

5 March 2025

Our Ref Southern Rural Community Forum
13 March 2025
Contact. Community Partnerships Team
Direct Dial. 01462 474405
Email. community@north-herts.gov.uk

To: Members of the Area Forum: Councillors David Barnard (Chair), Claire Strong (Vice-Chair), Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Lisa Nash, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Paul Ward and Laura Williams

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM

to be held in the

**HYBRID (VIRTUAL / COUNCIL CHAMBERS, COUNCIL
OFFICES, GERNON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6
3JF)**

On

THURSDAY, 13TH MARCH, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Jeanette Thompson
Service Director – Legal and Community

****MEMBERS PLEASE ENSURE THAT YOU DOWNLOAD ALL AGENDAS AND REPORTS VIA THE MOD.GOV APPLICATION ON YOUR TABLET BEFORE ATTENDING THE MEETING****

Agenda **Part I**

Item	Page
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1.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE
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2.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS
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Members are reminded that any declarations of interest in respect of any business set out in the agenda, should be declared as either a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest or Declarable Interest and are required to notify the Chair of the nature of any interest declared at the commencement of the relevant item on the agenda.

Members declaring a Disclosable Pecuniary Interest must withdraw from the meeting for the duration of the item. Members declaring a Declarable Interest, wishing to exercise a 'Councillor Speaking Right', must declare this at the same time as the interest, move to the public area before speaking to the item and then must leave the room before the debate and vote.

Community Governance Review

Council have resolved to launch the second public consultation of draft proposals for the Community Governance Review. This will launch on Friday 14 March and the deadline for responses is 9 May.

For each parish there is the proposal to change the electoral cycle so that all scheduled parish elections are held on the same year as the district council elections.

For some parishes there are proposals to change boundaries and / or the number of parish councillors.

There is also the suggestion to establish a new town council for Hitchin, Letchworth and Baldock.

Note that these are only draft proposals, and the final recommendations will be considered at a future Council meeting, taking the results of the public consultation into account.

The second public consultation will again encourage online responses. However, should anyone not have access or confident responding online they can visit the council offices and use the computers in the main reception with assistance by members of staff or they can make contact either on the phone, letter, in person, email, and a paper version can be supplied. These paper versions will also be made available at the monthly Councillor Surgeries in the four market towns.

Whether you agree or disagree with the draft proposals, please do respond to the consultation and with any alternative proposal you may have.

There's a dedicated webpage on the Council's website titled 'Community Governance Review' which will include a link to the survey once live.

- 3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - GRANT APPLICATIONS** (Pages 5 - 14)
To consider community grant applications for recommendation to the Executive Member for Community and Partnerships.
- 4. PRESENTATION - POLICE UPDATE**
Presentation by North Herts Safer Neighbourhood Team.
- 5. INFORMATION NOTE ON NEW BIN DELIVERIES** (Pages 15 - 16)
Information about the new bin deliveries starting in May, ready for the new collection service in August.
- 6. INFORMATION NOTE ON ECO FLEX SCHEME** (Pages 17 - 18)
Information about the Energy Company Obligation Flexible Eligibility (ECO Flex) scheme.
- 7. COMMUNITY UPDATE** (Pages 19 - 20)
To provide the Forum with an update to ensure Members are kept informed of the work of the Community and Partnerships Team.
- 8. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**
To receive any verbal reports from Members and questions from members of the public regarding Ward matters and Outside Organisations.
- 9. FUTURE COMMUNITY FORUMS**
To discuss topics for future meetings.

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REPORT (FOR RECOMMENDATION & NOTING BY COMMUNITY FORUM)

SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM
DATE 13 MARCH 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: LEGAL & COMMUNITY

1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

- 1.1 To advise the Community Forum on the current expenditure and balances of the Community Grant budget.
- 1.2 To bring to the Forum's attention details of recent requests received for Community grant funding, made by community groups and local organisations.
- 1.3 To enable Forum Members to make recommendations to the Executive Member for Community & Partnerships on grant applications.
- 1.4 To advise the Forum of the activities and schemes with which Community & Partnerships officers have been involved in and some important community-based activities that will take place during the next few months.

2. RECOMMENDATIONS

THAT THE COMMUNITY FORUM:

- 2.1 Considers and notes the information within this report.
- 2.2 Makes recommendations to the Executive Member for Community & Partnerships on the grant applications detailed below.
- 2.3 Holwell Parish Council – **£2,000** towards updating the fire precautions at Holwell Pavillion.
- 2.4 Offley Parish Council – **£2,000** towards the replacement and installation of a basketball arm, ring, and backboard, along with re-marking the court.

3. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Community Grant budget for Southern Rural Community Forum 2024/25 is **£16,555**.
- 3.2 Community grant payments totalling **£12,190** have been made to date, as itemised in Appendix 1.
- 3.3 The remaining budget available for community grants for the Southern Rural area for 2024/25 therefore stands at **£4,365**.

4. LEGAL IMPLICATIONS

- 4.1 Following the decision of Full Council on 18 April 2023, a Community Forum shall consider applications for community grants in its area and make recommendations to the Executive Member for Community & Partnerships on them. The Executive

Member has delegated authority to make these Executive decisions under section 14.6.8(b)((ii)A 5 of the constitution, in consultation with the Service Director: Legal & Community. That decision will be subject to a 5 clear working day call-in period, following publication in the Members Information Service (MIS) and on the Council's website.

- 4.2 Other issues raised in this report are for information and noting and therefore no direct legal implications arise.

5. FINANCIAL IMPLICATIONS

- 5.1 As outlined in Appendix 1 and under item 3.3 the remaining Community Grant budget available is **£4,365**.

- 5.2 The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£4,000**.

- 5.3 If the application outlined in Appendices 2 and 3 are recommended by the Forum and subsequently approved by the Executive Member for Community & Partnerships, there would be **£365** available to carry forward into the 2025/26 budget, subject to approval from Cabinet.

6. RISK IMPLICATIONS

- 6.1 Good risk management supports and enhances the decision-making process, increasing the likelihood of the Council meeting its objectives and enabling it to respond quickly and effectively to change. When taking decisions, risks and opportunities must be considered.

- 6.2 There are no relevant risk entries that have been recorded on Ideagen Risk Management, the Council's performance and risk system. Individual events should have their own risk assessments in place to mitigate any health and safety issues. Whenever a request for grant funding for equipment is received, the recipient of the funding will be advised to obtain insurance for the item to avoid a repeat request for funding in the event of the equipment being stolen or damaged. There are no pertinent risk implications for the Authority associated with any items within this report.

7. EQUALITIES IMPLICATIONS

- 7.1 In line with the Public Sector Equality Duty, public bodies must, in the exercise of their functions, give due regard to the need to eliminate discrimination, harassment, victimisation, to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations between those who share a protected characteristic and those who do not.

- 7.2 Community Grant funds are awarded to community groups that clearly demonstrate positive impact on the community and wider environment. The projects outlined in this report seek to advance equality of opportunity and foster good relations.

8. SOCIAL VALUE IMPLICATIONS

- 8.1 The Social Value Act and "go local" policy do not apply to the matters contained within this report, as there are no recommendations on procurement.

9. ENVIRONMENTAL IMPLICATIONS

- 9.1 There are no known Environmental impacts or requirements that apply to this report.

10. HUMAN RESOURCE IMPLICATIONS

10.1 The activities of the Community & Partnerships team are covered by existing budgets.

11. BACKGROUND PAPERS

11.1 Terms of Reference for Community Forums, Section 9 of the Council Constitution updated April 2024.

11.2 Community Grants Criteria Policy May 2023.

12. APPENDICES

12.1 Appendix 1. Southern Rural Community Grant Budget 24-25

12.2 Appendix 2. Holwell Parish Council

12.3 Appendix 3. Offley Parish Council

12.4 Appendix 4. Community Updates

13. CONTACT OFFICERS

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SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM

SUMMARY FINANCIAL POSITION 2024/25

<u>Original Budget</u> <u>2024/25</u>	<u>Carry Forward Budget</u> <u>2023/24</u>	<u>Total Funding</u> <u>2024/25</u>	<u>Grants</u> <u>Allocated</u>	<u>Unallocated</u> <u>Budget</u>
£13,700	£2,855	£16,555	£12,190	£4,365

FUNDED PROJECTS

<u>Project</u>	<u>Forum Date</u>	<u>Grant Allocated</u>
Angels Support Group Hitchin - towards 1:1 service providing individualised support for families of children with autism and ADHD	02-Oct-24	£2,232
Groundwork East - Wild Play sessions for families, focusing on outdoor learning	02-Oct-24	£1,982
Offley and Stopsley Cricket Club - towards the purchase of bowling machines with auto feeders, a set of additional balls and a mobile cricket cage	02-Oct-24	£1,812
Cassel Hall Trust - towards the replacement of the boiler at Cassel Memorial Hall	17-Dec-24	£2,000
Hitchin Town Youth FC - towards two sets of goal posts	17-Dec-24	£700
Pirton JoyCare - towards the running costs of services supporting older people in the community	17-Dec-24	£870
Preston Parish Council - External defibrillator cabinet	17-Dec-24	£594
Living Theatre Whitwell CIO - outdoor art trail project	17-Dec-24	£2,000
TOTAL SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM		£12,190

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=Document Control:

Version	Issue Date	Changes
1.0	NA	First Draft (BE)

Reference	6109			
Name of Organisation	Holwell Parish Council			
Organisation Type	Parish Council			
Ward	Cadwell			
Project Type	Fire Safety updates to Pavillion			
Green option considered?	-			
NHC Councillor involvement that may constitute a conflict of interest	None			
Previous financial support within six years	Received community grant funding in: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Sept 2023, towards additional chairs for the pavilion • June 2022, towards chairs, tables, cooker and fridge/freezer for the pavilion • March 2021, towards a noticeboard Also received a Capital grant in April 2021 of £50,000 towards the replacement of the sports and recreation pavilion.			
Documentation reviewed and approved*	Safeguarding	Yes	Accounts	Yes
	Demonstrates clear governance	Yes		
Total applied for	£2,000	Total project cost	£3,640	
Officer Summary				
<p>Holwell Pavilion requires an upgrade from domestic to commercial fire precautions. The original builder followed the architect's instructions, which were for domestic, not commercial, standards. The architect initially responsible for instructing the builder has unfortunately passed away. Consequently, the onus falls on the Parish Council to make the necessary updates.</p> <p>Updating the fire precautions will benefit all users of the pavilion, including the cricket club, football club, and those hiring the building for functions or meetings. Ensuring their safety is top priority.</p> <p>The pavilion is currently not being hired out until the correct fire precautions are in place. The final fire precaution certificate and building control sign-off are mandatory, as required by the insurance company.</p> <p>Installation of the necessary fire precautions will proceed as soon as any funding is received, aiming for completion before the summer.</p> <p>The total cost of the project is £3,640. Holwell Parish Council is requesting £2,000 from the Southern Rural community grant, contributing £500 from their own reserves, and currently has an open application with the Rands Foundation for the additional funding.</p>				

*Funding will only be released on receipt and approval of all supporting documentation

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Appendix 3. Offley Parish Council

=Document Control:

Version	Issue Date	Changes
1.0	NA	First Draft (BE)

Reference	6106			
Name of Organisation	Offley Parish Council			
Organisation Type	Parish Council			
Ward	Offa			
Project Type	MUGA refurbishment			
Green option considered?				
NHC Councillor involvement that may constitute a conflict of interest	District Cllr Steven Patmore is on Offley Parish Council			
Previous financial support within six years	Previously received funding from the Southern Rural community grant for: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • June 2023, towards benches in Offley Recreation Centre • Sept 2022, towards a village notice board 			
Documentation reviewed and approved*	Safeguarding	Yes	Accounts	Yes
	Demonstrates clear governance	Yes		
Total applied for	£2,000	Total project cost	£3,073	

Officer Summary

Offley is a thriving village with a well-supported recreation centre that hosts various activities including junior football, tennis, outdoor gym equipment, and a children's play area. This also includes the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) located at Offley Recreation Centre.

Over the years, it has undergone several upgrades and refurbishments to maintain its functionality and safety for community use. In the late 2000s, the MUGA was first sited at the recreation centre. With S106 funding, it was upgraded in 2012, which included the installation of full fencing and the marking out of five-a-side football and basketball. In response to the damage caused by bad storms in 2024, it was decided that the MUGA should undergo a refurbishment. This refurbishment project, scheduled for April 2025, will be carried out by Wicksteed's Play, who originally installed the MUGA.

The ongoing refurbishment project involves the replacement and installation of a basketball arm, ring, and backboard, along with re-marking the court. The total cost of the project is £3,073. The Parish Council is seeking £2,000 from the Southern Rural community grant and will cover the remaining £1,073 from their reserves.

The refurbishment of the Multi-Use Games Area (MUGA) at Offley Recreation Centre will improve safety, enhance facilities, and foster community engagement, offering upgraded equipment and a space for people of all ages to enjoy.

This is an in-principle agreement, with funds only be released once lease arrangements have been confirmed that work can take place.

*Funding will only be released on receipt and approval of all supporting documentation

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March 2025 Community Forums Briefing: New bin deliveries in May, ready for the new collection service in August

1. New arrivals: 240-litre blue-lidded cardboard and paper bins, from May

From early May, new 240-litre blue-lidded bins will be delivered to North Herts households, ready to use for cardboard and paper recycling when the new service starts on 4 August 2025. The new bin will be taped up with a note attached advising residents not to use it until that date.

Residents should continue to use their blue paper boxes until the new service begins. We will not be collecting the old paper boxes. We recommend that residents use them for storage, or for putting out additional recycling or cardboard and paper side waste for collection. If unwanted, these can also be recycled at local recycling centres.

The introduction of a separate cardboard and paper waste stream meets the Government’s ‘Simpler Recycling’ requirement, to reduce cross-contamination and increase the quality of cardboard and paper recycling. Annual increases in home shopping deliveries, and manufacturers and retailers moving from plastic to cardboard packaging, is resulting in a greater amount of cardboard arriving in households. This bin helps residents process that. The cardboard and paper that we collect goes to Edwards Recycling. Income from it is used towards the costs of waste collection.

2. Expanding food waste recycling to the majority of flats/communal bin stores

Food waste recycling collections will be reintroduced to flats and areas with communal bins that do not currently have this service.

3. Further changes to the bin collection service in North Herts

The new three-weekly collection cycle for non-recyclable waste, mixed recycling and the new cardboard and paper bin will start from 4 August 2025. Most flats and households with communal bins will stay on fortnightly collections. Food waste collections remain a weekly, with subscription garden waste collections continuing fortnightly. Revised bin collection days will be promoted and circulated nearer the time.

From 4 August, residents can put loose plastics in their mixed recycling bin, in line with the Government’s Simpler Recycling requirement for recycling ‘soft plastics’ from home¹.

Further information

A Waste Department representative has requested to present to the Community Forums across North Herts on the new bin collection service in June, to go through the changes.

In the meantime, the Council webpage covers the key points and offers FAQs: www.north-herts.gov.uk/bin-collection-service-changes.

¹Trailblazers Knebworth, Royston, & Sawbridgeworth should continue using their current system for soft plastics recycling, then switch on 4 August to adding these loose their mixed recycling bin

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March 2025 Community Forums Briefing: The Energy Company Obligation Flexible Eligibility

(ECO Flex) scheme

North Herts Council is working in partnership with the charity National Energy Foundation to offer the ECO4 and Great British Insulation Flexible Eligibility schemes.

The ECO and Great British Insulation Schemes (sometimes referred to as GBIS) require energy suppliers to deliver insulation and heating measures to homes with the aim of reducing home heating costs for fuel poor households.

By introducing the flexible eligibility scheme at North Herts, known as ECO Flex, more residents may be eligible for funding for insulation and heating measures.

For residents living in hard to heat, poorly insulated homes, there's three routes to qualify which relate to household income, having a medical referral or proof of having someone vulnerable to the cold living at the house.

For further information or check if you qualify, go to www.north-herts.gov.uk/energy-efficiency-schemes-and-advice or contact the Better Housing Better Health helpline on 0800 107 0044, an independent service delivered by the National Energy Foundation.

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Further detail on eligibility:

To qualify, residents must be living in hard to heat, poorly insulated homes (with EPC rating of D-G for owner occupied and EPC E-G for rented) and then follow one of the routes to qualify:

Route 1: Having gross household income less than £31,000

Route 2: a combination of two proxies such as proof of council tax reduction due to low income, someone at the house being vulnerable to the cold, such as ages 65 and over or under 5, a child at the house qualifying for free school meals or having a referral from Citizen's Advice

Route 3: Having a medical referral from a doctor or other NHS health provider

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Districtwide Community Updates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Since launching the 2025 North Herts Heroes Awards, the winners have all been contacted and filming is underway. The Awards ceremony took place at the Chair's Civic event on Friday 28 February. Films about the winners are now available to view on the Council's YouTube channel. • Holocaust Memorial Day was on 27th January and to commemorate this we created a short film, with readings from Councillors and Community Faith Leaders. It can be watched through this link Holocaust Memorial Day 2025 • Co-ordinating various local and district wide Network Groups including Youth Action, Food Provision, Arts and Culture and Green and Growing Group. • Coordinating voluntary support response to Asylum Seekers based in North Herts. • Continuing to facilitate NHC Councillors' Community Surgeries. • Sharing and disseminating information on social media and to mailing lists, keeping in touch with the community, voluntary, statutory, and non-statutory agencies. • Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 Survey briefing <i>In May 2019, the council passed a climate emergency motion. This declaration asserted the council's commitment toward climate action beyond current government targets and international agreements. We also declared an Ecological Emergency in July 2023 to recognise the seriousness of ecological crisis and ensure that nature recovery is a priority for the council.</i> <i>Sustainability is one of our four priority areas of the Council Plan 2024-2028. To align with this key priority, we are replacing the existing Climate Change Strategy 2022-2027 and developing a wider Sustainability Strategy. This strategy will encompass many areas of sustainability, including emissions reductions, climate change adaptation and biodiversity.</i> <i>This survey will give you the opportunity to give your thoughts on the following proposed topics and associated actions.</i> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Net Zero by 2030 for the council's emissions - Net Zero district by 2040 - Biodiversity - Adaptation <i>The survey for this is live on our website and is running until 5pm on 31 March.</i>
Area Community Updates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to attend Parish Council meetings to make closer links with the parishes and local groups. • Met with members of Pirton's Souper Wednesday, learning more on how the group runs and looking forward. • Attending a 'ground breaking' ceremony for the new Pirton pavilion, who received funding towards the project from North Herts Council. • Pirton Sports & Social Club received £10,660 from the North Herts Prosperity Fund (NHPPF) towards new folding tables, stackable chairs, trolley, picnic benches, barbeque and storage shed. • Please feel free to arrange any meetings or ward walks with the Community Partnerships Officer to learn more about local groups and issues in your area.

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