

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL



3 September 2025

Our Ref Southern Rural Community Forum 11
September 2025

Contact. Community Partnerships Team
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To: Members of the Area Forum: Councillors David Barnard, Joe Graziano, Dominic Griffiths, Caroline McDonnell, Ralph Muncer, Lisa Nash, Steven Patmore, Louise Peace, Vijaiya Poopalasingham, Claire Strong, Paul Ward and Laura Williams

NOTICE IS HEREBY GIVEN OF A

MEETING OF THE SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM

to be held in the

**GREAT ASHBY COMMUNITY CENTRE, WHITEHORSE LANE,
STEVENAGE, SG1 6NH**

On

THURSDAY, 11TH SEPTEMBER, 2025 AT 7.30 PM

Yours sincerely,

Isabelle Alajooz
Director – Governance

****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
1.	ELECTION OF A CHAIR FOR THE COMMUNITY FORUM MEETING To elect a chair for the Southern Rural Community Forum meeting on 11 th September 2025.	
2.	APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE	
3.	CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS 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.	
4.	PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - GRANT APPLICATIONS To consider community grant applications for recommendation to the Executive Member for Governance.	(Pages 5 - 14)
5.	PRESENTATION - LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION Presentation and Q&A on Local Government Reorganisation. Information on the Local Government Reorganisation can be found in the links below. <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Help shape Hertfordshire's future - have your say on changes to local government North Herts Council• Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation North Herts Council	(Pages 15 - 16)
6.	COMMUNITY UPDATE To provide the Forum with an update to ensure Members are kept informed of the work of the Community Partnerships Team.	(Pages 17 - 18)
7.	WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS To receive any verbal reports from Members and questions from members of the public regarding Ward matters and Outside Organisations.	
8.	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 11 SEPTEMBER 2025

***PART 1 – PUBLIC DOCUMENT**

SERVICE DIRECTORATE: GOVERNANCE

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 Governance (formally Community & Partnerships), the Leader 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 Governance on the grant applications detailed below.
- 2.3 Offley Parish Council - **£600** towards the purchase of three Christmas trees and lights for local village festivals.
- 2.4 Preston School Association - **£1,500** towards the replacement of the outdoor activity trail.

3. BACKGROUND/ RELEVANT CONSIDERATIONS

- 3.1 The Community Grant budget for Southern Rural Community Forum 2025/26 is **£15,000**.
- 3.2 Community grant payments totalling **£2,198** 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 2025/26 therefore stands at **£12,802**.

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 (now Governance) on them. The Executive Member is the Leader of the Council and has delegated authority to

make these Executive decisions under section 14.6.9(b)(iii)A of the constitution, in consultation with the Service Director: Governance. 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 The Terms of Reference of the Community Forum can be found in Section 9 of the constitution which states that the forum will *'consider and act as an advisory body to the relevant Executive Member responsible for grants who approves these (in consultation with the relevant Director)'*.

- 4.3 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 Community Grant budget available is **£12,802**.

- 5.2 The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£2,100**.

- 5.3 If the applications outlined in Appendices 2 and 3 are recommended by the Forum and subsequently approved by the Executive Member for Governance there would be **£10,702** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2025/26 financial year.

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 In relation to the Offley Parish Council application, Appendix 2, the environmental impact relates to the single use of cut Christmas trees, which contributes to organic waste, resulting in recurring waste each year. The alternative of artificial plastic trees has been considered as they can be reused over time, but they have a higher production footprint and are often non-recyclable. Another alternative to consider is the use of potted trees, which can be replanted or reused annually and have a lower carbon footprint. Real trees also decompose naturally and can be recycled into mulch or compost, reducing long-term environmental impact. Offley Parish Council has opted not to use potted trees due to their higher cost and the difficulty in sourcing trees of the required size.
- 9.2 In relation to the Preston School Association application, Appendix 3, if the full activity trail were replaced, this would result in significant wood waste. However, if a phased approach is used, this focuses on the most deteriorated areas, helping to reduce overall material consumption and environmental impact through targeted upgrades. The use of wooden materials does offer some environmental advantages over synthetic alternatives, as wood is biodegradable and renewable. To support this sustainable approach, the supplier installing the trail will also be removing and transferring the waste to a registered recycling centre for further processing.

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 May 2024.
- 11.2 Community Grants Criteria Policy March 2025.

12. APPENDICES

- 12.1 Appendix 1. Southern Rural Community Grant Budget 25-26
- 12.2 Appendix 2. Offley Parish Council
- 12.3 Appendix 3. Preston School Association
- 12.4 Appendix 4. Community Updates

13. CONTACT OFFICERS

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SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM

SUMMARY FINANCIAL POSITION 2025/26

<u>Original Budget</u> <u>2025/26</u>	<u>Carry Forward Budget</u> <u>2024/25</u>	<u>Total Funding</u> <u>2025/26</u>	<u>Grants</u> <u>Allocated</u>	<u>Unallocated</u> <u>Budget</u>
£15,000		£15,000	£2,198	£12,802

FUNDED PROJECTS

<u>Project</u>	<u>Forum Date</u>	<u>Grant Allocated</u>
Pirton Community Choir - purchase of a piano stool, microphone boom, keyboard in addition to a case and stand	17th June 2025	£1,073
Whitwell 25 Football Club - hire of the Recreation ground and pavilion	17th June 2025	£1,125
TOTAL SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM		£2,198

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Appendix 2. Offley Parish Council

=Document Control:

Version	Issue Date	Changes
1.0	NA	First Draft (BE)

Reference	6130			
Name of Organisation	Offley Parish Council			
Organisation Type	Parish Council			
Ward	Offa			
Project Type	Christmas trees and lights			
Green option considered?	While artificial trees can be reused, they have a higher production footprint and are often non-recyclable. Potted trees offer a lower carbon impact but are costly and hard to source. Real trees were the preferred option due to their biodegradability and potential for recycling.			
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	From Southern Rural Community Forum: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> £2,000 in March 2025 towards refurbishment MUGA £610 in June 2023 towards two benches at Offley Recreation Centre £500 in Sept 2022 towards new noticeboards £2,000 in March 2021 towards playground equipment 			
Documentation reviewed and approved*	Safeguarding	Yes	Accounts	Yes
	Demonstrates clear governance	Yes		
Total applied for	£600	Total project cost	£1,200	
Officer Summary				
<p>Following requests from local residents, Offley Parish Council intend to erect three Christmas trees and outdoor lights across the village and hamlets of Cockernhoe, Mangrove Green, and Tea Green. This is with the aim of bringing comfort and joy during the festive period. Offley Village already benefits from a similar installation, and this expansion ensures a more inclusive celebration across the parish.</p> <p>To mark the installations, three public Christmas light switch-on events will be held in collaboration with the School PTA and the Cockernhoe Memorial Hall Committee. These will feature carol singing, soft drinks, and light refreshments, inviting residents of all ages. The events are designed to strengthen community bonds and support the wellbeing of residents.</p> <p>The total cost of the project is £1,200, which includes the purchase of three Christmas trees (£480), erection and removal services (£300), two sets of lights (£60), three battery sets (£60), and event expenses (£300). The lights and battery packs will be stored for future reuse.</p> <p>The parish council is contributing £600 towards the project and is seeking the additional £600 from the Southern Rural Community Forum.</p>				

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

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Appendix 3. Preston School Association

=Document Control:

Version	Issue Date	Changes
1.0	NA	First Draft (BE)

Reference	6125			
Name of Organisation	Preston School Association			
Organisation Type	Registered Charity			
Ward	Hitchwood			
Project Type	Replacement of activity trail			
Green option considered?	A phased replacement of the activity trail would minimise wood waste and environmental impact, using biodegradable and renewable wooden materials, with all removed waste responsibly recycled by the supplier.			
NHC Councillor involvement that may constitute a conflict of interest	None known			
Previous financial support within six years	No			
Documentation reviewed and approved*	Safeguarding	Yes	Accounts	Yes
	Demonstrates clear governance	Yes		
Total applied for	£1,500	Total project cost	£12,798	
Officer Summary				

The [Preston School Association](#) (PSA) has supported Preston Primary School for many years, raising tens of thousands of pounds to improve the learning environment and ensure pupils have access to essential resources and equipment.

PSA are seeking funds to replace the school's wooden activity trail, which has been condemned as unsafe and is no longer usable. This trail was a key part of the outdoor play area, offering children opportunities for physical activity, imaginative play, and social interaction.

A safe and stimulating play trail will benefit the 64 children currently enrolled at the school, as well as hundreds more in the years to come. The school is a central part of the local community, and investing in its facilities contributes to wider goals of community health, inclusion and resilience.

The total cost of the replacement project is £12,798. The school and PSA have already secured £8,600 through fundraising and internal contributions. They are requesting £1,500 from the Southern Rural Community Forum to contribute to the project.

The PSA has been exploring other funding streams and currently has an open application with the National Lottery Community Fund to cover the remaining balance of the project. If the National Lottery application is unsuccessful, PSA will prioritise replacing the most critical sections of the activity trail and continue fundraising to complete the remaining parts.

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

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All Forums, September 2025: Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) Update

1. **Summary**

- 1.1 The government's requirement for Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) has now reached an important stage in Hertfordshire, as all 11 councils begin to engage with residents, businesses, community groups and other stakeholders on principles and priorities, as well as potential options for future council arrangements.
- 1.2 Engagement events are being held across Hertfordshire throughout September, including the community forums in North Herts. A survey is now open to allow residents to give their views on how local government in Hertfordshire should be organised.

2. **Overview:**

- 2.1 The government's Devolution White Paper requires all local authorities in areas where there are currently two tiers of local government, to develop proposals for reorganisation. These proposals should seek to establish a single tier of local government. District and Borough Councils across Hertfordshire, along with the County Council and the Police and Crime Commissioner, are working closely together to consider future arrangements that will best meet the needs of our communities.
- 2.2 This is a once-in-a-generation opportunity to help shape how local services, from bins and planning to libraries and social care, are delivered in Hertfordshire. Councils want to protect what already works well while improving the things that could be better. By taking part, residents and organisations can ensure their voices are heard and any future changes deliver long-term benefits to our communities.
- 2.3 The objectives for LGR are:
 - Simplified, more efficient and more resilient council structures
 - More consistent service access
 - Greater transparency in decision-making
 - A stronger local voice in how councils operate

3. **Steps to date:**

- 3.1 A single unitary council for the whole of Hertfordshire has been ruled out. With a population of 1.2 million, Hertfordshire is too big to be viable as just one council area. It would be larger

than any local authority in the UK and decision-making would become too far removed from our communities. Instead, councils are working together to explore options that are more locally focused and responsive, including multiple unitary authorities that better reflect the identity of different parts of our county.

- 3.2 An initial round of engagement took place in July with several key strategic partners of the council, including town business improvement districts (BIDs). This initial phase focussed on the principles and opportunities behind potential reorganisation options, and aimed to build understanding of the LGR process.

4. Information to note

- 4.1 Hertfordshire's 11 councils have developed three potential options for how local government could be structured in the future. Details for each of the three options can be seen on the display boards at the Community Forum.
- 4.2 A survey is now available online for residents to have their say on the proposals. It's the easiest way to give feedback. The link to the survey is on the display boards.
- 4.3 A website has also launched which has more information about the three options for unitary councils and updates related to LGR in Hertfordshire. The link to the survey is also there. The North Herts Council website also has more information and a link to the site.

5. Next steps:

- 5.1 Feedback from this phase of engagement will be collated and used to shape a final submission for LGR in Hertfordshire. The deadline for submissions is 28 November 2025.
- 5.2 An Extraordinary Council meeting will take place on 13 November 2025 to consider the submission, and a final decision will be made at a Cabinet meeting on 19 November 2025. Other Herts local authorities will also make a final decision that week.
- 5.3 A decision on which proposal to take forward is expected in 2026. It is anticipated that elections to the new unitary authorities will take place in May 2027, and Vesting Day (the date the new councils officially take over from the current councils) will be in 2028.

Note prepared by: Gavin Midgley, Senior Digital Communications Officer and Christine Crofts, Communications Manager

Districtwide Community Updates
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 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
Area Community Updates
<p>The Community Partnerships Officer Update:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Continuing to attend Parish Council meetings to make closer links with the parishes and local groups. • Met with Kimpton Folk Festival to discuss the future of the festival, support and guidance on the Community Grant. • Attended the 'Topping out' ceremony for the new Pirton Pavilion, who received funding towards the project from North Herts Council. • Presenting and holding a stall at the North Herts & Stevenage Centre for Voluntary Service's Funding Summit on 18th September. Register at North Herts & Stevenage Centre for Voluntary Services GoVolHerts • Attending Ickleford Village Hall's <i>100 years of service</i> celebration on 20th September. • A reminder to Councillors that they are very welcome to arrange any meetings or ward walks with the Community Partnerships Officer.

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