

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD AS A VIRTUAL MEETING ON WEDNESDAY, 14TH OCTOBER, 2020 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Helen Oliver (Vice-Chair), Daniel Allen, Morgan Derbyshire, Terry Hone, David Levett, Ian Mantle, Sue Ngwala, Mike Rice and Adem Ruggiero-Cakir*

In Attendance: *Claire Morgan (Community Engagement Team Leader), Simon Ellis (Development and Conservation Manager), Hilary Dineen (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Anna Gouveia (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer)*

Also Present: *At the commencement of the meeting approximately 7 members of the public, including registered speakers.*

13 WELCOME AND INTRODUCTION

Audio recording – 10 seconds

The Vice-Chair welcomed everyone to this virtual Letchworth Committee meeting that was being conducted with Members and Officers at various locations, communicating via audio/video.

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call and gave guidance as follows:

The meeting was being streamed live on the Council's YouTube 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.

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

The raise hand button should be used to alert the Vice-Chair that you wish to speak. Please wait for the Vice-Chair to invite you to speak before doing so.

Voting would be undertaken using the Green tick for "Yes", Red Cross for "No" and Blue Raise Hand for "abstain". To enable the votes to be counted, votes should not be cleared until requested to do so.

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

The Vice-Chair, Councillor Helen Oliver started the meeting proper.

14 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 4 minutes 48 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Gary Grindal (Vice-Chair), Kate Aspinwall and Sean Prendergast.

The Vice-Chair passed on the Committee's best wishes to Councillor Gary Grindal.

15 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 12 seconds

There was no other business notified.

16 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 5 minutes 22 seconds

- (1) The Vice-Chair welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Vice-Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded as well as filmed. The audio recordings would be available to view on Mod.gov and the film recording via the NHDC YouTube channel.
- (3) The Vice-Chair drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

17 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - 7TH LETCHWORTH SCOUTS

Audio recording – 6 minutes 27 seconds

Ms Jackie Hare, Group Scout Leader, 7th Letchworth Scouts thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of the grant application as follows:

- The 7th Letchworth Scouts group had 56 children attending primarily from the Wilbury Estate;
- It was a long-standing group which recently celebrated its 75th anniversary and was highly regarded in the district;
- The grant application for £760 was being made to help pay towards the forthcoming annual census fee to the national Scouting body';
- The census fee helped to pay for training, campsites, insurance, support and some permanent staff;
- The money collected by the district helped to pay for the District Headquarters, minibus, international and district expeditions, halls and storage, leader support and uniform and funding weekly activities for the young people;
- The Covid-19 pandemic had resulted in a reduction in fundraising.

The Vice-Chair thanked Ms Jackie Hare for her application.

18 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - THE SETTLEMENT

Audio recording – 12 minutes 07 seconds

Mr Nigel Carrick, The Settlement, thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee in support of their grant application as follows:

- The Settlement had been due to close for financial reasons;
- Fundraising had been carried out and donations and grants to cover running costs had been received;
- The cost of running The Settlement on an annual basis was £150,000;
- Participation in classes was currently limited due to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Classes were now being moved online or partially online where possible;
- The grant application for £2,000 was being made to help buy digital equipment such as laptops, microphones and screens.

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

- Councillor Sue Ngwala;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Mike Rice.

Members congratulated Mr Carrick and The Settlement on their fundraising efforts and their success in keeping The Settlement open.

Mr Carrick advised that there was external redecoration work to be done to the building as a condition of the lease. He confirmed that The Settlement had a 50 year lease.

The Vice-Chair thanked Mr Nigel Carrick for his presentation.

19 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - SMALL ACTS OF KINDNESS

Audio Recording 32 minutes 17 seconds

Ms Lynne Misner, Chief Executive, Small Acts of Kindness, thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation in respect of her organisation and its activities which included the following:

- Since grant funding had been awarded last year, the 'Warm in Winter' gift bags had been distributed to over 600 recipients;
- Positive feedback had been received from Letchworth residents who had received the bags;
- Ms Misner thanked the Committee for its support;
- Members were requested to let Lynne know of anyone they knew who would benefit from the bags, and also of any activities in the local area;
- 4,000 bags had been packed to go out;
- The qualifying age for receiving a gift bag was 55, the average age of recipients was early 80s.

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

- Councillor Sue Ngwala;
- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Mike Rice.

Members congratulated Ms Misner and Small Acts of Kindness on their great work in the community.

The Vice-Chair thanked Ms Misner for her presentation.

20 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - NORTH HERTS AFRICAN CARIBBEAN COMMUNITY

Audio Recording 39 minutes 43 seconds

Ms Kava Johnson, North Herts African Caribbean Community thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and provided Members with a verbal presentation in respect of her organisation and its activities which included the following:

- The group had been formed to bring together lots of different groups following the 'Black Lives Matter' peaceful protest in Hitchin, with the goal of sharing culture;
- Plans for Black History Month to share culture with the community had included a gala dinner and partnership work with the Broadway Cinema, haircare workshops and exhibitions;
- As much as possible had been moved online due to the Covid-19 pandemic and some events had been postponed until 2021;
- Thanks were conveyed for the grant given by the Committee which had been put towards supporting the community to do as much as possible during the lockdown period to bring the community together;
- Online poetry for mental health workshops and haircare workshops online had been held;
- Plans for the future included supporting community groups, local entrepreneurs and children and young people's activities next year;
- Support was welcomed from people of all backgrounds.

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

- Councillor Sue Ngwala;
- Councillor Helen Oliver.

The Community Engagement Team Leader confirmed that the group had received grant funding of £4,000 from the district-wide fund. She added that North Herts Museum had a Black History Month exhibition.

The Vice-Chair thanked Ms Johnson for her presentation.

21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - LETCHWORTH SAFE CYCLING AND WALKING NETWORK

Audio Recording 51 minutes 39 seconds

Ms Julia Sonander, Letchworth Safe Cycling and Walking Network, thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and provided the Members with a presentation in respect of her organisation and its activities which included the following:

- Work was being done by Letchworth Cyclists Group to create a safe cycling network for cyclists aged 8 upwards;
- The aim was to assist all to cycle with confidence;
- The webpage of the Letchworth Cyclists Group (transitionletchworth.org/letchworth-cyclists) contained a detailed report of schemes and an interactive open street map;
- The group was looking at various schemes including re-designing roads to include cycle lanes; 'Dutch' roundabouts; toucan and parallel (tiger) crossings; direct routes and quiet roads;
- There was benefit in having a 'big picture' vision and a comprehensive cycle network plan, although it was acknowledged that it may take some time to implement;
- The plan could be used to ensure that any new schemes fitted into the wider network plan, that the plan was considered during highways works and new developments, and that opportunities for transport funding, for example from Covid-19 funding sources, could be swiftly accessed;
- Support was sought for the idea of having a comprehensive cycle network plan for Letchworth and for working up 'The Community Plan for a Letchworth Cycling and Walking Network' into an adopted NHDC plan.

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

- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Sue Ngwala.

Members were supportive of the initiatives as presented. It was suggested that the Cycling Group work with the NHDC Transport Officer to discuss how to improve cycling facilities in Letchworth. Liaison with County Council would also be essential. It was noted that the Transport Users Forum was looking to schedule a meeting on walking and cycling to which all relevant stakeholders would be invited.

The Vice-Chair thanked Ms Sonander for her presentation.

22 LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY BID MANAGER

Audio recording – 1 hour 13 minutes 55 seconds

Mr Chris Wilson, Letchworth Garden City BID Manager, thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in Letchworth Garden City Town Centre including:

- September footfall YTD was down by 11%; October footfall was down 34% due to people staying at home during the current Covid-19 pandemic;
- 'Shop Local Shop Safe' signage had been put up and hand sanitiser stations put in place;
- New planters had been installed in Leys Avenue and Arena Parade Canopy;
- The Christmas light switch on had been attended by over 23,000 people last year;
- Money that would have been invested in entertainment for this event had gone into in a new lighting scheme;
- A Christmas market was scheduled for 3rd - 6th December; a virtual Christmas market was planned;

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

- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Daniel Allen;
- Councillor David Levett.

Members conveyed their thanks to the BID for its support in helping local businesses with the challenges brought about by the Covid-19 pandemic.

It was confirmed that an Escape Room was coming to the town and various vacant premises were being filled. The Carnival was planned to return next year.

It was noted that visitors were coming from other towns to visit Letchworth which was welcomed.

The Vice-Chair thanked Mr Wilson for his presentation.

23 LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY HERITAGE FOUNDATION - UPDATE

Audio Recording 1 hour 26 minutes 04 seconds

Mr Stuart Sapsford, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, thanked the Vice-Chair for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave the Members a verbal update on the Heritage Foundation's activities over the past few months including:

- It had been a challenging period due to the Covid-19 pandemic;
- Income from the property portfolio was down by £2.5m (20%) and the loss of income was expected to continue for 2021 and potentially 2022;
- A strategic review of the business model had been carried out to identify savings. This had resulted in some redundancies and services being cut;
- Funding of £224,000 had been secured from the Arts Council through the Cultural Recovery Fund which had given a lifeline to services – this would be used to create some posts to support heritage and cultural offers;
- The £600,000 per annum grants budget would continue to be provided to the community;
- The Community Response Service had been formed to support people affected by Covid-19;
- Services cut included: Active Letchworth; the theatre until at least the end of 2021; the Community Transport Service; Discover Letchworth and the Ernest Gardiner Treatment Centre;
- Short-term investment for the museum service collection and the Broadway Gallery had been secured;
- The ambition for 2021 was that the Cinema and Standalone Farm would generate greater revenues to support re-investment in the community;
- Services which remained included Stewardship and Development; the Cinema; cultural learning for children and young people; the Families and Child Development project primarily focused on the Jackman's Estate supporting families in poverty in that area;
- The focus would be on creating strong partnerships within the town, new activities and drawing in money from other funders to do more as well as supporting the vulnerable groups emerging with the pandemic which was pushing people into poverty;
- Delays with the Local Plan process were significant;
- The Foundation was part of the strategy group identifying ways of drawing people into the town;

- Other priorities included income recovery, ensuring tenants could remain; supporting new organisations and businesses to take on tenancies; looking at housing within the Local Plan and LG1 and other schemes and initiatives; working with local entrepreneurs and activists to support health and wellbeing and culture; celebrating the green spaces; attracting more people to Letchworth and giving opportunities to people within the town;
- The new strategy would be publicised later in the year.

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

- Councillor David Levett;
- Councillor Morgan Derbyshire;
- Councillor Ian Mantle;
- Councillor Mike Rice.

In response to questions Mr Sapsford advised:

- That the Foundation was looking at alternative models to deliver the Community Transport Scheme more cost-effectively.
- That the Ernest Gardiner Treatment Centre cost in the region of £350,000 per annum to run and its specialist staff had sadly been made redundant.
- The Heritage Foundation was working with the Primary Care Network to establish a Covid Assessment Centre and in the future a Covid Rehabilitation Centre at the premises but in the short to medium term it could not be supported.

The Vice-Chair thanked Mr Sapsford for his presentation and looked forward to working collaboratively with the Foundation in the future.

A comfort break was held at 21.14

Following the comfort break the Committee Member and Scrutiny Officer undertook a roll call.

24 ANNUAL UPDATE ON S106 OBLIGATIONS

Audio Recording 1 hour 55 minutes 12 seconds

The Development and Conservation Manager presented the report entitled Annual Update on S106 Obligations together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 - Current Held Funds Letchworth.

He drew attention to the following:

- There was now a need to collate information district-wide and send it to central government, as an Infrastructure Funding Statement, every year from December 2020 – this would be an annual account of everything that has happened across the district in the previous financial year – Area Committee updates would continue each year;
- He was looking at a Business Case for a Small Sites Community Infrastructure Levy to obtain funding from smaller scale developments;
- This could be affected by planning reforms proposed in the government White Paper. The government was looking at a national levy which would be a uniform charge across the country to give more certainty to the development industry. There was no firm legislation on this yet and it may take some time to be implemented;
- In July 2020 the new planning obligations Supplementary Planning Document had been endorsed and would take effect subject to the Local Plan being adopted;

- There was Informal Open Space funding of approximately £17,000 available as well as funding for Pitch Sport which could potentially be used for some projects which had been earmarked for capital funding, for example the landscaping around the War Memorial;
- There was £89,000 available under Sustainable Transport Funding. The Transport Officer could co-ordinate with Hertfordshire County Council to draw down some of that funding for cycle projects;
- The Pitch Sports budget could be used to fund some football goals on the recreational grounds;
- There was £120,000 in funding available for Healthcare. This could be used for the Health Hub project planned in the centre of Letchworth.

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

- Councillor Helen Oliver;
- Councillor Sue Ngwala.

In response to questions the Development and Conservation Manager advised that once funding was received the Council had 10 years to spend it and this was closely monitored to ensure funding was spent before the deadline.

The Vice-Chair thanked the Development and Conservation Manager for presenting his report.

Councillor Helen Oliver proposed, Councillor Morgan Derbyshire seconded and it was

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the content of the report entitled Annual Update on S106 Obligations be noted.
- (2) That it be agreed that a report continue to be presented on an annual basis to the Letchworth Committee, which sets out full records of all Section 106 activity for the preceding financial year and which reflects changes in legislation and practice.
- (3) That, other than where a contribution has been negotiated for a specific purpose or project, Ward Members of the area where the Section 106 Obligation or Unilateral Undertaking funding is generated and the Area Committee be consulted prior to funding being allocated away from that area. Members must note that the discretionary funds are rapidly diminishing and will not be replaced under current legislation and practice, for reasons that are set out in the report.

REASONS FOR DECISIONS:

- (1) To ensure that there is a robust system for negotiating and managing Section 106 Obligations and Unilateral Undertakings, that records activity for each financial year and is placed in the public domain.
- (2) To ensure that the process is kept under constant review and Member scrutiny and that the risk associated with this activity is managed in an appropriate manner.

25 GRANT APPLICATIONS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 23 minutes 3 seconds and 2 hours 8 minutes 8 seconds

The Community Engagement Team Leader presented the report entitled Grants and Community Update, together with the following appendix:

- Appendix 1 - Committee Budgets 2020/21

She advised that:

- Following grants made at the meeting, there was £8,100 remaining in the budget for the last two meetings of the financial year;
- The grant to Letchworth Rink Hockey had been released;
- The grant to Small Acts of Kindness had been released for this year;
- Many projects were ongoing, in particular the team were working with youth provision, mental health, Holocaust Memorial Day and setting up the Volunteer Awards.

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

- Councillor Mike Rice.

Councillor Helen Oliver proposed, Councillor Mike Rice seconded and it was:

RESOLVED: To endorse the actions taken by the Community Engagement Team to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Letchworth.

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

26 GRANT APPLICATION - THE SETTLEMENT

Audio recording – 23 minutes 55 seconds

The Community Engagement Team Leader advised that The Settlement was requesting £2000 in grant funding.

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

- Councillor Terry Hone;
- Councillor Daniel Allen.

In response to questions Mr Carrick confirmed that the amount requested was £2000 and this would be sufficient to cover costs.

It was proposed by Councillor Morgan Derbyshire, seconded by Councillor Ian Mantle and:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £2,000 be awarded to The Settlement for electronic and computer equipment to allow online access for participants.

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

27 GRANT APPLICATION - 7TH LETCHWORTH SCOUTS

Audio recording – 30 minutes 22 seconds

Prior to consideration of the item Councillor Daniel Allen declared a declarable interest in that his children attended the 7th Letchworth Scout Group. He advised that he would not take part in the debate or vote.

It was proposed by Councillor Mike Rice, seconded by Councillor Terry Hone and:

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £760 be awarded to 7th Letchworth Scouts to support payment of the annual census fee to the national Scouting body.

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

28 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 2 hours 12 minutes

The Vice-Chair led a discussion regarding Ward Matters and Outside Organisations. The following issues were discussed:

All Saints Church, Willian

Councillor David Levett advised that:

- The internal space of the Church was being reconfigured to make it a more flexible, communal space early in the New Year;
- Suggestions were welcome for storage sites and/ or a new site for the historic church organ.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That Members be requested to inform Councillor Levett if they knew of a new home or temporary storage facility for the All Saints church organ which was due to be removed from the building;
- (2) That All Saints Church, Willian be advised to contact the Community Engagement Team to discuss funding stream opportunities.

REASON FOR DECISION: To ensure that the Letchworth Committee is kept apprised of matters affecting Wards and Outside Organisations.

St Michael's Church

Councillor Mike Rice advised that:

- The cost of repairing St Michael's Church was too great therefore the decision had sadly been taken to remove it.

Members suggested that the Committee be involved in looking at what would be placed on this important and prominent town site in future.

Remembrance Sunday Events

The Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager advised that:

- The National British Legion had advised not to undertake parades or services;
- The details of the event in Letchworth were still to be confirmed;
- If there were no formal events, wreaths would be laid at the memorials outside usual times to prevent gatherings due to the Covid-19 pandemic;

Wednesday, 14th October, 2020

- Members were requested not to attend unless invited because the organisers were having to undertake risk assessments and 'Track and Trace' obligations;
- If a service was confirmed in Letchworth, the Vice-Vice-Chair of the Council would lay the wreath.

The meeting closed at 9.54 pm

Chair