

**North Herts Council
LETCWORTH AREA FORUM**

Meeting held on Zoom – Monday, 24 January at 7:30pm

NOTES

Present:

Cllr Tom Plater (Chair), Cllr Sean Prendergast (Vice Chair), Cllr Amy Allen, Cllr Daniel Allen, Cllr Simon Bloxham, Cllr Mick Debenham, Cllr Terry Hone, Cllr David Levett, Cllr Daniel Marsh, Cllr Sean Nolan, Cllr Tamsin Thomas, Cllr Phil Weeder

In Attendance:

Danny Pearson (DP) (Community and Partnerships Team Officer) – Laura Hartley (LH) Technical Support (Community and Partnerships Officer)

Also present:

At the commencement of the meeting there were 2 members of the public, 9 registered speakers and Andrew Mills – NHDC Service Manager Greenspace

Meeting Started at **7:33pm**

1. Chair's Announcements

Cllr Tom Plater welcomed everyone in attendance.

- Highlighted that it's an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.
- Members were reminded they are making recommendations and not decisions for grant applications.
- Highlighted that in accordance with Council policy the meeting was being recorded. The recording would be available both on the Council's YouTube channel, as well as on the Council's ModGov site alongside the documents from this meeting.

Apologies for absence: *Cllr Ian Mantle*

2. Public Participation – Grants

Danny Pearson, the Community and Partnership Officer, updated Members of

community grant budgets. Cllr Daniel Allen asked a question about possible grants that were expected at the next meeting and if there was enough money to cover those. Danny was able to answer the question and update members.

Cruse – Susan Cross and Babs McDonald presented.

Cruse asked for **£1,060**. They would like to spend funding on a Bereavement Support Group to be held in Letchworth. The group would be held once a month for a total of 6 months. Each group session lasts around 1½ hours. They would require funding for refreshments; volunteer travel and CPD costs; and administration/helpline costs.

Cruse provides free, specialist bereavement support for local adults, children, and young people (this application does not relate to children, and young people however), irrespective of how or when a bereavement occurred.

The group will be held on a weekday morning. They hope to use the same venue as for previous groups - the Broadway Hotel, in Letchworth once a month for 6 months. This hotel is situated in the town centre, a few minutes' walk from the train station and bus stops.

Group sessions give people battling with loneliness and social isolation the opportunity to meet other local people going through similar experiences and to talk openly and honestly about their feelings and how they are adjusting to living without their loved one. This form of support can be extremely empowering for bereaved people, enabling them to form long-lasting friendships and support networks for when their support ends.

Often this also results in local informal support groups forming amongst peers, supporting one another through WhatsApp groups and physical activities, e.g. coffee morning or Walk & talk groups, enabling clients to improve physical as well as mental wellbeing. Susan and Babs were able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions.

Proposed by Cllr Simon Bloxham and seconded Cllr Daniel Marsh.

Unanimous vote in favour of providing £1,060 to Cruse.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Susan Cross and Babs McDonald for the presentation.

Friends of Norton Common – David Whitaker and Roger Day presented.

Friends of Norton Common asked for **£2,165**. Friends of Norton Common host volunteer activities on the common that range from building a boardwalk, a bridge, replacing old seats, clearing paths, renovation of woodland, repairing hedges, clearing of fallen trees etc building a wildlife pond, and maintaining streams. They

have a lock up shipping container in the car park.

Much of their tool stock is showing its age, the majority being purchased at the inception of the group in 2007. They need to replace almost all of it to maintain the quality of work required. New tasks such as replacement of benches and boardwalks require additional tools. In addition, PPE is essential for the group and is being continually replaced as it wears out or is supplied to new joiners.

The need for this activity is determined by the GAP plan which contributes to winning the Green Flag award. Residents of Letchworth Garden City and beyond who use Norton Common for leisure activities and the fauna and flora of this part of North Hertfordshire who find a home there.

Their role is to maintain and improve the common as a facility to enable visitors such a runners, dog walkers, toddler groups and the forest school to enjoy the common. They value their volunteers who are of all ages and abilities, and newcomers are always welcome.

The friend's contribution to the common assists with the long-term health of the whole space. During the time they have been active the common has regularly attained Green Flag status. Their work substantially reduces council spending and provides a pleasant green space for the residents. Regular maintenance such as coppicing, clearing streams, scrub clearance and the planting of trees are ensuring Norton common will thrive for the residents and the fauna and flora of North Herts. David and Roger were able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions.

Cllr Simon Bloxham declared an interest and excused himself from the vote.

Cllr Daniel Allen declared an interest and excused himself from the vote.

Cllr Amy Allen declared an interest and excused herself from the vote.

Proposed by Cllr Daniel Marsh and seconded Cllr Sean Prendergast.

Unanimous vote in favour of providing £2,165 to Friends of Norton Common.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked David Whitaker and Roger Day for the presentation.

Cllr Amy Allen asked the question what Cllrs can do if they've volunteered working with a group in the past as it stops them from currently voting. Danny will get a clarification on this and bring it to the next area forum.

GreenCare – Ray Wilson presented.

GreenCare asked for **£500**. GreenCare's project aims to support and bring about positive changes in the lives of adults living with loneliness, unemployment or who are socially excluded through mental illness, learning difficulties or deprivation. Based on three different sites across Letchworth Garden City, participants work alongside volunteers to grow their own food and flowers.

Participants benefit from having a safe and secure place to make friends, learn and develop skills, and enjoy the mental and physical health benefits of getting moving outside. They run several sessions each week, with Ray Wilson, the project director leading the planning and practical running of the sessions, along with volunteers who give what time they can. The project is free to participants and no volunteers are paid for their time. Neither do they pay any rent for their sites having negotiated with the landowners.

They take referrals from a variety of professionals including the Jobcentre, settle housing association, Create Community Network, NHS Community Mental Health, and others, as well as self-referrals, meaning they have no barriers to someone accessing our support.

They also have a larger section of land on Standalone Farm, Letchworth, in partnership with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation. They have established a large growing area on this site, giving their participants the opportunity to gain valuable skills such as larger-scale commercial growing of food and flowers, as well as marketing, pricing of items, floristry, architectural landscaping plus an understanding of a social enterprise business venture. They are hoping this will bring a vital source of income to Green Care at Norton, enabling us to support more people and is in fact enabling our participants to take a step towards work.

They would like to expand their production of vegetables at their Standalone Farm site so that they can increase their vegetable sales and thus become more self-sufficient. To do this from April to July 2024 they would like to purchase approx. 500 vegetable plug plants from an online supplier (Rocket Gardens, Cornwall) representing a wide variety of produce, which will provide a succession of vegetables throughout the season. They would also like to similarly develop soft fruit production on their Standalone Farm site and to that end would like to purchase a fruit cage to protect fruit from birds and butterflies etc. Ray was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions.

Proposed by Cllr Tom Plater that they should be given the full project amount, and this was seconded Cllr David Levett.

Unanimous vote in favour of providing the full total project cost of £613 to GreenCare.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Ray Wilson for the presentation.

Home-start Herts – Liz Le Coze presented.

Home-start Herts asked for **£2,060**. Home-Start Hertfordshire (HSH) are engaged with 21 families across North Hertfordshire. 14 are receiving active support and a

further 7 have had their initial assessment and are waiting for support to commence. 3 of the families waiting for support are located in Letchworth.

With this funding they would be able to support one family currently waiting for support in Letchworth, with weekly, 1:1 home-visiting support.

The family has multiple complex needs, requiring a variety of support. The mum needs help to build her confidence and her self-esteem so that she can be the parent she wants to be, to give her children the best start in life. The mum will benefit from being matched with a volunteer Family Mentor who is experienced in coping with Autism, and she can also be signposted for further support.

This vulnerable family is struggling and needs support with the complex issues they are facing. The wellbeing of Mum and her three children is being detrimentally affected. HSH offers early intervention, because they know children's future outcomes are impacted in these desperate situations.

Through a tailored package, support is delivered by a trained and skilled volunteer Family Mentor. The Family Mentor will visit the family in their own home, where they feel comfortable in their own surroundings. The family will be provided with weekly support for 2-3 hours, for up to 9 months. Their Family Mentor will build a trusted relationship with the family in the surrounding of their own home, where they feel safe and secure, so that they can learn to face the challenges they are experiencing, learn some coping strategies and help mum build her confidence to support her children. They are also applying for funds from the Baldock and Hitchin Area Forums. Liz was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs and member of the public's questions.

Cllr Amy Allen proposed for a deferral to the next meeting and Cllr David Levett seconded.

Debate followed between Cllrs.

Moved to a vote for deferral,
For the deferral totaled 6
Against the deferral totaled 4

Majority voted to defer this grant proposal. Recommended to be deferred to next Letchworth Area Forum meeting.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Liz Le Coze for the presentation.

Resolve – Laura Hyde presented.

Resolve asked for **£1,500**. Resolve supports the treatment and rehabilitation of people suffering from substance / alcohol misuse problems. Resolve's primary aim is to assist clients to move to a manageable positive lifestyle, contributing to and

enhancing the communities within which they live.

They operate from Welwyn Garden City and Letchworth Garden City and clients come from many areas of Hertfordshire.

Funding is being requested towards the costs of key workers who take group therapy sessions and individual casework; acupuncture and counselling therapy costs and operational running costs including IT and premises costs.

They are also applying for funds from the Baldock, Royston, and Hitchin Area Forums. Laura was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions.

Cllr Daniel Allen declared an interest and excused himself from the vote.

Proposed by Cllr Daniel Marsh and seconded Cllr Phill Weeder.

Unanimous vote in favour of providing £1,500 to Resolve.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Laura Hyde for the presentation.

Comfort break

The Agenda was then moved around to accommodate our speakers as the meeting was running late.

3. Friends of Baldock Road Recreation Ground (Ward Matters)

Rebecca Klippstein from Friends of Baldock Road Recreation Ground was invited to speak to Cllrs. Cllr Tamsin Thomas introduced Rebecca and explained how, and why, the group was first created.

Rebecca brought up matters about the Baldock Road Recreation Ground. Some of the early issues included anti-social behaviour and fly tipping. These were brought to NHDC attention and quick action was taken. The hedges were cut, litter cleaned and wildflowers along the border have been introduced.

Rebecca feels this was a positive response. They have a Facebook group, and they try to report incidents more frequently and have arranged litter picks. They have also taken part in a local survey with 37 responses. Key concerns were better street lighting, maintenance of the hedge areas, and the drug dealing in the park. They would like more police support. They also would like the park to be fenced off if possible. The problems with the bins were raised too. They appreciated what work had already been done but felt a few more changes were needed.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Rebecca for coming to the meeting to raise these points.

Cllr Simon Bloxham asked why it took Cllrs involvement to get the original issues addressed. Andrew was able to say that Rebecca and the group made them aware of the problems the residents were experiencing and a meeting with them helped further actions. Andrew also highlighted plans and actions that were already in place and potential future plans were also brought to everyone's attention.

Cllr Tamsin Thomas highlighted some of the problems that are occurring at the Recreation ground one major one being joy riders on motor bikes trespassing on the park. Wanted to highlight that it was Andrew who encouraged her to get involved with the Friends of Baldock Road Recreation Ground and thanked Andrew for his proactive approach and for working with the Friends of Baldock Road Recreation Ground.

Cllr Sean Prendergast asked if the antisocial behaviour had been reported to our NHDC Community safety team. Andrew was able to confirm that they are aware. Any antisocial behaviour needed to be reported to the police. The police will only respond if reports are made. Andrew encouraged everyone to report all issues to the police.

Issues around travelers using the space in the past was also highlighted and discussed. Cllrs wanted to know how these reports are collected across multiple agencies.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked everyone for their contribution.

4. Presentations

PRESENTATION – Create Community

Presentation from Lena Queen from Create Community followed by Q&A.

A very full and informative presentation was given through slides and verbal updates. There were no questions from Cllrs. Lena also invited Cllrs to drop in and see them at Create Community.

The presentation is available on slides and can be circulated amongst the Cllrs. The slides are available upon request: Community@north-herts.gov.uk

Questions from the public: None

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Lena Queen from Create Community for the presentation.

PRESENTATION – Citizens Advice North Hertfordshire

Presentation from Christine Low from Citizens Advice North Hertfordshire

followed by Q&A.

Another very full and informative presentation was given through slides and verbal updates. Christine was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. She also invited Cllrs to come and see them at their various future events.

The presentation is available on slides and can be circulated amongst the Cllrs. The slides are available upon request: Community@north-herts.gov.uk

Questions from the public: Do you have anything that goes on over at the Jackmans estate? Christine did want to deliver a session over at Jackmans and was interested to hear if there were any leads in.

Cllr Tom Plater thanked Christine Low from Citizens Advice North Hertfordshire for the presentation.

5. **Information Note: Grants & Community Update**

Danny Pearson, Community and Partnerships Team Officer, gave a presentation on the Community Update. Most of which can be seen in the report. These included:

Districtwide Community Updates

- The Community Investment Fund has now closed. There was an oversubscription of three times the amount of allocated funds available, with those scoring highest from initial assessment progressing to recommendation by the panel on 18 January 2024.
- Coordinating voluntary support response to Asylum Seekers based in North Herts.
- Launch of the North Herts Heroes awards, nominations close 7th January. The Awards ceremony will take place at the Chair's Civic event on Friday 1st March.
- Co-ordinating various local and district wide Network Groups including Youth Action, Food Provision, Arts and Culture and Green and Growing Group.
- 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.
- A reshuffle of the Community Partnerships team in October means that some officers now cover different areas.
- Holocaust Memorial Day is on 27 January 2024. North Herts Council are holding an event to mark the day on Friday 26 January 2024 at 1pm. This will be a hybrid event that can be viewed on the Council's YouTube

channel or attended in person. If you would like to attend, please email the Community Partnership Team for more details.

- Worked with Hitchin Rotary Club to help successfully deliver the Youth Showcase event.
- The Community Partnership Team worked with The Royal British Legion and Letchworth BID to help deliver the Letchworth Remembrance Day event.

Area Community Updates

- Meeting with the Jackmans Community Centre.
- Attending the Letchworth - What is your part to play in the future of Letchworth? hosted by Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation.
- Working with settle and their new designated officer for Jackmans and The Grange.
- Helping Hong Kong Connect with their Chinese New Year Market 2024 event.
- Meeting with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Garden Square Shopping Centre, and Letchworth BID as part of the Town Centre Strategy Group

Cllr Tom Plater thanked the Officer for the presentation.

6. Open Discussion

Cllr Terry Hone brought up the issues with the Christmas lights tractor parade. These will be discussed at the next multi-agency debrief meeting.

Cllr Simon Bloxham also asked if Cllrs could be called by their first names in future meetings.

Ward Member activities was brought up again but there were no further updates from Cllrs.

7. Topics for future Letchworth Area Forums

It was noted that the police have been invited to give their yearly update at the next Area Forum. Discussions ongoing about if the meeting should be in person or not. *ResilienTogether* have also been invited to give a presentation.

Cllr Daniel Marsh brought up he would like an update from Herts County Council about SEND provisions across Letchworth and North Hertfordshire. Also, would be good to have the police come along to give them an update.

Cllrs wanted to explore inviting Letchworth Bid and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to future meetings so they can give updates.

If there are any further thoughts from Cllrs, then they will discuss and send ideas to the Chair. The Chair will then bring these to the Community & Partnerships team ASAP.

Meeting closed 10:30pm