external funding, professional surveys and full business planning. If the project proves viable, the council gains a sustainable future for The Bury, releases pressure on the Berkhamsted Civic Centre site and demonstrates proactive stewardship during a period when public assets and local accountability will be under heightened scrutiny.

3. Organisational Status

The Dacorum Heritage Trust Limited (DH) formally submits this proposal. Founded in 1993 out of the Dacorum Museum Advisory Committee, DH is a registered charity (No. 1026161) and a fully Accredited Museum by Arts Council England (Museum No. 1594). For over three decades, the Trust has served as the officially recognised custodian of the borough's rich material history, providing services to DBC initially in return for an annual grant and latterly pursuant to a Service Level Agreement. Unlike un-constituted community groups or temporary campaigns, DH operates with a deeply mature corporate structure, featuring strict financial oversight, an established volunteer network, and professional, audited accounting frameworks.

Over recent years DH's governance and operational models have undergone a major strategic expansion. The Board of Trustees has been intentionally restructured to onboard professional experts in commercial property development, public sector accounting, regulatory museum curation, and law. This professionalisation guarantees that the charity possesses the commercial acumen and organisational capacity to take on full, long-term stewardship of a complex, historic real estate asset. A Museum Manager has also been appointed to as chief operating officer.

As a trusted partner to the local authority, DH currently manages over 132,000 catalogued historic objects, ranging from Palaeolithic tools and Roman villa excavations to post-war industrial machinery from Hemel Hempstead's New Town era – over 6000 years of the borough's history. By taking over The Bury, DH will bring its proven collections management expertise, professional curation standards, and independent grant-funding eligibility to a facility that can finally release these treasures from deep storage and return them to the public realm.

This organisational maturity is important for DBC because the proposal is not based on aspiration alone. DH already holds the professional status, governance framework, collections expertise, charitable purpose and local credibility required to steward a complex heritage asset. The development phase would allow these strengths to be tested further through independent surveys, professional design work, full business planning and funder scrutiny before any final transfer or capital project proceeds.

4. Strategic Fit with Local Government Reorganisation

Local Government Reorganisation creates both uncertainty and opportunity for DBC and its successor authority. During transition, councils will need to demonstrate disciplined asset management, protect public value, avoid avoidable liabilities, and make decisions that can

withstand scrutiny by residents, members, officers, external auditors and future unitary structures. This proposal is framed deliberately as an enabling decision rather than a final capital commitment, making it suitable for the LGR environment.

The proposal aligns with the main tests that local government will face during reorganisation: whether decisions simplify delivery, reduce duplication, support financial sustainability, protect strategically important assets, strengthen community confidence and leave the future authority with fewer unresolved liabilities. By moving The Bury from vacancy into a funded development pathway, DBC would avoid leaving a complex heritage asset as a problem for the next structure to inherit.

The project also provides a credible model of localism within a larger unitary context. As local government becomes more consolidated, there is a risk that communities perceive decision-making as more distant. A community centred heritage centre at The Bury would demonstrate that strategic reorganisation can sit alongside genuine place-based delivery, local identity, civic participation and community ownership of outcomes.

For the council, the key advantage is that the decision can be structured with clear gateways. An Agreement in Principle and exclusivity period would not require DBC to underwrite the full project. Instead, it would allow DH to secure external development funding, commission independent technical work, test the business model, identify maintenance liabilities, assess planning and conservation constraints, and return to the council with a fully evidenced case before any final transfer or long lease is completed.

This makes the proposal particularly defensible in the LGR period: it preserves options, does not pre-empt due diligence, creates a transparent route to evidence-based decision-making, and positions DBC as an active steward of community assets rather than a passive holder of vacant liability. It also gives any successor authority a clearer position: either a viable externally funded project is ready to proceed, or the evidence gathered during development provides a stronger basis for future decisions about the asset.

5. The Asset: History & Location

A. Historical & Cultural Significance

The Bury stands as one of the most architecturally and historically significant civic buildings in Hertfordshire. The ground beneath the property holds a deep manorial history, dating back to a 13th-century medieval moated manor linked to the Ashridge Monastery. In the 16th century, the site was rebuilt into a grand Tudor mansion by the wealthy Combes family — a period marked today by the surviving Grade II listed Charter Tower and the historic walled gardens adjacent to the house.

The current building is a remarkably intact example of late Georgian neoclassical architecture, erected around 1790 by prominent local attorney William Ginger. It features a striking brick and stucco-clad facade, a hipped Welsh slate roof, and elegant interior features, including sweeping arches, delicate fanlights, and a grand central staircase. For over two centuries, it housed notable figures who shaped the region's destiny, including Harry Grover, a prominent 19th-century solicitor who established the Hemel Hempstead Bank in 1809 and owned much of the surrounding parkland.

In 1954, the building transitioned into public service when the Hemel Hempstead Rural District Council purchased it. From 1969 until its closure in 2016, it served as the borough's registry

office, hosting hundreds of weddings annually and embedding itself into the personal memories and emotional tapestry of thousands of local families. However, it has now sat empty for several years, and the windows and doors have been boarded up for security.

B. Strategic Location & Spatial Suitability

Situated at the entrance to Gadebridge Park and the River Gade, along Queensway, The Bury occupies a highly strategic position at the edge of Hemel Hempstead's historic Old Town Conservation Area. This location offers superb pedestrian access, immediate connectivity to town centre transport infrastructure, and proximity to multiple municipal car parks. Crucially, the building sits directly across the road from West Herts College's Hemel Hempstead campus, presenting an unparalleled opportunity to anchor a new cultural and educational zone in the heart of the town.

The internal layout of this multi-floor asset has a lot to offer to the functional needs of a centralised museum operation. The grand, high-ceilinged reception rooms on the ground floor are ideal for temporary, high-footfall historical exhibition galleries and a welcome reception. The first floor provides light-filled, distinct spaces perfectly proportioned for flexible community meeting rooms, curatorial suites and academic workshop spaces.

Set against these strengths, the site also carries important conservation and physical constraints that must shape any future design. As a Grade II* listed building within a conservation area, there is a statutory obligation to preserve or enhance the character and appearance of both the building and its setting.

The green space immediately surrounding the building is enclosed and includes several trees, although currently none appear to have a tree preservation order. The nearby River Gade means that the western part of the site is also within a flood zone. These constraints limit opportunities for new development to the north, west and south of the main building, but they also create an opportunity to treat the surrounding landscape as part of the public heritage offer, for example through sensitive external interpretation, small-scale events and the thoughtful positioning of DBC statues removed from the town centre and currently in storage.

The only area with limited built-development potential is the existing car parking and garage area. These structures currently detract from the character and appearance of the conservation area and the setting of the listed building. Any replacement structure in this location would need to be subservient to the main house, carefully designed and of high quality. However, removing the outbuildings and garage areas — which the Hemel Hempstead Old Town Conservation Area Character Appraisal describes as "*a group of lock-up garages of no special interest which could be replaced or removed completely*" — could free up crucial space for a secure, modern, climate-controlled storage extension for museum, archaeology and archive materials currently held in DH's stores. This would improve the overall presentation of the site while allowing DH to consolidate its entire operation into a single, efficient and tightly managed layout.

Overall, The Bury is a highly sensitive site with limited potential for built development. Extensions to the main building are unlikely to be acceptable given its Grade II* listed status, and any planning application is likely to be complex because of heritage, archaeology, flood-risk, tree and setting considerations. This is why the proposal depends on careful feasibility work before any final design, funding application or transfer decision is made.

As part of the feasibility and development studies, DH would actively engage with Historic England (HE), Historic Buildings & Places and Archaeology UK, alongside any other relevant statutory bodies, planning authority and conservation specialists. Early engagement with HE and these amenity societies consultees would help identify heritage sensitivities, archaeological considerations, conservation constraints and opportunities for sensitive adaptation before any final design or funding application is submitted. This would ensure that the project is developed transparently, in line with recognised conservation practice, and with appropriate professional input from the outset.

This approach would allow DH to develop a sympathetic, evidence-led proposal that meets community need while respecting the statutory, conservation and planning requirements of the site.

For the council, this means the proposal offers a constructive alternative to continued vacancy, deterioration, security costs and uncertain disposal options. It also respects the constraints of the site: rather than attempting to force an intensive commercial or residential use onto a sensitive listed building and conservation area setting, DH's proposal works with the character of the asset and turns its constraints into civic value.

6. Evolution from the Previous 2018 Bid

Having established the strategic value and constraints of The Bury, the revised proposal must also show how DH has learned from the previous funding attempt and developed a more robust delivery model.

In 2018 DBC, in conjunction with DH, submitted a major grant funding application to the NLHF which failed because it was designed around a park café with additional traditional, passive museum displays that lacked long-term commercial resilience. It was treated primarily as a heritage project that relied on continuous public grants, but it also leaned heavily on getting the lottery to support extraneous infrastructure, such as a public café serving Gadebridge Park.

Our updated proposal introduces an entirely different, modernised approach that addresses every piece of feedback received from the NLHF, changing the project's philosophy in three fundamental ways:

First, this proposal moves away from the concept of a "stuffy", static museum. Instead, it will create a dynamic, interactive cultural space where heritage serves as a backdrop for continuous education, enterprise, and community engagement.

Second, the proposal removes any reliance on public funding for park-facing amenities. Every commercial element — such as venue hire or specialised retail — will be designed exclusively to feed revenue back into the museum's core operations.

Third, the strategy solves a major structural inefficiency of the 2018 proposal by completely consolidating DH's operations in one location. The 2018 plan left DH's massive collection isolated at the existing Museum Store at the Berkhamsted Civic Centre site, which created heavy logistical and financial burdens. By utilising the entire footprint of The Bury — and demolishing the existing site garages to create a purpose-built, secure storage extension — we will move all museum and archival materials from Berkhamsted into this single location. This gives DH complete control over a unified, highly secure site, while simultaneously freeing up the council's Berkhamsted asset for unhindered commercial redevelopment.

To demonstrate how systematically these changes address past hurdles, the matrix below highlights the direct evolution from the 2018 feedback to our delivery strategy:

2018 NLHF Feedback / Risk Area	How the Current Proposal Addresses & Resolves It
Over-reliance on public funding *Feedback: The museum model was too focused on traditional grant funding and lacked commercial viability.*	**Diversified Revenue Model:** The model integrates internal commercial venue hire, out-of-hours event spaces, corporate conferencing, retail, research and academic fees and storage fees (archaeology and other archives) to guarantee self-sustained operational income.
Extraneous infrastructure dependencies *Feedback: Bundling park-facing amenities (like a Gadebridge Park café) diluted the heritage core of the application.*	**Strict Site Focus:** We have stripped out all external park projects from the design stage. Every revenue-generating element is contained entirely within the footprint of The Bury, directly serving the museum's operational budget. Exhibition spaces and engagement opportunities would relate to the museum's collections and borough history. Within this we would explore Gadebridge Park's Roman villa site. Where possible, we would continue to support the work at Gadebridge Park via service level agreements and partnership working.
Fragmented operations & split sites *Feedback: Keeping the museum displays at The Bury while leaving the archival storage at Berkhamsted was operationally inefficient.*	**Complete Site Consolidation:** By demolishing the existing on-site garages, we will build a purpose-built storage extension. This brings 100% of DH's collection, curation and administration onto a single, unified site. This will ensure that all security and operational models are efficient and within DH's capacity to build a sustainable and thriving business model.
Insufficient community co-design *Feedback: The bid felt 'collection-led' rather than community-driven.*	**Deep Local Consultation:** Widespread public surveys and focus groups was undertaken during the Dacorum 30:30 project by The Audience Agency. The subsequent report has shaped the new strategy. Access to the collections is core to the new strategy,

2018 NLHF Feedback / Risk Area	How the Current Proposal Addresses & Resolves It
	ensuring relevance and place-making. Using this detailed audience engagement research that fed into DBC's Arts & Culture Strategy, the new strategy ensures active, collaborative engagement with audiences which meets key strategic areas identified.
Capital cost underestimation. *Feedback: Risks surrounding the maintenance backlog of a Grade II* building were not fully accounted for.*	**Phased Development & Development Grant:** We are seeking funding for a development grant first. This guarantees all structural surveys, quantity surveyor costing, and architectural plans are fully funded and locked down before the main capital bid is submitted. There will also be a sustainable business plan created, ensuring that long term maintenance is identified and within financial modelling.
Governance capacity *Feedback: Concerns over whether a purely volunteer trust could oversee a major property asset.*	**Expanded Board of Trustees:** DH has restructured its board, successfully onboarding professional experts in commercial property management, museum curation, legal affairs and public sector accounting. This restructure separated operational oversight from the governance and strategic, building capacity for development. **Staff development:** a staffing restructure has been undertaken, employing a museum manager with chief operating officer role. As part of the business planning within the development phase, a full staffing structure will be investigated to ensure capacity building and good operational management.

The Strategic Takeaway: The 2018 bid failed because it was structured as a park-based amenity with a passive gallery requiring ongoing subsidy. The new proposal is a resilient community business model that treats heritage as the anchor, but relies on consolidated operations, diversified income, and robust professional governance to thrive.

Council benefit: this revised model gives DBC a clearer and more defensible proposition than the 2018 scheme. It separates the council's immediate decision from the later capital commitment, places technical and commercial testing into a funded development phase and demonstrates that the project has learned from previous feedback. This makes the next decision a controlled enabling decision, not an open-ended financial commitment.

7. Spatial Requirements & The Dacorum 30:30 Storage Assessment

To ensure that any new heritage centre is built on a foundation of rigorous data rather than guesswork, the baseline spatial requirements for this project were meticulously evaluated during the **Dacorum 30:30 project**. Initiated at the direct request of DBC, and funded by a £91,000 grant from the NLHF, this comprehensive review brought together an array of heritage and architectural specialists to mathematically assess the total volume of storage capacity and floor space required to safely house the borough's vast collection. The audit scrutinised the requirements for over 132,000 historic artifacts, assessing everything from fragile archaeological textiles requiring climate-controlled cabinets to heavy industrial machinery from the region's paper-milling past. The final reports from the 30:30 project provided an indisputable baseline for the minimum cubic footprint required to transition the collection out of its current temporary holdings and into a permanent, secure home, with space for growth.

Crucially, when the 30:30 project team initially mapped these spatial requirements against the internal footprint of The Bury, the building was assessed as falling just short of the total cubic volume required to house the entire collection under one roof. However, it is vital to note that this historical assessment was strictly predicated on the constraint that the existing, dilapidated block of garages on the site would remain completely intact. The previous plans treated these outbuildings as unalterable fixtures, which artificially strangled the site's footprint and forced the conclusion that a split-site model — keeping a separate storage facility elsewhere — would be necessary.

Our current thinking completely bypasses this limitation. By shifting the strategy to include the demolition of these obsolete, historically insignificant garages, we unlock a substantial, underutilised plot of land within the secure perimeter of the property. Architects and surveyors have provided an initial indication that clearing this specific footprint would create more than enough additional space on-site to construct a two-story, purpose-built, and sympathetically designed storage extension. This extension could either be standalone or could be made seamlessly to connect to the main Georgian house. Either way, it would allow the historic rooms of The Bury to be dedicated entirely to public engagement spaces, curatorial suites and academic workshop spaces, while the collections are consolidated into a secure, high-capacity wing.

This new, purpose-built wing will be constructed as a state-of-the-art conservation archive designed from the ground up to meet **British Standard BS EN 16893:2018 (Conservation of Cultural Heritage)**. Adhering to this rigorous European benchmark means the facility will feature passive environmental controls, structural fire filtering, and specialised air purification systems tailored to protect delicate organic materials from decay, pests, and light damage. Furthermore, because this extension will be a new build rather than a retrofit of a Georgian structure, it will be constructed to the absolute latest environmental and sustainability standards. The facility will be highly energy-efficient, utilising heavy thermal mass construction to naturally stabilise internal temperatures and relative humidity, which drastically cuts the need for traditional, energy-hungry HVAC air conditioning. By combining cutting-edge sustainable architecture with strict international preservation standards, this proposed extension satisfies the spatial demands highlighted by the Dacorum 30:30 project while giving the council a carbon-neutral heritage asset it can be proud of.

This approach also supports wider council objectives around climate responsibility and good asset management. Reusing and upgrading the existing building, while designing any new storage element to modern environmental standards, offers a more sustainable route than continued vacancy, piecemeal maintenance or speculative redevelopment. It gives DBC the

opportunity to demonstrate that heritage conservation, carbon reduction and community infrastructure can be delivered together.

8. Security & Single-Occupancy Strategy

A primary lesson from our operational reviews is that running a successful, accredited museum requires absolute control over the physical site. Having multiple distinct tenants or residential users in close proximity to a museum collection creates severe security risks, fire vulnerabilities, and insurance complications that can threaten museum accreditation. Therefore, this proposal is strictly based on DH taking over the full site as a single, exclusive occupant. This clear boundary is necessary to protect the integrity of the invaluable collections and to satisfy the strict security demands of national heritage lenders.

By securing exclusive occupancy, DH can design and implement a comprehensive, integrated security strategy across the entire estate. This will include state-of-the-art, multi-zone burglar alarms, comprehensive internal and external CCTV monitoring, specialised fire suppression systems, and strict electronic access control for archival and storage areas. Crucially, isolating the archival wing from the public galleries allows DH to manage high-security operations without compromising the warm, open feel of the public museum spaces. This clear separation ensures that delicate historical materials are safely protected, while the public spaces remain highly accessible.

For DBC, single occupancy also reduces complexity. A single accountable operator, clear site control, professionally managed access, and a defined full-repairing responsibility would provide a simpler risk profile than a fragmented mixed-use arrangement. This strengthens accountability, protects the listed building, supports insurability and gives funders confidence that the project can be managed to recognised museum and conservation standards.

9. Audience Engagement & Partnership Working

A. An Active, Community-Centred space

The following audience groups show how the building would translate the strategic aims of the project into practical activity, measurable social value and wider community participation.

Designing the heritage centre using human-centred design principles, DH will build on the audience development work undertaken as part of Dacorum 30:30 by The Audience Agency, creating a museum that is active, participatory and relevant to different stages of life. Key opportunities can be seen in developing interactive storytelling spaces using the historic collections, alongside research rooms, workshop spaces and flexible learning areas that encourage deeper exploration of local themes, objects and places. The aim is not simply to increase visitor numbers, but to create measurable educational, social and cultural impact for residents across the borough.

The move to an accessible building in a central Hemel Hempstead location would allow DH to develop inclusion and diversity in a more practical and visible way across all programmes. Improved physical access, proximity to public transport, nearby parking, the town centre, Gadebridge Park, the Old Town and local education providers would make it easier for residents

from across the borough to visit, volunteer, study, contribute and take part. This would particularly support people who may currently face barriers to engagement, including those with mobility needs, families without access to private transport, older residents, young people, community groups, schools, and residents who may not normally travel to heritage venues outside their immediate area. By placing the collections in a welcoming, accessible and central civic space, The Bury would help DH broaden representation, involve a wider range of voices in programming and interpretation, and ensure that Dacorum's heritage is shared as a living, inclusive resource for the whole community.

For schools, the heritage centre would provide a curriculum-linked learning hub where pupils can handle real and replica objects, investigate local history, explore archaeology, geography, citizenship, art and design, and use the collections as evidence for enquiry-based learning. Sessions could include facilitated workshops, loan boxes, teacher resources, digital trails, storytelling sessions, local history investigations and project days linked to themes such as the Roman villa at Gadebridge Park, the development of Hemel Hempstead, migration, working lives, wartime experiences and the New Town. The impact would be improved local cultural education, stronger place-based learning, increased confidence in using primary sources, and better access for schools that may not have the budget to travel to larger museums outside the borough.

For families, the museum would offer low-cost, repeatable and inclusive activities that make heritage part of everyday community life. Thematic exhibitions and programming can utilise digital and live interpretation, gamification of objects and themes, storytelling, trails, dressing-up, sensory resources, drop-in crafts, family discovery packs, garden-based activities and holiday workshops. These activities would encourage shared learning between children and adults, support family wellbeing through creative participation, and provide a welcoming indoor and outdoor destination close to the town centre and Gadebridge Park. The impact would include increased family footfall, longer dwell time in the Old Town, stronger intergenerational conversations and a more accessible cultural offer for residents who may not currently see museums as places for them.

For teenagers and young adults, the heritage centre would create the kind of safe, creative and purposeful space that young people in Hemel Hempstead have identified as missing from the town. Opportunities could include youth panels, young curator programmes, creative commissions, podcasting, filmmaking, photography, digital interpretation, zine-making, gaming-inspired trails, volunteering, work experience, Duke of Edinburgh placements, employability workshops and co-produced exhibitions. Workshop areas could be used by Dacorum creatives to mentor young people and support skills in design, research, performance, media production, events and heritage interpretation. The impact would be to increase youth voice in local culture, build confidence and transferable skills, support routes into volunteering and employment, and reduce the perception that heritage is only for older or specialist audiences.

For older people, the creation of a reading room and improved access to the collections would support local history research, reminiscence work, lifelong learning and social connection. Programmes could include memory cafés, oral history recording, handling sessions, local history clubs, archive mornings, accessible talks, intergenerational storytelling, volunteering roles and quieter visiting times. The house and gardens would become a safe, trusted and welcoming place where older residents can contribute knowledge, share memories, stay connected to their community and take part at a pace that suits them. The impact would

include reduced isolation, improved wellbeing, stronger intergenerational understanding, new community knowledge added to the collections, and a deeper sense of pride and belonging among residents who have lived through major changes in the borough.

For volunteers, the heritage centre would provide a clearer, more rewarding and better supported route into meaningful participation. Volunteers could contribute across collections care, cataloguing, research, oral history, visitor welcome, learning sessions, events, gardening, digital projects, exhibitions and community outreach, with structured induction, training and supervision appropriate to each role. This would build on DH's existing volunteer base while creating new opportunities for people of different ages, skills and confidence levels to take part. The impact would be increased capacity for DH, stronger community ownership of the museum, improved access to the collections, new skills and social connections for volunteers, and a visible demonstration that The Bury is being shaped and sustained by local people.

Across all audiences, these programmes would create different levels of engagement, from a short family visit or drop-in activity to deeper participation through volunteering, co-curation, research and skills development. This layered model would help DH demonstrate impact to funders through evidence of school participation, family repeat visits, youth skills development, older people's social connection, volunteer hours, community contributions and increased access to collections. It would also position The Bury as a civic asset that supports lifelong learning, health and wellbeing, creativity, community cohesion and local economic activity, rather than as a traditional museum operating in isolation.

Measurable community outcomes could include: the number of school sessions delivered, pupils engaged, families attending free or low-cost activities, young people completing volunteering or work experience placements, older residents taking part in reminiscence or research programmes, volunteers trained, community exhibitions co-produced, local creatives commissioned, and repeat visits generated. These measures would allow DH and DBC to demonstrate clear social value, not just cultural activity.

B. Co-Curation & Inclusive Engagement

DH's audience engagement strategy moves away from top-down curation toward an open, collaborative model where local people help shape the exhibitions, public programme and interpretation. The museum will feature exhibition spaces, which would include rotating exhibitions co-designed with residents, local creatives, schools, youth groups, cultural organisations, historical societies and community partners. Rather than treating the community simply as an audience, this approach positions local people as contributors, storytellers and decision-makers, ensuring that the heritage centre reflects the full breadth of Dacorum's people, places and lived experiences.

This will provide a flexible venue for community-led displays, oral history projects, creative responses to the collections, local anniversary exhibitions, intergenerational storytelling, school takeovers and temporary showcases developed with under-represented groups. The space could also host consultation boards, memory walls, object handling sessions, artist residencies, pop-up talks and small-scale performances, enabling people to test ideas, share knowledge and see their own stories represented within the museum.

This co-curation model will strengthen inclusion by creating clear routes for participation at different levels: from contributing memories, photographs or objects, through to joining planning workshops, helping to select themes, writing labels, recording audio interpretation, or

supporting public events. It will also create practical skills development opportunities in research, collections care, exhibition design, digital interpretation, public speaking and event delivery. By changing regularly residents and partner organisations will have a reason to return, while helping DH build long-term relationships with communities whose histories have not always been visible in traditional museum displays.

C. STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIPS – ACADEMIA AND SKILLS

The location of The Bury opens opportunities to expand DH's existing sporadic collaborations with academia, local organisations and creatives into deep, mutually beneficial partnerships.

DH will design and build dedicated conservation suites, reading and learning rooms that double as high-quality teaching spaces for students. This gives sector-specific community interest groups, universities and colleges a hands-on learning environment within easy commute of London, allowing them to offer specialised vocational courses in heritage management, archival science and art conservation.

Other opportunities for academic partnership might include:

College Department	Museum Integration Activity
Media & Creative Arts	Exhibition design, digital signage, and audio-visual production.
Business & Catering	Live management case studies and museum event operations.
Construction & Trade	Hands-on heritage carpentry and traditional building maintenance.

Identified potential academic partners would include West Herts College, the University of Hertfordshire and Birkbeck University.

DH's philosophy of creating learning opportunities based on live, real-world projects using the historic collections provides visible outputs that positively impact both collection care and audience experiences, as well as demonstrable skills and projects for students to use within their CVs.

Furthermore, these types of partnership will create a steady pipeline of young talent to support the museum, both during their time as students and thereafter.

By training a new generation of heritage professionals right here in Hemel Hempstead, this partnership would provide local students with invaluable career pathways, while giving the museum a highly skilled, energetic team to keep its operations innovative and forward-looking.

The impact for DBC would be a stronger local skills ecosystem, with young people and adult learners gaining experience in heritage, conservation, creative production, customer service, research, digital interpretation and event delivery. This supports employability, strengthens the

local cultural workforce and gives the council a practical example of place-based education linked directly to a civic asset.

D. Strategic partnerships – The Old Town Hall

With the proximity between The Bury and the Old Town Hall, a five-minute walk, there is potential for partnership working that is complementary rather than competitive.

A formal partnership between the heritage centre at The Bury and the Old Town Hall would allow the two venues to create a stronger cultural offer for Hemel Hempstead without duplicating activity. The museum would provide the collections, research, local stories and historical context, while the theatre would provide performance, production expertise, live interpretation and established audiences for evening cultural programming. Together, the two organisations could develop linked exhibitions and performances, oral history projects, schools' workshops, heritage walks, talks, community drama, family trails and themed festivals that encourage visitors to move between both sites.

This model is complementary because each organisation would retain its distinct role. The Old Town Hall could use museum material as inspiration for new writing, youth theatre, participatory performance and seasonal programming, while DH could use theatre techniques to bring collections to life through character-led interpretation, object handling sessions, storytelling and immersive learning. This would make local heritage more accessible to audiences who may not normally visit a museum, while giving theatre audiences a deeper connection to place.

Operationally, the partnership could include shared marketing, joint ticketing for special events, cross-promotion at both venues, coordinated school and community outreach, volunteer exchanges, shared technical or front-of-house training, and combined funding bids for cultural engagement projects. This would strengthen the case for investment by demonstrating collaboration across local cultural assets, widening audience reach, increasing dwell time in the Old Town, supporting local hospitality businesses and creating a visible cultural corridor between Gadebridge Park, The Bury and the Old Town Hall.

For the council, this partnership would help create a more coherent Old Town visitor offer. Rather than operating as separate cultural venues, The Bury and the Old Town Hall could become linked anchors within a walkable cultural route, supporting evening economy activity, local hospitality, public realm improvements and a stronger sense of destination for residents and visitors.

E. Strategic partnerships – local creative partnerships

Dacorum has a wealth of creative individuals, makers, community groups and cultural organisations, and The Bury would create a permanent, visible setting in which those talents can connect with the borough's collections. DH can provide workshop and activity space for art, craft, music, writing, performance, film, photography, digital media and design projects that respond directly to local history, objects, landscapes and lived experience. This would allow the heritage centre to operate not only as a museum, but as a creative production space where new work is generated from the collections and shared back with the public.

By providing a place, practical support and structured access to the objects and stories held within the collections, DH could invite local creatives to develop exhibitions, installations, performances, talks, workshops, publications and digital content inspired by Dacorum's

heritage. Opportunities could include artist residencies, craft demonstrations, community making days, creative writing projects, local history illustration, photography commissions, theatre responses, music events, pop-up markets, design challenges and collaborative projects with schools, youth groups and older residents. These activities would make the collections active and visible, showing that heritage can be a starting point for contemporary creativity rather than a static record of the past.

The impact would be significant. For creatives, the heritage centre would provide affordable space, inspiration, profile, commissions and opportunities to reach new audiences. For residents, it would create regular reasons to visit, take part, learn a skill, contribute ideas and see local culture be made in real time. For DH, it would generate fresh interpretation, public programming, volunteer involvement, earned income through workshops and events, and stronger evidence of community benefit for funders. For the town, it would help strengthen Hemel Hempstead's cultural identity, support the creative economy, increase footfall in the Old Town and position The Bury as a lively civic space where heritage, creativity and community enterprise work together.

This is particularly relevant to DBC because it shows how the building can support wider regeneration outcomes. A creative partnership model would help animate the Old Town, support small enterprises and freelancers, increase community use of the site, and provide visible evidence that the asset is generating public benefit throughout the year rather than functioning as a static heritage venue.

10. Business & Financial Sustainability

A. Capital Financing and the Funding Strategy

The engagement and partnership model will only be credible if it is underpinned by a realistic financial structure. The business case is therefore built around phased funding, tested income assumptions and long-term operational resilience.

The development phase of this project will be financed through a phased, low-risk approach. Upon securing an Agreement in Principle from DBC, DH will immediately apply for a project development grant to the NLHF. Early discussions indicate that the NLHF is highly supportive of this targeted approach. This grant will fully cover the upfront financial requirements of the project, funding comprehensive structural surveys, architectural designs, and a robust business plan without requiring any capital investment from the council.

Once the development phase has proven the project's viability, the main capital works and initial operational concerns will be funded by a comprehensive mix of major heritage grants, national philanthropic trusts, and corporate sponsorships. Crucially, as an independent charity, DH can access these specialised capital funding streams — such as the Architectural Heritage Fund and specific green energy grants — which are completely unavailable to local authorities.

B. Long-Term Revenue Generation

To ensure the museum remains financially independent and sustainable over the long term, DH will deploy four steady, independent revenue streams, moving to significantly reduce any dependence on ongoing council subsidies:

1. **Commercial Asset Hire:** The elegant, historic Georgian rooms and manicured gardens provide a beautiful backdrop for out-of-hours commercial use. DH will actively market the space for corporate conferences, private evening events, bringing in revenue during off-peak museum hours.
2. **Academic & Professional Fees:** The museum will generate reliable institutional income by charging standard deposit and curation fees for archaeological materials recovered from local development sites. Increasing access to the collections will also enable increased research to be undertaken, with potential partnerships with universities and colleges to access AHRC funding.
3. **Internal Retail & Premium Programming:** While DH aims to ensure general admission to temporary exhibitions remains free for residents to maximise accessibility, DH will utilise the commercial value of the collection through programming and commercial ventures. Consistent revenue will be sought through a curated heritage gift shop, local history publishing, educational and social workshops and programming, and ticketed entry for periodic premium, high-profile temporary exhibitions.
4. **Endowments & Patronage:** Building on its strong local profile, DH will launch a structured corporate patronage scheme and a "Friends" individual giving programme, creating an insulated financial cushion to protect operations from changing economic conditions.

The development phase will test and evidence these assumptions through professional business planning, market testing, sensitivity analysis and a realistic staffing model. This will give DBC assurance that the final proposal is not reliant on optimism, but on independently tested income projections, operating costs, maintenance liabilities and governance capacity.

11. Building Management & Maintenance

DH fully recognises that taking long-term stewardship of a Grade II* listed building is a major operational responsibility that requires careful, professional oversight. The proposed NLHF development grant process will enable DH fully to identify and quantify these responsibilities and devise a comprehensive buildings management plan involving the correct professionals.

To the extent that DBC is not prepared to transfer the freehold of the property to the trust, and to protect the future of the building, DH would be prepared to commit to a full-repairing long leasehold (125+ years) arrangement, provided it met NLHF funding requirements. We will assume full liability for day-to-day operations, statutory compliance, fire prevention systems, asbestos management, and specialised building insurance, completely removing these ongoing financial pressures from DBC's budget.

A key part of our long-term financial planning is the creation of a protected, ring-fenced **Sinking Fund**. A fixed, audited percentage of all monthly commercial income — drawn from venue hire, retail, and college partnerships — will be paid directly into this capital reserve. This fund will be used exclusively for long-term, cyclical maintenance, such as specialist lime-mortar repairs, Welsh slate roof care, and traditional sash window restoration. Additionally, DH will work closely with conservation officers to implement sensitive, modern energy efficiency upgrades.

By introducing advanced loft insulation, zoned smart heating systems, PV slates and low-energy LED gallery lighting, we will significantly reduce the building's carbon footprint and operational utility costs while carefully protecting its precious historic architecture.

This approach gives the council a clearer long-term stewardship model than continued ad hoc maintenance of a vacant building. It also creates a mechanism through which commercial success is directly reinvested into the public asset, ensuring that revenue generation supports conservation rather than extracting value from the site.

12. Heads of Terms & Next Steps

Because the current internal condition of The Bury is unknown, DH requires a supportive, collaborative commitment from DBC to unlock the funding needed for detailed planning. We propose that both parties sign an **Agreement in Principle / Heads of Terms** based on the following mutual commitments:

- **The Council's Commitment:** DBC grants DH an exclusive 2-year window to develop the detail of the project, alongside a commitment to transfer the property via a freehold transfer or a long leasehold (125+ years) at a nominal or reduced fee. To satisfy the matching-fund expectations of the NLHF, the council's contribution will be recognised as the reduced market value of the asset transfer.

- **The Trust's Commitment:** DH takes on full responsibility for securing the initial NLHF development grant, commissioning comprehensive building condition surveys, creating full architectural plans, and delivering a finalised business plan. Concurrently, DH will commit to vacating completely the Berkhamsted Civic Centre site once The Bury site is complete, allowing the council to proceed with its major redevelopment plans in Berkhamsted completely unhindered.

Upon approval of these Heads of Terms, DH will immediately submit a grant application to the NLHF to launch the project development phase.

DECISION ASSURANCE FOR DBC

To make this proposal appropriate for decision-making during LGR, DH proposes that the Agreement in Principle is subject to clear gateways and review points. These would allow DBC to support project development while retaining control over final approval.

Council concern	Assurance mechanism	Outcome for DBC
Financial exposure during LGR	Development grant funding, external due diligence, cost planning and business modelling before any final transfer.	A low-risk enabling decision rather than an immediate capital commitment.
Future asset liability	Full condition surveys, maintenance plan, lifecycle costing and proposed sinking fund.	A clearer stewardship route for a vacant Grade II* asset.
Governance and delivery capacity	Independent business plan, professional project team, trustee expertise and defined operating model.	Confidence that delivery risk is tested before commitment.
Successor authority scrutiny	Transparent gateway reports and evidence pack for members, officers and any new unitary authority.	A defensible decision trail through reorganisation.

Immediate decision requested: DH asks DBC to agree to enter good-faith Heads of Terms discussions and to grant an exclusivity period sufficient to support external funding applications and professional project development. This would allow the council to retain oversight and control at each gateway, while enabling DH to assemble the evidence, funding strategy and delivery plan needed for a final informed decision. In the context of LGR, this is a proportionate and time-sensitive enabling decision: it protects public value now, preserves strategic options for any successor authority, and avoids leaving The Bury as an unresolved vacant asset during transition.