

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE

**MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING
ON WEDNESDAY, 17TH JUNE, 2020 AT 7.30 PM**

MINUTES

- Present:** *Councillors: Daniel Allen, Morgan Derbyshire, Gary Grindal, Terry Hone, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Helen Oliver, Sean Prendergast, Sue Ngwala, Mike Rice and Adem Ruggiero-Cakir*
- In Attendance:** *Lea Ellis (Assistant Community Engagement Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager)*
- Also Present:** *At the commencement of the meeting 2 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

1 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio Recording – 18 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager welcomed everyone to this virtual Letchworth Committee that it is being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video and online.

She then gave guidance as follows:

Attendance

A roll call was undertaken to ensure that all Members and Officers could hear and be heard.

Live Streaming

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's You Tube channel. If live streaming failed the meeting would adjourn. If the live stream could not be restored within a reasonable period then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

If for any reason the meeting was not quorate an Officer would notify attendees by interjecting the meeting. The meeting would adjourn immediately. Once the meeting was quorate the meeting would resume. If connection could not be restored within a reasonable period, then the remaining business would be considered at a later date.

Only Members present for the entire debate and consideration of an item were entitled to vote. If technology failed for a Member during the debate and they rejoined the meeting, they would not be able to vote on that item.

Noise interference

Electronic devices should be muted and all present should have the mute button on their tablet or computer activated when not speaking.

Rules of Debate

The raise hand button (located under participants) should be used to alert the Chair that you wish to speak. Please wait for the Chair to invite you to speak before doing so.

Voting

Voting would be undertaken using the Green tick for “Yes”, Red Cross for “No” and Blue Raise Hand for “abstain”, located in the participants section at the bottom of the screen. To enable the votes to be counted, votes should not be cleared until requested to do so.

Details of how Members voted will not be kept or minuted unless a Recorded Vote was requested or an individual requests that their vote be recorded, and it will not be heard or seen on the audio and YouTube recordings of the meeting.

2 ELECTION OF A CHAIR FOR 2020/21

Audio Recording – 5 minutes 10 seconds

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager called for nominations for Chair of the Letchworth Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21

Councillor Sue Ngwala proposed, Councillor Helen Oliver seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Gary Grindal be appointed as Chair of the Letchworth Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

Councillor Gary Grindal took the Chair.

3 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 8 minutes 36 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillor Kate Aspinwall.

4 ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR FOR 2020/21

Audio Recording – 7 minutes 54 seconds

The Chair called for nomination for Vice-Chair of the Letchworth Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

Councillor Gary Grindal proposed, Councillor Ian Mantle seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: That Councillor Helen Oliver be appointed Vice-Chair of the Letchworth Committee for the Civic Year 2020/21.

5 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 9 minutes 9 seconds

There was no other business notified.

6 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 9 minutes 38 seconds

- (1) The Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual meeting of the Letchworth Committee, particularly those who had come to give a presentation.
- (2) The Chair thanked former Councillor Deepak Sangha, who had resigned as a Councillor his work for the Letchworth Community over many years.
- (3) The Chair thanked Amelia McNally who had previously been clerk to the Committee for her help.
- (4) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council policy, this meeting was being audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC Youtube channel.
- (5) Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item, the detailed reminder about this and speaking rights was set out under Chair's Announcements on the agenda.

7 LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY BID MANAGER

Audio recording – 13 minutes 39 seconds

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Levett advised, for clarification, that he had two businesses operating in the Town Centre.

Mr Chris Wilson, Letchworth Garden City BID Manager had given his apologies that he was unable to attend this meeting.

He had provided a document entitled Online Guide to reopening Letchworth Businesses and written update that was read out by the Assistant Community Engagement Officer as follows:

- Business have been preparing their premises in anticipation of reopening;
- Special measures required included:
 - Social distancing signage;
 - Ordering PPE and service cleaning for the safety of staff and customers.
- The Town had demonstrated unprecedented support, resilience and collaboration during lockdown;
- The BID had made available a wide range of services and merchandise to enable safe reopening of businesses;
- All businesses would continue to be supported to adapt and respond to government advice and guidelines as required;
- Signage, certificates of compliance and safety measure would clearly be displayed in all businesses;
- The Covid -19 recovery Plan had been published in the agenda.

Chris Wilson was now the Managing Director of the BID.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Gary Grindal;
- Councillor David Levett.

The following matters were raised during the debate:

- Approximately one third of businesses in Letchworth had already opened;
- Staff were posted at entrances to Garden Square in order to monitor the numbers of people within the area;
- There were 2 metre markers on the floor throughout the Town;
- Hand sanitisers had been placed around the Town;
- Businesses were finding it difficult to work out how many people could be allowed into their shop;
- A lot of businesses had benefitted from Government aid;
- There would likely be some businesses that do not reopen.

The Chair thanked the Assistant Community Engagement Officer for presenting Chris Wilson's update,

8 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - GREENCARE NORTON

Audio recording – 22 minutes 1 second

Mr Ray Wilson, Greencare Norton thanked the Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of the grant application as follows:

- At a previous meeting there had been discussion regarding making the plot more accessible to disabled users;
- Due, to Covid-19 it had been difficult to undertake research;
- He had considered four options being:
 - Wooden Decking
 - Artificial Grass
 - Self Binding Gravel (Hoggin)
 - Slab Paving
- The first 3 options all had their drawbacks such as on going maintenance, safety, high cost or long term durability;
- The best and safest option was 'council standard' paving 900mm wide laid on a deep aggregate foundation;
- He had sourced a large quantity of reclaimed paving, which would make this option more affordable;
- It was estimated that the work would cost £4,000;
- They also wished to make the actual gardening accessible through provision of wooden raised beds which could be accessed from the proposed paved pathways;
- Suitable accessible wooden rustic raised beds could be purchased for approximately £90.00 each and be constructed by the participants;
- Timber could be purchased at a low cost to construct raised beds in the new polytunnel;
- The estimated cost of the raised beds and timber would be approximately £500;
- Completion of these projects would make the plot much more accessible for those with physical disabilities, irrespective of the weather and ground conditions, and offer an opportunity not only to participate in gardening but also to simply enjoy the beauty of the location its plants and wildlife.

In response to questions from Members Mr Wilson advised that the Greencare Norton plot was sited over 2 full sized plots at the allotments in Norton.

The Chair thanked Mr Wilson for his presentation.

9 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY HERITAGE FOUNDATION

Audio Recording – 29 minutes 48 seconds

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Terry Hone declared a declarable interest in that he was a member of the board and trustee of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor Helen Oliver declared a declarable interest in that she was a member of the board and trustee of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.

Mr Alistair Stewart, Head of Grants, Partnerships and Community Services, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, thanked the Chair for the opportunity to update the Committee on the work undertaken during the Covid-19 pandemic as follows:

- In March they made a decision to support the areas of food, prescriptions and signposting during the pandemic;
- They had worked closely with North Herts CVS and Herts Help to set up a telephone helpline service had been set up which had taken over 1000 telephone queries;
- They had delivered prescriptions, food parcels and food boxes in association with NHDC;
- They had recruited volunteers who had given 1725 volunteer hours;
- They had worked with different food providers to support them to understand different needs;
- They had also worked with HILS and active Letchworth to provide and deliver 600 booklets that included information on health and wellbeing such as such as diet, exercising, contact information for various services and alerts regarding scams;
- They had worked closely with the Healthy Hub to share and publicise information;
- They had awarded £33,000 in grant funding to 11 organisations including SADA, digital technology for organisations and food provision;
- They had been working on blogs regarding subjects such as Citizens Advice, Food Banks, Carers in Herts and Free school meals.

The following Members took part in the debate and asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Sean Prendergast.

In response to questions Mr Stewart advised:

- That the support line remained open Monday to Friday 9am to 5pm;
- That publicity surrounding the phone line would be reconsidered.

Members wished to acknowledge Feed Up Warm UP, the Need Project and Morrisons amongst others who have been supporting the local community.

The Chair thanked Mr Stewart for his presentation and for the work that the Letchworth Heritage Foundation has been undertaking.

10 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio Recording – 45 minutes 23 seconds

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update together with the following appendix:

- Committee Budgets 2020-21.

She advised that:

The Team had been extremely busy working on the current situation as well as continuing projects that had previously been started including working with YC Herts to get a Youth Council operational.

The following Members took part in the debate and asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen.

In response to questions the Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised:

- That there was no longer a restriction on the timing of organisations applying for grant funding.

Members wished to place on record their thanks to the Community Engagement Team for their hard work, particularly over the period of the pandemic.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Committee formally thank the Community Engagement Team for their hard work, particularly over the period of the pandemic.
- (2) That the actions taken by the Community Engagement team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Letchworth be endorsed.

REASON FOR DECISIONS: To ensure the Committee is kept informed of the work of the Community Engagement Team.

11 GRANT APPLICATION - GREENCARE NORTON

Audio Recording – 49 minutes 12 seconds

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised that The Committee had previously given £2052 to Greencare Norton and that they had requested further grant funding of £2.500 for their project that was expected to cost a total of £4,000.

Members were supportive of the project but requested that any funding be conditional on a formal quote being provided.

RESOLVED: That, subject to a satisfactory quote being received, grant funding of £2.500 be awarded to Greencare Norton to provide disabled accessibility the allotment plots at Norton from the following budgets:

- £2,360 from the 2019/20 carry forward budget
- £140 from the 2020/21 budget.

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community,

12 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio Recording – 55 minutes 3 seconds

The Chair Led a discussion regarding Ward Matters and Outside organisations. The following issues were discussed:

Letchworth Settlement

The Letchworth Settlement had made an announcement that they would be closing on 31 July 2020 with all staff being made redundant.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Gary Grindal;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Sue Ngwala;
- Councillor Daniel Allen;
- Councillor Mike Rice;
- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor Helen Oliver;

The comments by Members included:

- The Settlement had been self financing from courses and rental income;
- Was there any way that NHDC could support the Settlement with grant funding;
- The annual running costs of the Settlement were high;
- There were a number of other organisations that would be affected by the closure as they used facilities at the settlement;
- Can we ask the BID to provide some business advice.

The Assistant Community Engagement Officer advised that:

- The Settlement had not approached NHDC for any funding.
- There were potential grants that the Settlement could apply for;
- In the past it had been difficult to engage with this organisation;
- The Community Engagement Team had been in contact with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and Letchworth Settlement to discuss potential support that could be offered to the Settlement.;
- The ownership of the building is complicated and needed to be understood at an early stage.

Proposed Bandstand on Norton Common

There was a small groundswell of opinion that a bandstand should be reinstated on Norton Common.

The following Members took part in the debate:

- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Mike Rice;
- Councillor Daniel Allen.

Comments from Members included:

- That the original bandstand was removed as the maintenance costs were extremely high and it was never used;
- If there were a new bandstand it would have to be used regularly;
- This would be a very expensive luxury and the Council had more important things to do;
- County Councillors had been approached and had reservations regarding this project;
- The focus of events was on Broadway Gardens.
- Norton Common was now a local nature reserve, which may mean that a bandstand could not be built there.

Letchworth Organisations

Councillor David Levett highlighted that several organisations were struggling in the current circumstances and were at risk of closure. They had been advised to contact the Community Engagement Team.

Food Rescue and Delivery

Councillor Daniel Allen highlighted that guerrilla groups had been set up in Warren Close and the Grange to collect rescued food and deliver it to those in need.

Letchworth Community

Councillor Daniel Allen acknowledged the work being undertaken by many formal and informal groups throughout Letchworth.

Roadworks

Councillor Hone advised that there would be significant roadwork on the A1M at Coreys Mill from 7 July 2020 to 12 August 2020 which could result in significant local road closures and diversions.

Councillor Surgery

The Letchworth Councillor Surgery would be held on Saturday 20 June via phone calls to the local Councillors.

Committee, Member and Scrutiny Team and IT Department

The Chairman thanked the Committee, Member and Scrutiny Team and IT Department for all of their hard work in enabling meetings to take place virtually.

RESOLVED: That the Community Engagement Team continue to engage with the Letchworth Settlement to offer support wherever possible and signpost to other organisations that may also be able to assist and that they keep the Members of the Committee updated.

The meeting closed at 9.02 pm

Chair