

**North Herts Council  
LETCHWORTH COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Howard Garden Social Centre,  
Norton Way S, Letchworth Garden City SG6 1SU – Wednesday, 5 June at  
7:30pm**

**NOTES**

**Present:**

*Councillor Sadie Billing (Chair), Councillor Amy Allen, Councillor Daniel Allen, Councillor David Chalmers, Councillor Mick Debenham, Councillor Ian Mantle, Councillor Sean Nolan, Councillor Sean Prendergast, Councillor Claire Winchester*

**In Attendance:**

*Danny Pearson (Community and Partnerships Team Officer)*

**Also present:**

*At the commencement of the meeting there were 3 members of the public, 6 registered speakers. This went up to 4 members of the public, 7 registered speakers.*

Meeting Started at **7:32pm**

**1. Chair's Announcements**

**Cllr Sadie Billing welcomed everyone in attendance.**

- Highlighted that it's an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.
- Informed everyone in attendance that we would be receiving presentations from The Army Cadets, Creative Chefs CIC, Herts Vision Loss, Letchworth Men's Shed, Respair Therapy CIC and The Sadie Centre who are seeking grant funding.
- Members were reminded they are making recommendations and not decisions for grant applications.
- Members were reminded to make declarations of interest before an item they may wish to abstain from voting if they have an interest, but they are merely making recommendations and not decisions.

**Apologies for absence:** *Cllr Tamsin Thomas, Cllr Emma Fernandes, and Cllr Tina Bhartwas.*

## **2. MINUTES - AREA COMMITTEE MARCH 23**

Cllrs were able to approve the minutes of the meeting of the Area Committee held on the 15 March 2023. Signed by The Chair and passed to NHDC Committee Services.

## **3. Presentation**

### **PRESENTATION/ UPDATE – LETCHWORTH BID**

Presentation and update from Richard Harbon, Letchworth BID Manager, followed by Q&A.

A very full and informative verbal presentation and updates was given. There were questions from Cllrs which Richard Harbon was able to answer. Updates about the Letchworth Festival and the BIDs future plans were discussed as well as the Christmas lights and tree. The Cllrs praised Richard and his team for all the work they do for the town centre and acknowledged the collaborative work going on behind the scenes with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation and North Herts council.

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked Richard Harbon for the presentation.

## **4. Public Participation – Grants**

Danny Pearson, the Community and Partnership Officer, updated Members on community grant budgets.

On the Community Forum Report, as outlined in Appendix 2, the Community Grant budget available is **£16,652**.

If the applications outlined in Appendices 3, 4, 5, 6, 7 and 8 are recommended and approved, there would be **£5,983** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2024-25 financial year.

Presentations then took place.

**The Army Cadets – Adam** from **The Army Cadets** presented.

**The Army Cadets** asked for **£2,500**. The Army Cadets recently spent money from

their reserves on new storage for their Adventurous Training (AT) equipment, which they now need to replenish. In addition, they need to service and maintain the existing items, replace some old/damaged items, and hope to purchase new equipment, subsidise cadets attending courses and other great opportunities they may otherwise not be able to afford.

Their HQ is in Icknield Way, Letchworth. They have detachment locations in Letchworth, Hitchin, Royston, and other areas in Hertfordshire. Some of the activities include Outdoor Climbing, Mountain Biking, Paddling and Navigation exercises. There is a lack of activities available to young people in our area and the Army Cadets are filling a gap in provision.

They have been working towards getting their volunteer team qualified as activity leaders and instructors so that they can reduce the costs of running activities for the cadets. This means that once they have the correct equipment the running costs for any activities reduce to almost zero and allow them to deliver more days training. This funding would primarily help the cadets in the area, but also the adults who volunteer. Currently that is approximately 230 12-18 yr. olds and 40 adults living in Hertfordshire. With an annual turnover of about 30% for new cadets. Their target audience in those enrolled in the Army Cadet Force (ACF).

The ACF advertises on the radio, on social media, and posters. Advertising is focused more in areas where their numbers are low, or they can make the biggest impact to the community. Word of mouth has the best results. The adventurous training element of what they offer is aimed at helping to build resilience in those who take part, to push themselves physically and mentally in a safe and fun environment. The skills that are targeted include teamwork, communication, self-reliance, planning, awareness (of dangers), co-ordination and help with building strength, stamina, self-confidence. By providing the funding it will make the Cadet places more accessible to families on low incomes and provide opportunities for young people from disadvantaged backgrounds to experience activities that they may not be able to access otherwise. They believe in an all-inclusive policy; everyone can achieve something.

Adam was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. Adam was asked, after delivering his presentation, if there was any way the Cadets could reduce the amount they are asking for since they had secured a small amount of funding from Tesco already. Adam said he would be able to accommodate the Cllrs request and said anything between £1,500 and £2,000 would help.

*A revised amount of **£1,750** proposed by Cllr Sadie Billing and seconded by Cllr Amy Allen.*

**Unanimous vote in favour of providing £1,750 to The Army Cadets.**

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked **Adam** for the presentation.

**Creative Chefs CIC – Angie from Creative Chefs CIC presented.**

**Creative Chefs CIC** asked for **£1,951**. Creative Chefs CIC provide fun cooking sessions for children. During the sessions children create a healthy recipe (main meal) to take home. The funding will be used to deliver these sessions to reception children (year 1 from September) at Garden City Academy, 30 children, Icknield infant School, 90 children, and Wilbury Junior School (year 3) 72 children. These schools have been identified due to Ofsted comments and pupil premium numbers.

Each child will receive educational information on the importance of making healthy food choices and they will have the opportunity to try seasonal vegetables in the session. The programme invites children to taste, touch and smell the ingredients as the session progresses. This instils a sense of interest in the food they eat and mindfulness while eating. The children will have fun creating a main meal alongside their peers. Each child will receive a recipe booklet to take home with more family friendly recipes for them to try at home with their family. Creative Chefs are not aware of any provider who is delivering these sessions and they can provide testimonials from the North Herts Healthy Hub who they regularly deliver sessions too. The children will learn skills they can take into adulthood encouraging them to make healthy food choices and reducing health inequalities within the local population.

The service does not finish with the delivery of sessions. They can support families if they have any questions on budget recipes for all the family. They have been delivering these sessions throughout North Herts through the Household Support Fund via the North Herts Council and have managed these sessions independently arranging them with schools and reached more than 550 “chefs”. Without exception they have had positive feedback with many requests to return. Using seasonal affordable ingredients is both environmentally and economically more sustainable.

In addition, their website will offer continued support to families with regular seasonal recipes listed. This encourages an ongoing conversation. As well as the health benefits to the families, their sessions help with the levelling up agenda in which the lesser advantaged members of our community have access to education on healthy eating on a budget. All children create side by side regardless of their economic circumstances.

Angie was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. Questions included finding out if there was anything like this already being provided by schools and what age groups were being involved in these lessons.

*Full amount to be paid proposed by Cllr Sadie Billing and seconded by Cllr Claire Winchester.*

**Unanimous vote in favour of providing £1,951 to Creative Chefs CIC**

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked **Angie** for the presentation.

**Herts Vision Loss – Clement** from **Herts Vision Loss** presented.

**Herts Vision Loss** asked for **£2,000**. Herts Vision Loss (HVL), support and empower blind and visually impaired individuals in Hertfordshire by providing a comprehensive range of services. There are 4,810 people living with sight loss in the North Hertfordshire District. Currently, more than 300 North Herts's residents aged 65 and over receive support through HVL. Referral rates are predicted to increase by 30% from 2024-2025.

HVL has received repeated requests to set up Sight Life social groups in North Herts from residents. With this funding, the proposed project aims to establish a Sight Life social group in Letchworth, starting with five sessions. They will provide a range of services including information, advice, advocacy, counselling, assistive technology support, home visiting and befriending service.

50 Letchworth residents will directly benefit from the proposed project. Funding will go towards facilitators, room hire, travel expenses for beneficiaries, volunteer expenses, refreshments, and publicity. Having a social group in Letchworth will bring community support closer to residents, thereby addressing transport barriers and increasing accessibility to essential services.

Both older age and sight loss can lead to social isolation and loneliness. By establishing a local social group, HVL can help mitigate these issues by providing a supportive community where individuals can build social networks, increase confidence, and feel better informed about their condition. This can lead to improved mental health outcomes and overall well-being for beneficiaries.

They are also approaching Hitchin Community Forum for £2,000 to set up a Sight Life group in Hitchin.

Clement was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. Questions included future plans once the money had been spent and where the venues in Letchworth might be.

*Full amount to be paid proposed by Cllr Sadie Billing and seconded by Cllr Mick Debenham.*

**Unanimous vote in favour of providing £2,000 to Herts Vision Loss**

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked **Clement** for the presentation.

Please note Councillor David Chalmers departed the Community Forum at this point and so was unable to vote on the next three grant proposals.

**Letchworth Men's Shed – Peter from Letchworth Men's Shed presented.**

**Letchworth Men's Shed** asked for **£658**. Letchworth Men's Shed are seeking funding to support their 'Lathe Lads' project. This will be for older men to learn skills in wood turning affordably and to keep brains active with mindful activity and develop the potential to earn income to sustain the Men's Shed in future.

This project will teach new skills at 8 weekly sessions, initially for Shed members but hopefully to be extended to the wider community. For those new to woodturning this project will help discover the art and craft in a safe environment under expert supervision. For those with experience of woodturning they would have the opportunity to make items for resale and develop paid-for training courses to help sustain the Shed financially. Funding will provide PPE in the form of several rugged woodturning smocks and full-face protection visors, two folding workbenches and four quick-grip clamps.

They source from reputable suppliers whose sell branded products that they know are at best price and are quality items made to last. This is a new development for the Letchworth Men's Shed but surveys of other Shed members by the UK Men's Sheds Association, of which Letchworth is a member, demonstrate the benefits to mental and physical health of bringing men together for purposeful activity. They operate from premises at Standalone Farm and currently have 11 Shed members from Hitchin, Letchworth, Royston. Within North Herts those who benefit are also the partners and families of their members, and the members of organisations for whom they have made items, such as the mud kitchen for a local pre-school.

The Lathe Lads project is part of a wider plan to actively promote their offer and recruit new members. At their premises they have use of facilities on all days of the week and have only recently extended open days from one to two weekdays. As membership increases, they intend to open on more days. They are regularly contacted by Community Groups, Care Services, GP Link Workers and have people referred to them by doctors and outreach workers who increasingly understand the role Men's Sheds play in providing localised support for mental health, wellbeing and having a positive impact on physical health outcomes.

Peter was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. Questions included where members were from, what other community projects had they been involved in and about the items they sale to create further funds for Letchworth Men's Shed.

*A revised amount of **£708** proposed by Cllr Sean Prendergast.*

*The full project cost of **£708** to be paid was then proposed by Cllr Sadie Billing and seconded by Cllr Sean Prendergast.*

**Unanimous vote in favour of providing £708 to Letchworth Men's Shed**

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked **Peter** for the presentation.

**Respair Therapy CIC – Debbie** from **Respair Therapy CIC** presented.

**Respair Therapy CIC** asked for **£2,060**. The primary objectives of Respair Therapy C.I.C. involves using Dance Movement Psychotherapy and Psychoeducation to enhance the well-being of the community. Operating as a Community Interest Company, their focus is on delivering therapeutic services that promote wellness for individuals and the community.

The project they're seeking funding for involves widening the participation in a movement-based support group for new parents, primarily mothers, trans men, and birthing fathers in North Herts. The project will run over 20 weeks. The group is called Babe Club, and it is the UK's only silent disco support group for new parents and their babies.

So far, Babe Club has existed as a pay-as-you-go pilot group, but they would like to widen the participation in this group by setting up a new group in Letchworth. The facilitator at Babe Club is a fully qualified Dance Movement Psychotherapist, with experience of working in the NHS. Access to this kind of expertise at this rate of pay represents good value for money for participants. By using silent disco headsets, participants can dance and reconnect with themselves without compromising their baby's hearing. The sessions involve dancing freely in a way that fits with each individual's body. This innovative approach ensures accessibility as it requires no specific dance moves, allowing individuals to move at their own pace and in their own way. Following the movement session, participants have the opportunity to discuss their thoughts and feelings in a group setting facilitated by a qualified psychotherapist. Including the infants who will be attending with their parents, this initiative could help up to 30 residents.

Through initiatives like Babe Club, we demonstrate our dedication to shaping a future where every baby receives the care and support necessary for optimal growth and development. By intertwining their project's objectives with the principles outlined in the 'First 1001 days' policy, they pave the way for North Herts to thrive, ensuring a brighter and more prosperous future for generations to come. It is hoped that by forming a support network of parents, this will reduce loneliness amongst new parents and contribute to an increased sense of mental wellbeing.

Debbie was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. Questions included where the club would be set up, what ages the babies could be for this club and what the future plans were once the funding had been spent.

*Full amount to be paid proposed by Cllr Sadie Billing and seconded by Cllr Sean Prendergast.*

**Unanimous vote in favour of providing £2,060 to Respair Therapy CIC.**

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked **Debbie** for the presentation.

**The Sadie Centre – Roberta** from **The Sadie Centre** presented.

**The Sadie Centre** asked for **£1,500**. The Sadie Centre offer a range of flexible, low-cost and effective therapeutic options to help residents move through The *Positive Movement* technique is an amalgam of techniques drawn from the Alexander Technique, Adaptive Yoga and Mindfulness. It is for older people with mobility problems or who are living with long-term conditions.

emotional and psychological challenges. This funding would cover the cost of the design and delivery of a ten-day training programme for trainers, in the award-winning *Positive Movement* technique.

The Train the Trainer programme would be delivered in weekly sessions in one of their on-site classrooms. Then the Positive Movement programmes themselves would be delivered in accessible community facilities in Letchworth and Hitchin. This would create a team of teachers equipped to train new tutors, to deliver the programme widely amongst the local community.

Initially funded by a small Lottery grant and then by two Herts County Council *Innovations* grants, the programme has been delivered throughout Hertfordshire in 31 venues. Robust before-and-after evaluations of 140 participants demonstrated that 80-90% experienced reduced anxiety, stress and fear of falling, improved self-confidence, increased energy, and a greater ability to look after themselves in their own homes.

The Sadie Centre estimates that during year one, they would be able to deliver in Letchworth five venues hosting their 20-week programmes, each delivered twice throughout the year - amounting to a total of 10 programmes, each with 15 participants i.e. a total of 150 participants. Their ultimate aim is to have *Positive Movement* established as a local free, preventative service.

They are also approaching Hitchin Community Forum for £1,500; the room hire of £2,100 is an in-kind contribution and £1,000 is from Health Inequalities Funding.

Roberta was able to give extra information and answered the Cllrs questions. Questions included how it would be ensured that the quality of the training remained high and where would the trainers be recruited from.

*Full amount to be paid proposed by Cllr Sadie Billing and seconded by Claire Winchester.*

**Seven out of the eight Cllrs present voted in favour of providing £1,500 to The Sadie Centre.**

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked **Roberta** 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

- Under Delegated Decision the action was made to change Area Forums to Community Forums.
- Member inductions have taken place where the Community & Partnerships team had the opportunity to introduce themselves to new members.
- 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.
- Police support at all NHC Councillors' Community Surgeries has been arranged.
- Sharing and disseminating information on social media and to mailing lists, keeping in touch with the community, voluntary, statutory, and non-statutory agencies.
- Due to the success of last year's Youth Showcase event, we are again working with Hitchin Rotary Club to help deliver a second Youth Showcase event in Hitchin.
- Team members are working with North Herts & Stevenage CVS and Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation to deliver the 'All About Us' community conference.

### Area Community Updates

- Meetings with the Jackmans Community Centre and the Howard Garden Social and Day Care Centre teams.
- Working with Active in the Community CIC, Herts Sports Partnership and Forever Young People in gaining support for a 2-year youth club project at Jackmans.
- The team are also working with The Royal British Legion and Letchworth BID to help deliver the Letchworth Remembrance Day event for 2024.
- Meeting with The Settlement to discuss emerging ideas around Settlement provision.

- 150 lavender plants were secured from Hitchin Lavender Farm for the Letchworth part of the bee corridor. John O’Conner will be planting them on Broadway Gardens, on the roundabout by the council offices and at Howard Park.
- Helping Hong Kong Connect find a suitable location for a business which provides special fresh groceries for the Hong Kong community.
- Meeting with Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, Garden Square Shopping Centre, and Letchworth BID as part of the Town Centre Strategy Group.
- The Arts and Culture group had connected many creatives together who are now collaborating and hosting events at the Letchworth Festival.

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked the Officer for the presentation.

## 6. Open Discussion

Hilary Kemp, the main organiser of Letchworth Festival, was able to give Cllrs a brief update and overview of events that would be happening across the month of June. The Cllrs praised Hilary for all the work she does not just for the festival but the entire town.

## 7. WARD MEMBERS ACTIVITIES

Cllr Amy Allen brought to the Forums attention the Wilbury Community Café. It is held the second Saturday of every month, 10am - 12:30pm Wilbury Hall, Bedford Road. All are welcome to come along and see what the Café does for the community.

## 8. Topics for future Letchworth Area Forums

**CHAIR** asked for suggestions for future topics for discussion and possible future venues in Letchworth. The next Community Forum is planned for September 18<sup>th</sup>.

Cllrs wanted to explore the theme ‘Youth’. A suggestion was made by Cllr Daniel Allen about inviting members of the Youth Council so they can give thoughts and updates. This will be explored by the Area Officer.

Noted that 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.

Cllr Sadie Billing thanked everyone for coming and called the meeting to a close.

**Meeting closed 9:15pm**