

## Fire risk forces town hall closure

PART of a town hall has been closed after failing a fire safety check.

North Hertfordshire District Council was forced to close the main hall of Baldock Town Hall following an annual fire risk assessment which found no fewer than eight safety issues with the building.

In a letter to the Baldock Community Association, the current caretakers of the hall, a council officer said work needed to be done before the hall can reopen.

This includes installing a fire detection alarm system throughout the building, the replacement and/or upgrading of all existing fire doors "especially those on escape routes" and the replacement of missing fire extinguishers.

Despite the closure of the main hall Baldock Museum is still open.

The council has been criticised by one of its own councillors, Michael Weeks, who told *The Comet*: "My Baldock colleagues and I are outraged that such a state of affairs should have been allowed to occur. One must ask how long users have been at risk."

Responding to criticism, a council spokesman said the absence of a fire detection and alarm system covering the whole of the building was discovered in 2002 but at the time the council's own area housing office was located in the building and the staff were "properly trained in fire awareness and evacuation arrangements".

"Since the closure of the housing office in 2005 there has been no management presence on site and there is a potential risk to members of those organisations which use the hall through the management of the Baldock Community Association without sufficient training and awareness of fire and evacuation procedures.

*The Institution of Fire Engineers – International Fire News Update*