

BALDOCK & DISTRICT AREA FORUM

Monday 11th September 2023

Meeting held at Baldock Methodist Church, Whitehorse Street, Baldock,
SG7 6QB

On Monday 11th September at 7.30pm

NOTES

Present: *Cllr Tom Tyson (TT) (Chair), Cllr Alistair Willoughby (AW) (Executive member for Community and Partnerships) (Vice Chair), Cllr Juan Cowell (JC), Cllr Michael Muir (MM), Cllr Michael Weeks (MC), Cllr Steve Jarvis (SJ)*

In Attendance: *Laura Hartley (LH) (Community Partnership Officer)*

Also present: *At the commencement of the meeting there was 1 member of the public (MoP) including registered speakers.*

Paul Mumford (PM (Urban and Civic), Cath Bennet (CB) (Citizens Advice, Community Engagement Manager), Peter McMeekin (PMc) (Letchworth, Hitchin and Baldock Foodbank), Meika Cavanagh (MC) (Friends of Brandles) Richard Sharp (RS) (Friends of Brandles)

Meeting Started at **19:30**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

No apologies received.

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS (19:33)

Cllr Tyson welcomed everyone in attendance.

- Highlighted that the Forum is an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.
- Members were reminded they are making recommendations and not decisions for grant applications.

3. MINUTES AREA COMMITTEE 20 MARCH 2023

Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 20 March 2023 to be approved as a true record of the proceedings.

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4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATION (19:33)

Laura Hartley, Community Partnership Officer, updated Members on the community budgets. Last civic year total of **£4065** was not spent for the Baldock and District budget and has been carried forward onto 23/24 budget. Building on the budget of **£5000** from this civic year, to total **£9045**. With **£1325** having been granted, the current total is **£7740**.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Meika Cavanagh and Richard Sharp from Friends of Brandles who outlined the background of the club and what service they provide for the community.

Councillors asked questions that were answered by the grant applicants or Community Partnership Officer:

- What is the nature of the school?
Brandles is a secondary school that specialises in catering for boys with emotional, behavioural and mental health needs.
- Path and access to the area were discussed and a map of the area was presented.
- As this is an educational setting does this meet the grants criteria?
It does meet the Community Grants criteria providing the activity is beyond their statutory responsibilities.
- How are you hoping to fund and use the outdoor area after the grant has been provided?
Other fundraising will be happening throughout the year to help with costs after the initial set up of the outdoor activity area. Hoping to be able to open the garden during PTA events and attend market stalls to sell what has been grown in the garden.

Friends of Brandles Vote

MW proposed an amendment to the grant amount to £1000.

MM seconded.

3 votes against the amended amount.

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Cllr Tyson proposed original amount of funding, £1950, in favour of the recommendation.

SJ seconded.

Majority voted in favour of recommending Friends of Brandles application for £1950 towards gardening equipment, tools and storage for their outdoor adventure classroom.

3 – in favour of the recommendation

2 - against the recommendation

1 - abstained due to being the Executive Member and the ultimate decision maker of the grant application.

4. INFORMATION NOTE: GRANTS & COMMUNITY UPDATE

Laura Hartley, Community Partnerships Officer, presented the Community Update.

5. PRESENTATIONS (19:50)

U&C update

PM introduced Urban & Civic (U&C) who are planning and delivering the building of the Baldock expansion in partnership with the County Council.

[Growing Baldock](#)
[Baldock | Urban&Civic \(urbanandcivic.com\)](#)

From conversations with Baldock community groups, themes and discussion have looked at health provision, secondary school provisions, transport, and green & blue infrastructure.

Questions from Councillors:

- What is the predicted need within primary schools?
From the basis of the local plan and increase in population a 6 form entry influx is expected.
- Will the next public consultations be easily accessible?
From reflection of the last forums, venues are being looked at that are floor level and accessible to the public.

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At the end of October/ early November U&C will hold a public consultation.

U&C returning to Area Form for a longer presentation taking place virtually in January.

Peter McMeekin from Letchworth, Hitchin and Baldock foodbank presenting.

[Letchworth Foodbank | Helping Local People in Crisis](#)

- This is a referral based system from local agents (including Settle, Citizens Advice Bureau, schools, Children's centres, healthcare professionals)
- E-voucher system used - this holds details of the household and the need they have.
- The foodbank runs every Tuesday and Friday morning 10-12 in each area.
- [The Trussell Trust](#) has worked with nutritionists to ensure food parcels contain sufficient nutrition of healthy, balanced meals for individuals and families.
- Volunteer led organisation with around 70 volunteers.
- Also provide parcels for people who only have access to hot water, no stove/cooker or with no excess to water.

Questions from councillors:

- Have there been returns of food parcels due to fuel poverty and not being able to cook the food provided?

There have mainly been returns due to dietary requirements, religious reasons or exchange for vouchers. There are items that aren't put in the food parcels as they will cost more to heat than the cost of the food itself.

- How do you know the people receiving are in need?

The referral of individuals and households cuts this down. There is a grant from the Trussell Trust to obtain Citizens Adviser for people that need ongoing support.

- Is the food provided something that can be kept and is long lasting?

It should be long lasting and have longer best before dates.

- From previous experience boxes can be repetitive with not much variety.

Try to make sure there is as much variety as they can provide. Donations help to provide more variety for the food parcels.

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Cllr Muir advised that they are welcome to apply to Baldock Rotary Club for donations and support.

Cath Bennett from Citizens Advice North Herts presenting help and advice on the Cost of Living crisis and signposting.

Offer free confidential help and support, available to all.
6000 people had 1-1 help last year within the community.

Citizens Advice are at Baldock Library every Wednesday 10.30am to 12 noon.

As well as weekly sessions at the library, the Letchworth office is open Monday-Thursday 9.30pm-4pm.

[Get Advice - Citizens Advice North Hertfordshire \(northhertscab.org.uk\)](http://northhertscab.org.uk)

Questions from Councillors:

- What is the main way Citizens Advice are contacted?
Before covid 50% was face to face. This has gradually gone up to 25% after Covid. There is an advice line & email which people can be called back on.
- Is there data on the Baldock Area and the support given?
There are snapshots of wards that is sent to councillors showing numbers and demographics.

Chair presenting what help and support is offered by the council for Cost of Living.

Cost of living NHC page - [Help with the cost of living | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](http://north-herts.gov.uk)

Herts County Council (HCC)

- Webpage with resources - [Help to manage the cost of living | Hertfordshire County Council](http://north-herts.gov.uk)
- Free School Meals - Every child in the first three years of primary school can receive [free school meals](http://north-herts.gov.uk) via Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) regardless of family income. For older children, eligibility for free school meals is dependent on family income, but there may be exceptions.
- [HCC's Money Advice Unit](http://north-herts.gov.uk) – resources to help with money, including benefit and budgeting calculator, information on all major benefits and factsheets for pensioners, families with disabled children, people who are unfit for work, students and young people.

Council Tax

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- Council Tax reduction scheme -People of working age on a low income or who claim benefits can apply to pay less Council Tax. Link - [Council Tax Reduction Scheme consultation | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

- If you are struggling to pay council tax please contact NHC as soon as possible. Link - [Problems paying Council Tax | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

Home Grants - [Housing grants | North Herts Council \(north-herts.gov.uk\)](#)

- The Council offers grants to assist with improvement work in people's homes in certain limited situations. The two types of grants available are Home Repair Assistance Grants and Disabled Facilities Grants.
- Home Repair Assistance Grants are a discretionary form of assistance specifically designed to provide practical help, through a grant for small-scale works
- Disabled Facilities Grants are mandatory grants available to residents who need to make changes to their housing accommodation to enable them to continue to live independently.

Household Support Fund (HSF) - **Please be aware this is invite or referral only**

- Food boxes – **eligible** families will be **invited** to participate in a food scheme that will see them receive food boxes over a 6 month period that provide low cost, healthy ingredients and recipe instructions. Families will be supported by a team of nutritionists. Schools will be identifying families who are facing financial difficulties and speaking to inviting families in the Autumn term to sign up to participate.
- We are working in partnership with local organisation Creative Chefs to offer food education workshops to settings working with children aged to 5 years old including nursery and reception classes, parent and toddler groups and pre schools. Groups in the local area are already being contacted but any other groups wishing to participate can express their interest by emailing healthyhub@north-herts.gov.uk
- Food education sessions adults with learning disabilities, carers and older people are being organised through local partner organisations and individuals eligible to attend these will be contacted directly.

[Healthy Hub](#)

Healthy Hubs North Herts is where you can access practical help and support for a range of issues that affect your health and wellbeing. Whether you are feeling lonely or isolated, need help with accessing food support or if you are looking for some advice on staying healthy and well

Children

- Tax-free childcare - You can get up to £500 every three months (up to £2,000 a year) for each of your children to help with the costs of childcare through [Tax-free childcare](#). This goes up to £1,000 every three months if a child is disabled (up to £4,000 a year).

7. OPEN DISCUSSION (20:33)

SOLAR TOGETHER

Hertfordshire Solar Together Scheme aims to offer installation of solar panels (and battery storage if wanted) at a competitive price. It works by grouping together people from across the county who are interested in generating their own renewable energy, and then acting as an intermediary for them to increase their bargaining power. Last

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year, the scheme helped more than 400 households in North Herts get an average 22% discount on the typical market price of a 14-panel system (the average sized installation).

If you live in North Herts, or run a business, organisation, or community group in North Herts, you can register your interest for free and you are under no obligation to proceed if the price and recommendation do not meet your expectations. Solar Together pre-vets all their installers to ensure you'll receive a high-quality service from a certified provider, and you will only receive a singular recommendation from an installer, so you won't be inundated with numerous offers.

Registration is open now until the 27th October 2023. For further details, take a look at the North Herts Council website: [Solar Together](#) .

8. WARD MEMBERS ACTIVITIES (20:35)

Cllr Muir advised Herts County Council has £90,000 a year to spend on highways. Expressed to inform him of any maintenance needed.

9. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS (20:37)

If anyone has any topics for discussion to contact the Chair, Cllr Tyson, or Community Partnership Officer.

Suggested topics:

- U&C, Baldock development, to present in Januarys Area Forum

Meeting closed 8.37pm