

**North Herts Council
LETCHWORTH COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Jackmans Community Centre Annex
On Wednesday 11 December 2024 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: Cllr Sadie Billing (SB) (Chair) , Cllr Tamsin Thomas, (TT) vice Chair Cllr Sean Nolan (SN), Cllr Daniel Allen (DA), Cllr Mick Debenham (MD) and Cllr Emma Fernandes (EF) and Cllr Ian Mantle (IM) Cllr Sean Prendergast (SP), and Cllr Claire Winchester (CW)

In attendance:

Claire Morgan (Community and Partnerships Team Leader) (CM)

Also present:

At the commencement of the meeting there were around 4 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:30**

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Amy Allen (AA), Cllr Tina Bhartwas (TB), Cllr David Chalmers (DC)

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Billing welcomed everyone in attendance.

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

3. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION

Richard Harbon (RH) – Love Letchworth BID Manager

Update on Town Centre Events and Activities

Successful events for Christmas Lights switch on 1500 people in town centre despite high winds which meant that the event had to be scaled back.

The Christmas tractor event is great but unfortunately it needs to be looked at next year. It isn't going through the town centre as it's going up Gernon Road. The organisers had not arranged for stewards and barriers for Leys Avenue so the procession will go along Eastcheap. The Businesses in Leys Avenue will suffer as a result, and they've already missed out on the big events as they had to be cancelled due to extreme weather. It will also mean that there will be double the crowds along Eastcheap, which could cause a safety issue. RH is liaising with the Safety Advisory Group and the event organiser to try and find a solution to this.

Looking to include planters in town centre - by having their own planters and refilling

twice per year works out more economically viable.

Has utilized the Shared Prosperity Fund – to apply for town centre projects working with partners. The BID is doing a lot to improve marketing and publicity of the town. This will include a new website and way marking in the Town Centre.

Want to replace the play area in the Wynd. RH thanked Andrew Figgis the North Herts Council Economic Development officer for his support in this.

The funding will be used towards training for independent shop keepers on use of social media etc.

BID have applied for £12k via Section 106 for soft play but has not been informed of progress – can Members investigate what has happened to that money?

There have been issues with the Christmas Lights – they are failing, had a power failure at the light switch on and some of them didn't turn on. The power outlets and the fixings need replacing.

Hopefully over the next few months, you'll see more improvements.

Successfully got through the BID election – doing a marketing strategy and town centre strategy. 5-year view. Recruited a consultant to work on it. Will be working with Louise Symes North Herts Council and Stuart Sapsford from LGCHF.

Cllr IM asked if RM had a good relationship with the management of Garden Square Shopping Centre – RM responded that the Centre Manager was excellent, and they work together to well.

Cllr TT – asked if the Tractors could go through the town centre – can the route change to include Leys Ave.

RH said the SAG have been brilliant and he's written to Ian Fulstone to ask if the route can change. He is hoping to work out a solution.

SP will help put barriers out in Town Centre.

DA will investigate the S106 funding.

4. IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATION

The Community Partnerships officer informed those present that the remaining Community Grant budget available is **£1,374**.

The total amount of funding requested for this meeting is **£1,393**. which would leave an overspend of **£19**. This overspend would be offset against the Letchworth Community Forum grant funding available in the next financial year.

If the application outlined in Appendix 2 is recommended by the Forum and subsequently approved by the Executive Member for Community & Partnerships, there would be **£0** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2024-2025 financial year.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Carers in Herts did not attend to give a presentation, and the grant application was deferred.

5. **EVERYONE ACTIVE**

Juanita Prescott (JP), from the Everyone Active Communities Team gave a presentation about their community outreach work.

JP explained that alongside their community outreach work they also support sporting excellence.

DA added that Letchworth Civic Trust will support Letchworth residents who need funding to assist sporting activities if they are at a national level.

SP asked what the age limit was for the Men's Club - JP answered that it's over 18 and no upper limit.

SP asked what is the overall attendance on all the activities?

JP responded that the Men's Club is limited to 10 to make it manageable and enable individuals to have space to speak.

The sports clubs' numbers are picking up gradually.

Everyone Active are working on marketing the outreach activities generally they will be targeting GP practices.

SP – We can help to promote by putting up posters locally, sending them to the Social Housing providers for notice boards and in schools.

6. **CITIZENS ADVICE**

Kate Beed (KB), from CITIZENS ADVICE NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE gave a presentation about their work in Letchworth.

TT asked; are the people who need advice getting it?

KB responded that CANH never turn people away, but they may have to wait for an appointment as they are oversubscribed. Most cases are complex with several issues. It would be better if people came earlier before the issues become serious.

SP asked; whether many of the debt issues were related to rent arrears and wanted to know if they CANH worked closely with the social housing providers.

KB confirmed that many of the debt issues were related to rent and that she hoped that communications between them and social housing providers could be improved, and they may need to work on building those relationships. She added that if Members come across any families in need, please can they let them know about the services CANH provides. They can refer them to her as she is the friendly face of Citizens Advice, and she can signpost to the relevant person for support.

DA Thanked Kate for attending the Wilbury Café

7. **PRESENTATION - PARKING TARIFF CONSULTATION**

Cllr Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council and interim Executive Member for Planning and Transport, to present on the proposed parking tariff increase for 25/26.

DA explained that the cost of pay-and-display car parks will be going up by 10p across the board.

After 3pm there will be a flat fee of £1.50

The carparks at Norton Common and the Lido will remain free for the first 2 hours. New parking machines will be fitted in the new year that allow you to pay by card and tap in when you arrive and tap out as you leave. This allows drivers to stay as long as they wish in the town centre up to 4 hours.

TT asked if it would still be possible to pay by phone?

DA responded: Yes.

8. COMMUNITY UPDATE

CM, Community and Partnerships Team Leader, presented the Community Update and confirmed the available community grant budget.

9. OPEN QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

William Armitage MBE had several questions for the Forum regarding the Town Centre. He stated that he thinks that the current administration of North Herts Council has improved and are energetic and forward thinking. He asked about:

1. Two-hour Letchworth – to encourage people to dwell for at least two hours
2. No venue for large scale events in the town centre
3. We need a health and medical centre in the town centre
4. We need a museum in Letchworth
5. Without any local press or journalists, it's difficult to get local news out and to promote the town.
6. People don't tend to apply for large pots of grant funding.

DA responded on Q2 that there were many venues around the town centre that can hold up to 100 people. Broadway Hotel Ballroom, The Garden City Church, The Central Methodist Church.

DA responded on Q3 – that the Council have tried to work with the NHS on a project to discuss a health centre, but the NHS do not have the resource to work on the planning stages of a project.

TT responded that the council are currently working on an Economic Development strategy, and we will be working in partnership with the BID and the LGCHF on the town centre consultation. She also mentioned that the collection at North Herts Museum contains many artifacts and information relating to Letchworth. The council are currently looking at adequate museum storage for the collection.

10. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

- Town Centre strategy. / Community Safety Report from the Police
The forum members would if possible like to hold the meeting at Letchworth Library.

MEETING CLOSED 21:30