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NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN THE COUNCIL CHAMBERS, DISTRICT COUNCIL OFFICES, GERONON ROAD, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY, SG6 3JF
ON WEDNESDAY, 15TH MARCH, 2023 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors: Councillor Daniel Allen (Chair), Councillor Sean Prendergast (Vice-Chair), Amy Allen, Morgan Derbyshire, Ian Mantle, Tom Plater, Adem Ruggiero-Cakir, Tamsin Thomas, Phil Weeder and Sean Nolan*

In Attendance:

Aimee Flack (Assistant Community Engagement Officer), James Lovegrove (Committee, Member and Scrutiny Manager) and Eleanor Hopcraft (Committee, Member & Scrutiny Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting approximately 4 members of the public, including registered speakers.

85 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Audio recording – 1 minute 7 seconds

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors David Levett, Terry Hone and Simon Bloxham.

86 MINUTES - 14 DECEMBER 2022

Audio Recording – 1 minute 24 seconds

Councillor Daniel Allen as Chair proposed, Councillor Amy Allen seconded and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 14 December 2022 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chair.

87 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 13 seconds

There was no other business notified.

88 CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Audio recording – 2 minutes 18 seconds

- (1) The Chair advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (2) The 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.

- (3) The Chair advised for the purposes of clarification that 4.8.23(a) of the Constitution did not apply to this meeting.

89 HERTFORDSHIRE CONSTABULARY - UPDATE

Audio recording – 3 minutes 12 seconds

The Chair invited PS Lisa Perks from Hertfordshire Constabulary to present. PS Perks thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- Crimes in Letchworth for the year 01/04/22-12/03/23 totaled 2,600 compared to 1,718 in the previous year. This was an increase of nearly 20%.
- North Hertfordshire saw a 7.5% increase in crime and County overall saw a 2.7% increase.
- Residential burglary had increased by 17% in Letchworth, 6.3% in North Hertfordshire and 2.3% County-wide.
- There had been a 140% increase in business burglaries in Letchworth. North Hertfordshire had seen cases increase to 143 from 96 previously.
- OWL messaging was being used to communicate with residents, as well as collect evidence of criminal activity, including instances of cuckooing.
- Theft from motor vehicles had increased by 49% in Letchworth. North Hertfordshire had seen an increase to 284 cases from 242.
- There was a large increase in Wilbury Ward, with 16 cases this year compared to 5 previously.
- Personal robbery in Letchworth had increased to 14 cases from 6, and North Hertfordshire had seen a decrease to 53 from 58 cases last year.
- Violence against persons decreased in Letchworth to 844 cases from 845. North Hertfordshire also saw a decrease to 2,281 from 2,370.
- Criminal damage and arson had increased in Letchworth to 232 from 188 previously. North Hertfordshire had also seen an increase to 795 compared to 616 last year.
- Shoplifting had increased to 182 cases from 92 in Letchworth, and North Hertfordshire had seen an increase to 453 from 300 cases previously.
- Incidents of drug possession had decreased to 41 from 56 in Letchworth and public order offences had increased to 137 from 129.
- Possession of offensive weapons in Letchworth had increased to 17 cases from 12.
- Priority areas were set every 3 months, and the current priorities were theft from motor vehicles including catalytic converters and number plates, speeding in Norton Road and unlawful use of e-scooters.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Tamsin Thomas
- Councillor Tom Plater

In response to Member's questions, PS Perks advised:

- The end of COVID restrictions could explain the crime increase in Letchworth.
- Theft from motor vehicles was a county-wide issue. Arrests had been made by on-road policing units and the police were working to educate residents on securing catalytic converters and numberplates.
- The cuckooing system, safeguarding vulnerable people and the use of plain-clothes officers was how drug crimes were being dealt with currently.
- It would be ideal to have more patrols, however Police Officer recruitment and retainment issues were affecting this currently.

90 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Audio recording – 16 minutes 25 seconds

The Chair invited Aimee Flack, the Assistant Community Engagement Officer, to update Members on Budgets. Ms Flack thanked the Chair, and provided the following update:

- The 2022/23 base budget was £11,000 with £2,956 carried forward from 2021/22. This gave a total budget of £13,956.
- The Committee had awarded £11,814 in grants this year, with £2,142 left.
- The grant applications for the meeting on 15 March 2023 totalled £1,858, which if granted, would leave £284 to carry forward into 2023/24.

Councillor Tom Plater commented that representatives from Letchworth BID were not in attendance tonight and asked the Chair for an update of their work.

The Chair advised that the BID had not been invited, and advised that the BID had recently appointed a new manager.

The Chair invited Raymond Wilson from Green Care, Norton CIC to present. Mr Wilson thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- Hydroponics units would provide vulnerable adults the opportunity to grow produce indoors.
- This would benefit those unable to go outdoors and participate in rigorous gardening.
- The units did not use compost, and were economical to run.
- Dehydration units would reduce food waste, and meant produce could be stored for longer.
- Previously, ovens were used to dry out produce and flower petals for confetti and potpourri which took a long time. The dehydration units would make this process quicker.
- The people that the CIC worked with were long-term unemployed. This project would give them basic business, economic and horticultural skills.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Daniel Allen
- Councillor Sean Nolan
- Councillor Sean Prendergast

In response to the Member's questions, Mr Wilson advised:

- The walking tractor previously funded by the Committee allowed larger areas to be cultivated quicker than using manual tools.
- Green Care had donated to foodbanks previously, however most foodbanks preferred non-perishable items.
- There were about 25 active users of the organisation, and the organisation had worked with over 50 people since their inception.

In response to the question from Councillor Prendergast, Mr Wilson advised that the entire project would total £898, with £200 of the cost coming from their reserves.

Councillor Tom Plater proposed that the Committee increase the grant funding to £898 and this was seconded by Councillor Sean Prendergast, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocated £898 to Green Care at Norton CIC towards equipment for the next phase of their development as outlined in paragraphs 8.1.1-8.1.7 of the officer's report.

Mr Wilson thanked the Committee of their support of the organisation and the interest Members had taken in the organisation.

N.B. The Chair and Councillor Amy Allen declared an interest in Letchworth Garden Shed, and left the Chamber at 20:04. During this time the Vice-Chair, Councillor Sean Prendergast acted as Chair of the meeting.

The Chair invited Angela Bell, from Letchworth Garden Shed to present. Ms Bell thanked the Chair, gave a presentation and advised:

- The organisation were opening a Library of Things in May 2023, which would allow members to borrow tools, equipment and appliances at low costs instead of buying items outright.
- It was expected that in the first year of the library would save 32 tonnes of carbon emissions.
- One in five households in Letchworth were living in poverty, and the Library of Things would allow people to do tasks and fun activities.
- There were currently 40 other libraries in the UK, and the Letchworth branch hoped to have 300 stock items for opening.
- Part of the grant funding would go towards second-hand shelving at the Library.
- At least five skills workshops would be run a year, with four repair days, where residents could bring items for repair at no charge.

The following Members asked questions:

- Councillor Tom Plater
- Councillor Sean Nolan

In response to the Member's questions, Ms Bell advised:

- The Library of Things would be situated on Leys Avenue.
- Members would be asked to vote on what skills session they would like to see run at the Library.
- First aid training would be provided for all the volunteers..
- A paid part-time manager may be appointed dependent on funding.

Councillor Tom Plater proposed and Councillor Ian Mantle seconded, and following a vote, it was:

RESOLVED: That the Committee allocated £1,160 to Letchworth Garden Shed towards shelving units and repair day equipment as outlined in paragraphs 8.1.8-8.1.12 of the officer's report.

N.B Councillors Daniel Allen and Amy Allen re-entered the Chamber at 20:15.

91 GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Audio recording – 46 minutes 35 seconds

The Chair invited Aimee Flack, Assistant Community Engagement Officer, to present. Ms Flack thanked the Chair, gave a verbal presentation and advised:

- The Community Conference was fully booked. This conference was being put on by North Hertfordshire Centre for Voluntary Service and Letchworth Heritage Foundation, assisted by North Hertfordshire District Council. The conference led on from a survey published that aimed to find out what challenges community groups were facing.
- The main challenges identified from the survey were spiralling overheads, service demand, reduced income and increased pressure on funders, which would be discussed further at the conference.
- The North Hertfordshire Heroes Awards Ceremony recognised five individuals for their service and can be viewed on the Council's YouTube Channel.

The Chair thanked the Community Engagement team for organising the North Hertfordshire Heroes Events and congratulated the Letchworth winners.

Councillor Tamsin Thomas proposed and Councillor Amy Allen seconded, and following a vote, it was:

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

92 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Audio recording – 49 minutes 28 seconds

Councillor Ian Mantle advised that the lease at Mrs Howard Hall had been agreed with a voluntary organisation. The Hall was run by volunteer teams with a professional manager. The Hall was a valuable community facility, and the new lease brought stability so it could continue serving the community for years to come.

The Chair commented that Mrs Howard Hall was a real benefit to Letchworth, and was happy to hear it was stable.

Councillor Sean Nolan advised that he had attended a settle Community Day on the Jackman's Estate and encouraged other Members to attend these events, should they have the opportunity.

The Chair advised that the recent traffic issues on the Grange Estate were caused by emergency works coinciding with planned works.

The Chair advised Members about the Outside Organisations survey sent out by Committee Services, and asked Members to fill in the survey for every organisation they represented.

The Chair advised that the Letchworth Councillors Community Surgery was on 18 March 2023.

The meeting closed at 8.24 pm

Chair

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