

**North Herts Council**  
**SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Whitwell New Fellowship Hall**  
**On Thursday 12 December 2024 at 7.30pm**

**NOTES**

**Present:** Cllr David Barnard (Chair) (DB), Cllr Claire Strong (Vice Chair) (CS), Cllr Joe Graziano (JG), Cllr Dominic Griffiths (DG), Cllr Ralph Muncer (RM), Cllr Steven Patmore (SP) and Cllr Paul Ward (PW)

**In attendance:**  
Laura Hartley (Community and Partnerships Officer) (LH)

**Also present:**  
At the commencement of the meeting there were around 9 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:30**

Cllr Patmore and Cllr Griffiths were absent at the start of the meeting.

**1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Cllr Caroline McDonnell, Cllr Laura Williams, Cllr Louise Peace, Cllr Lisa Nash and Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham.

**2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS**

Cllr Barnard welcomed everyone in attendance.

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

**3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATION**

The Community Partnerships officer informed those present that there is £10,529 available in the Southern Rural grant budget. The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is £6,599. If all grants are recommended and subsequently approved, there will be £3,930 remaining in the budget for the remainder of the financial year 24/25.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

**David Miles** presented the **Cassel Hall Trust** application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- The trusts current reserves
- Approaching County Council and Lilley Parish Council for potential funding
- Alternative energy solutions such as solar panels and electric boilers

Cllr Patmore does have a registered interest in the application but was absent for this section of the meeting.

### **Cassel Hall vote**

CS proposed.

RM seconded.

*Unanimous vote in favour of recommending Cassel Hall Trust application for £2,000 towards replacement of the boiler.*

Cllr S Patmore and Cllr D Griffiths entered the Community Forum meeting.

**James Horobin** presented the **Hitchin Town Youth FC** application.

Cllr Strong confirmed that she was not involved in the decision for the Rands Educational Foundation grant funding towards Hitchin Town Youth FC.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Player registration fees and what these costs cover for each member
- How the club supports those who cannot afford the costs of the club and support given
- Where the goal posts will be stored when not in use

### **Hitchin Town Youth FC vote**

RM proposed.

PW seconded.

*DG abstained as they were not present throughout the whole of the presentation. Six members voted in favour of recommending Hitchin Town Youth FC application for £700 towards two sets of goal posts.*

**Elaine Derrick and Alison Maple** presented the **Pirton JoyCare** application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How the charity coped before the minibus was donated in January this year
- How Pirton JoyCare will look to become more financially stable in the future
- What current reserves the charity holds
- What other funding stream they have approached
- Where the minibus is stored

### **Pirton JoyCare Club vote**

CS proposed.

SP seconded.

*Unanimous vote in favour of recommending Pirton JoyCare application for £870 towards the running costs of their service.*

**Cllr Buckland and Cllr Clark** presented the **Preston Parish Council** application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Where the previous defibrillator funded by the Southern Rural Grant is located
- The process of how the defibrillator is locked and opened
- What funding the Parish Council is contributing to the project and their reserves
- The future increase of the population in Pirton due to developments and the impact this will have on their Precept.
- Where they originally got the defibrillator and if there was a cabinet offered at that time

#### **Preston Parish Council vote**

JG proposed.

CS seconded.

*Unanimous vote in favour of recommending Preston Parish Council application for £594 towards the fitting of an external defibrillator cabinet.*

**Emma Fisher and Stephanie Booth** presented **The Living Theatre Whitwell** application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How marketing is carried out currently
- Linking with other organisations such as Hitchin BID
- How the free spaces are allocated for the workshops
- Current reserves and how they are used
- What happens to the artist's work after the event
- If they have applied for any further funding from other sources
- Expected attendance to workshops

#### **The Living Theatre Whitwell vote**

RM proposed a reduced amount of £2,000.

DG seconded.

*Four members voted in favour of recommending The Living Theatre Whitwell application for £2,000 towards the running of an outdoor art trail project.*

## **4. PRESENTATION – PARKING TARIFF CONSULTATION**

Southern Rural Councillors made the below comments on the parking tariff consultation:

CS – If the current hourly tariff goes up by 10p, that would be an increase of 7.7% which is above the 4% stated. CS believes it should remain at the current rate. Looking at the all-day tariff, this will go up from £5.22 to £5.30 which is an increase of 1.9%, not the 4% stated or in-line with the % increase in the hourly rate. In addition, comments were made on the ‘after 3pm’ tariff and how going in later to the town centre, e.g. past 5pm, would cost more than it does currently.

RM – raised concerns around how this wouldn’t encourage people from the rural villages to go into the town.

PW – Knebworth Parish Council will be sending in their response to the consultation. The increase to the parking would be approx. 15%. The Parish Council have tried to implement that the first hour half is free, however the Traffic Regulation Order has taken a while and hoping to be in place next year.

CS – Biggin Lane car park is closed Saturday mornings, due to market traders. Once they are set up for the market the car park could be made available to the public earlier than what happens currently.

DB – in the current economic climate, it feels unfair to rural residents to increase tariffs, who drive into towns to spend money and maintain the vitality of the centres. DB would oppose any increase to the car parking charges.

The Southern Rural Forum oppose any increase to parking charges and would ask the Exec Member to consider granting the first 30 minutes for free.

Comment from members of the public:

- Having the first 30 minutes free would be very beneficial for those people who go into town to pick up prescriptions and dropping off etc.

Full details can be found on [Off street parking tariffs | North Herts Council](#)

## **5. COMMUNITY UPDATE**

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

North Herts Heroes awards – visit [North Herts Heroes | North Herts Council](#) to submit nominations for people in the North Herts community that go above and beyond. Nominations close 5 January 2025.

## **6. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS**

PW updated on the fast trains now available from Knebworth. There is a mix of slow trains, which take 40 minutes to reach Kings Cross, and fast trains which take 22 minutes. Also updated on the Odyssey development – there were conditions set out that the developers had to take on. There have been leaks from the site and with recent weather has caused disruptions to local roads in the area.

## **7. OPEN DISCUSSION – CONNECTING WITH PARISHES**

Networking between District councillors, Parishes and the public took place.

## **8. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS**

- March topic: Police update  
Venue: Council Chambers, Council Offices, Gernon Rd, LGC, SG6 3JF
- Potentially look to invite Exec Member for waste to a future meeting.

**MEETING CLOSED 21:05**