

**North Herts Council
LETCHWORTH COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Letchworth Library
On Wednesday 18 September 2024 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: Cllr Sean Nolan (Chair) (SN), Cllr Amy Allen (AA), Cllr Daniel Allen (DA), Cllr Tina Bhartwas (TB), Cllr Mick Debenham (MD) and Cllr Emma Fernandes (EF) and Cllr Ian Mantle (IM)

In attendance:

Laura Hartley (Community and Partnerships Officer) (LH)

Also present:

At the commencement of the meeting there were around 15 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:30**

1. VOTING IN OF THE CHAIR

DA proposed Cllr Sean Nolan as Chair for this meeting.
MD seconded.

Unanimous vote in favour of Cllr Sean Nolan as Chair for the Community Forum for the night of 18 September 2024 only.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Sadie Billing, Cllr Tamsin Thomas, Cllr Sean Prendergast, Cllr Claire Winchester and Cllr David Chalmers.

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Nolan welcomed everyone in attendance.

Highlighted that the Forum is an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.

Community Governance Review

The Council resolved to commence a Community Governance Review for the whole district which focuses on parish level arrangements.

The first stage of the review is to consult, and the council is inviting residents, parish councils and any interested parties to have their say on current

arrangements as well as suggestions for future arrangements via a survey which is open until **7 October**.

There is a dedicated webpage on the Council's website titled 'Community Governance Review' which includes a link to the survey.

Please can I encourage you to complete the survey. If anyone has any queries regarding the Consultation, please email CommunityGovReview@north-herts.gov.uk

4. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATION

The Community Partnerships officer informed those present that there is £6,683 available in the Letchworth Community Grant budget. The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is £5,309. If all grants are recommended and subsequently approved, there will be £1,374 remaining in the budget for the remainder of the 24-25 financial year.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Leise Cooper presented the Angels Support Group Hitchin application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How much of this is educational support.
- Links to other funding sources.

Angels Support Group Hitchin vote

AA proposed.

MD seconded.

TB declared an interest and abstained from questioning or voting.

IM abstained from the vote.

The remaining five Members voted in favour of recommending Angels Support Group Hitchin's application for £1,502 towards their online support service.

Emily Evans presented the Groundwork East application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How families are selected to take part in the courses.
- How families with limited space at home are supported to grow at home.

Groundwork East vote

TB proposed.

MD seconded.

Unanimous voted in favour of recommending Groundwork East application for £2,367 towards Grow It, Cook It, Share It courses.

Anji Archer presented the Open Art Box CIC application.

No additional questions from Members on the application.

Open Art Box CIC vote

DA proposed.

IM seconded.

TB declared an interest and abstained from questioning and voting.

The remaining six members voted in favour of recommending Open Art Box CIC application for £1,440 towards delivering workshop sessions.

5. YOUTH FOCUSED PRESENTATION

Laura Butcher and Lucy Davis presented on Hertfordshire County Council - Services for Young People.

- Receive [referrals](#) from community groups, children's services, parents or self-referral from young people.
- Core priorities:
 - Working with the most vulnerable young people
 - Helping young people who are missing from education
 - Working with young people 16+ that are NEET (Not in Education, Employment, or Training)
 - Offer to schools including youth work and careers education
 - Support for those with Educational Health and Care Plan
 - Coordinating the support and development of the voluntary youth sector
- Work on a termly offer that enables a more flexible response to the needs of young people
- Current offer in Letchworth:
 - Friday Night Project from Mrs Howard Memorial Hall
 - SEND Youth Council, 18-25 young adults (across whole of North Herts)
 - Younger SEND offer in Stevenage that can be accessed
 - Emotional wellbeing support
 - Elected home education support
- Young Peoples Centre located in Letchworth offer drop-in sessions from 11am – 5pm, Tuesday – Thursday. Open to all, across North Herts
- [Youth projects in your area \(servicesforyoungpeople.org\)](http://servicesforyoungpeople.org)
- Careers Education, Information, Advice and Guidance Advisor team, offering independent careers advice.

- Referrals
 - On offer page there is a referral link. This is assessed and referred to the appropriate support.

Stuart Sapsford and Alistair Stewart, Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation, presented on the Letchworth Strategic Plan - Great Place to Grow Up.

[Home | Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation](#)

- Looking to create partnerships and to focus on gaining funding to plug identified gaps in the community.
- Key steps:
 - Partner events and consultation
 - Form mental health and cost of living collective impact groups.
 - All About Us conference – voluntary sector celebration and capacity building event. In Partnership with CVS and North Herts Council.
 - LGCHF strategic plan
- Pillars and priorities identified:
 - Health
 - Child poverty
 - Educational attainment and employability skills
 - Sports and leisure
 - Cultural opportunities
 - Nature to support wellbeing
- Next steps – looking at what is in existence and how can develop funding to support the vision.

Przemyslaw Grabowski and Kate O'Neill presented on the Cool Cats Club.

- Cool Cats Club aims to be a creative, relaxing hub, where people can connect.
- Main engagement is through Instagram 'coolcatsclublgc' and also run a WhatsApp group.
- As the group grows, they would be looking for opportunities to create further partnerships e.g. business, youth groups, schools.
- Some past events include poetry nights, music stage at a local festival in Letchworth, open mics, crochet circles, artist hang outs, cinema meet up groups.
- In the future, working towards offering a variety of additional sessions such as education talks, DIY training/workshops, music workshops, community theatre projects, range of communication workshops and much more.

6. COMMUNITY UPDATE

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

7. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

Written Town Centre update from Richard Harbon, Letchworth BID manager, can be found at the end of this document.

DA - local councillors have carried out ward walks with the local police on what is their priorities.

Roberta Ferraro, Letchworth Library Manager, informed the forum of the free services the library offers including borrowing books, WiFi, charging areas and online library service. In addition to the range of sessions available.

8. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

- Active Communities presented by Everyone Active, confirmed for December. Potentially a health focus for the meeting.
- Town Centre strategy.

MEETING CLOSED 21:18

Richard Harbon, Letchworth BID manager, update:

Based on the objectives in our 5 year plan.

1. To create an environment that is lively and well promoted.

Over the last 6 months we have started to look at doing events differently. Events such as the Green Festival and Run Around the Garden have not only been very popular but have also drawn a different audience into the town. They have also been very well supported by businesses. Also Little People Love Letchworth was organised by businesses, supported by the BID. Footfall data showed that this was more popular than the usual food and drink festivals.

In addition, smaller campaigns have proven popular such as the Summer of Fun, in partnership with Garden Square.

Our marketing and publicity is going from strength to strength with over 14k followers on line and great feedback from posters, video productions and business advertising on the website. In fact we were asked to take one business off the website as it was drawing in more customers than they could handle.

Looking forward to Events

Halloween - This is in the school holidays and so we will be doing more than usual with a wide range of children's entertainment.

Christmas Lights switch on - November 23rd. A new range of lights this year and the Christmas Tree in Leys Square. We have also had a queue of entertainers wanting to take part.

Christmas Tractors - December 21st - Awaiting plans but we will be publicising this.

Christmas entertainment - Working with Garden Square to put on a range of entertainment in the build up to Xmas.

2. To provide a welcoming, attractive and easily accessible environment.

The planters have worked better this year than before.

a) The hired in planters have gone down really well again with lots of very positive feedback.

b) The volunteer gardeners have been busier than ever outside the cinema and library. Great beds here, which were part of the Open Gardens.

c) More businesses are coming forward to take on some of the older planters. All are now in use.

d) We decided to take on the decoration of some of the planters. All were painted by local artists funded by the BID.

The railway station project finally got going with a clear out day in late August. There is another one planned for October to finish the job. This will vastly improve the area around the war memorial and reduce ASB. Thanks to the Heritage

Foundation for volunteers, John O'Conner for removing the foliage, BID volunteers and to GTR for support.

North Herts Council has also been doing renovation work on the war memorial ready for Remembrance Sunday. Thank you to Andrew Mills and his team.

Our relationship with the Police is growing with regular bike marking and drop in events in the town. Thanks to HCC, the BID and Herts Police for grants towards bike marking kits.

3. To represent the collective voice of businesses in the town centre.

It is a tough time in all our town centres. Letchworth Garden City is no different. Wilkinson is one of a number of businesses to remain closed and is a blight on Eastcheap. The BID continues to work with landlords to see about the cleanliness of empty units and anything that they can do to support other businesses in. We have embarked on a town wide marketing campaign to attract new businesses and customers. The Shared Prosperity Fund will, hopefully, provide financial support for this campaign.

Other projects on the go in the town include.

- a) Renovation of the Pirate ship in the Wynd.
- b) Installation of a Christmas Tree pit in Leys Square.
- c) A Heritage Trail map for the town centre, aimed at children and young people.
- d) Digital signage for Leys Avenue to enhance and improve signage around the town.
- e) Continued training in first aid for businesses.

Finally, we are working with North Herts Council and the Royal British Legion and associated groups to put on Remembrance Sunday. This is a significant year for both WW1 and WW2. There are plans to make this a real occasion.