

North Herts Council
ROYSTON & VILLAGES COMMUNITY FORUM

Meeting held at Royston Town Hall, Melbourn Street, Royston, SG8 7DA
On Wednesday, 26 March 2025 at 7.30pm

Actions from this meeting:

IT to provide detailed to responses to questions posed in the meeting.

BE to distribute **IT**'s responses.

NOTES

Present: Councillor Ruth Brown (RB) (Chair), Councillor Bryony May (BM) (Vice-Chair), Councillor Matt Barnes (MB), Councillor Ruth Clifton (RC), Councillor Martin Prescott (MP), Councillor Tim Johnson (TJ), Councillor Sarah Lucas (SL)

In Attendance: Becca Edwards (BE) (Community and Partnerships Officer)

Also present: At the commencement of the meeting there were 78 members of the public.

Meeting started at **7.30pm**

1. **Apologies for absence**

Cllr Cathy Brownjohn

2. **Chair's Announcements**

Cllr Brown welcomed everyone in attendance.

- Highlighted that the Forum is an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas.
- Shared information about the [Community Governance Review | North Herts Council](#)
- Shared information about the [Sustainability Strategy 2025-2030 Consultation](#)

3. **Public Participation – Grant Applications**

Received a presentation in support of a grant application by the following:

Andy Osborne (AO) presented the Therfield Parish Council (TPC) application.

Members and members of the public enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How many people attend each lunch club (60-65)
- If the club is only open to residents of Therfield (Open to everyone)
- How the accounts work (TPC hold funds on behalf of the club)

Proposed **RB**

Seconded **MP**

Unanimous vote in favour of recommending Therfield Parish Council receive £902 towards a storage solution for the lunch club.

4. Presentation – Barkway Road Development

RB introduced the topic, Ian Thorn (IT) of Happy Business Consulting presented.

RB Planning is a legal and regulatory function governed by a formal framework. Officers assess planning developments by carefully weighing the pros and cons. In addition to publicly available documents, the Council has supplementary requirements and may often request developers to meet standards exceeding the national legal minimum. Officers consider all aspects in a balanced manner.

Big developments like this are reviewed by the Planning Committee. Several Councillors (MP, BM, and RB) on this Forum are members of the Committee. To avoid being predetermined, Committee members are unable to share their opinions on these matters.

Councillors aim to represent local residents to the best of their ability, but it's important to remember that their work operates within a legal framework. Planning officers do not participate in these type of events and do not engage directly with the public generally. Councillors are present to listen to and advocate for the community.

IT introduced himself and expressed his enthusiasm to address as many questions as possible. *Distributed 30 information packs.*

The application for this development has been under consideration for the past four years, leading to significant uncertainty and concern. This duration is quite unusual for an outline application. All detailed aspects will be addressed after the proposal is reviewed by the Committee. The Master Plan accompanies the outline and includes components such as drainage and other key features.

The proposed development involves approximately 280 houses, with the exact number to be determined at the detailed planning stage. The application aims to encourage sustainable living by reducing reliance on cars - though it is acknowledged that some may be skeptical about this goal. The plan includes improvements to footpaths, a central wooded bridleway, and collaboration with the Town Council to provide allotments, public parkland, play areas, and other elements necessary to meet legal planning requirements.

The site is designed with sustainable drainage systems and will deliver a 57% increase in hedgerows. Homes will feature solar panels, heat pumps, and water efficiency measures, with no gas infrastructure included. Negotiations with HHC Highways have been ongoing for four years, and there is interest in engaging further with the Town Council regarding highway plans.

Additional aspects of the proposal include sustainable transport initiatives, such as a new bus stop and improved cycling links. Contributions include £300k for sports facilities, funding for health-related private care, and a £600k contribution for library services.

The reality is that there is a significant demand for housing, with this authority currently having a 5-year housing supply of just 3.9 years. This shortfall means that almost anyone owning a field can submit a planning application. If initially denied, such applications often succeed upon appeal.

MoP according to government policies, developments should ideally be located in areas with existing infrastructure and amenities. However, this application appears to be quite disingenuous. While it claims the town centre is within 800m and easily accessible on foot, the reality is different. Key amenities such as supermarkets and the leisure center are located beyond 800m, and the area includes a steep hill, making walking impractical for many.

IT Infrastructure presents a fundamental challenge in most market towns, which were historically designed for horses and carts. This legacy creates complications for new developments. The upcoming Local Plan may adopt a more holistic approach to contributions, but infrastructure remains an ongoing issue everywhere.

Education planning is relatively straightforward comparatively, as projections can estimate the number of children expected. However, NHS and health services, being outside the remit of local government, present challenges for delivering additional healthcare infrastructure through the planning system. Developers are typically limited to providing financial contributions.

The Community Infrastructure Levy is often raised as a solution, though the funds it generates are frequently too small to make a substantial impact. Active travel initiatives, such as encouraging walking and cycling, are crucial. While it's unrealistic to expect elderly or infirm residents to walk up steep hills, achieving a 10–15% shift in travel habits could lead to meaningful progress. It's also worth noting that traffic and transportation are noticeably improved during school holidays.

RB Encouraging sustainable movement isn't just about promoting cycling or walking; it's also about enhancing public transport options and creating more direct walking routes. The hill presents a challenge - many, including myself, find cycling up there difficult. However, with the increasing availability of e-bikes, there's real potential to make this more feasible. Ultimately, we want to motivate people to adopt active and sustainable travel habits wherever possible.

MoP2 I live up top of Beldam Avenue. I'm quite elderly, Flint Cross is an accident blackspot more pressure will be put on that.

IT I understand your point, however it is reasonable to think young families might embrace walking and cycling, especially with improved routes and infrastructure. However, it's important to acknowledge that not everyone will be able to do this due to personal circumstances or the site's challenges, like the steep hill.

That said, considering the environmental concerns we face today, fostering sustainable travel habits is more critical than ever.

MoP3 Many people are here because they are concerned about the specifics of this planning application. While there are other applications, this one is clearly potty. Focusing on national trends isn't helpful when addressing the unique challenges posed by this case.

A critical issue is the single-track road linked to the development. A December 2020 report on this road is included with the application; however, it was prepared during the COVID

pandemic, which will obviously have had major effects on travel. The road itself is problematic, as even a bus struggles to navigate it effectively.

RB the traffic assessment was done in December 2020. I have asked for this to be updated how is this going?

IT We are currently in discussions with HCC Highways. Once they provide their proposals, we will respond with ours in turn. I understand that the initial report was not representative, and I would be surprised if it hasn't been updated. Councillors on the Planning Committee are committed to ensuring that only credible applications are approved. I will check with the developer in the morning to confirm whether an updated report is available.

MoP4 With 280 houses in the development, we're realistically looking at around 600 cars. Even with efforts to encourage more active travel, there will likely still be around 400 cars. Plus, the Barkway development with 100+ homes will bring even more vehicles into the area. At this rate, it almost feels like we'd need to shut down Barkway Road entirely.

RB Do you know what feasibility studies have been done? Have there been any done about what signalling the Barkway Road junction with the gyratory?

IT Discussions with HCC are ongoing, I will go back and ask what is happening with this and report back. This matter will be brought back to the Royston Town Council and NHDC meetings for further review. At the Planning Committee, Councillors will thoroughly question both officers and developers to ensure all aspects are addressed. The application will be scrutinised in the most public way possible, allowing everyone the opportunity to submit their views in writing. Additionally, I am happy to involve someone with more expertise on highways to provide further insights.

RB At North Herts, a Member Advocate and up to three spokespersons from local residents can participate in discussions. All objections submitted will be carefully reviewed and summarised in the officers' report. It's important to note that the number of objections is not considered—only the substance and content of the objections are taken into account.

MoP5 When will a more detailed plan be available to comment on? I want to ensure any environmental and financial impact on the neighbouring properties are kept to a minimum.

IT This application will go to the Committee, where it will be debated and either approved or refused. If approved, a detailed application will follow, covering specifics such as house types, exact locations, garden sizes, and boundaries with immediate neighbours. In similar developments, extensive consultations are typically held with immediate neighbours to address their concerns and preferences. This stage is referred to as 'reserved matters', where the detailed plans are finalised.

RB This application is accompanied by a Master Plan, which outlines the basic expectations for the development. The Master Plan has already undergone significant changes based on prior consultations. The outline application must determine, in principle, whether this site is suitable for the proposed number of houses, particularly as it has not been allocated in the local plan.

MoP6 In the early 70s, there was a new sewage system. What will happen sewage-wise for this new development?

IT This aspect of the application falls under reserved matters, which involve input from a wide range of consultees. RTC will provide comments, while Affinity Water and Anglian

Water will share their views. All feedback will be carefully reviewed by officers and Members of the Planning Committee as part of the decision-making process.

RB If statutory consultees object, then the developers have to find a way to overcome the objections before the plan is agreed.

County Cllr Fiona Hill (FH) It concerned me when you stated there will be a chance to respond to the planning application, including highways issues. Submissions, questions and concerns have already been put forward on several occasions by consultees, residents and others through the planning process and you have stated this evening that Highways is still raising questions. The issue of the traffic survey/assessment being carried out during Covid has been raised and yet it would appear there has been no confirmation that a further assessment has been carried out. Has this been addressed with the developer by Planning or Highways?

IT I will come back with the facts on this.

RB I've spoken to the case officer about this. The application would be likely to be deferred by the Committee if the traffic assessment isn't updated.

MoP7 Why, during the past four years, did the application not appeal for non-determination? Was it because there was a highways objection dated July 2022?

IT I'd like to address conditioning the traffic survey. My understanding throughout this process is that North Herts has consistently provided constructive feedback on the application. The prevailing view has been that we wouldn't resort to a planning appeal on grounds of non-determination.

If you're a landowner or developer, significant amounts of money are involved in the process. There has been a sense of constructive engagement with officers throughout, with the aim of progressing the application to the Committee stage.

MoP7 This is not technically an outline application but rather a hybrid application, which is typical for a scheme of this size. On the highways issue, a detailed assessment based on the sensor data from 2020 was conducted. The developer has had four years to address these concerns but has only focused on pathways. Shouldn't the developer be committing to a unilateral undertaking (UU) to implement a car-free scheme?

It's also disappointing that neither the developer nor the planning consultant has attended this evening. Some of us have been involved in this process for over five years, and their absence is notable given the importance of this application.

IT I can't answer that.

MoP7 Why did the developer not put this through the local plan process?

IT I don't know, it sits with North Herts and is likely to be promoted through the new local plan.

MoP7 The 2022 Local Plan will serve as the statutory framework moving forward, influenced by new legal requirements and changes to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). While there is an obligation on the local authority to meet housing needs, ultimately, the suitability of the site remains the key.

RB This site is not included in the current local plan because it became available after the examination process had concluded. It is likely that the site would be considered in the next

local plan, where it would go through the appropriate process. The Master Plan is not a requirement that all councils undertake; however, I was involved when it was introduced for this site. Initially, the application came forward as an outline plan, but NHDC requested a Master Plan to accompany it. This makes the situation quite unique and an anomaly in the planning process.

MoP7 I believe this is a deliberate abuse of the planning process by the developer. They've applied just after the time for it to go through proper process, this kind of thing gives developers a bad name.

MP For clarity, is this being proposed as a car free development?

IT Not that I'm aware of.

MOP8 I have two young kids, we don't have a sixth form in Royston. Concerned about education places.

IT All the developer can do is engage with the Education Board and provide relevant funding. The developer must be told what is required, and if they don't agree to what is required that is another reason for the application to be challenged / rejected.

MoP9 The cost of the sewage will come back to the taxpayer and the land for the sewage works will reduce land available.

IT The water company serves as a statutory consultee and is required to provide advice on the application. If there are issues concerning capacity or other factors, they will either enter negotiations to find a solution or ultimately decline the proposal.

MoP9 have there been any enquiries with the water companies, this has been going on for four years?

IT I believe there has been some consultation, but I'm not aware of the specifics at this stage. I'll look into this further and come back to Becca with more information tomorrow.

MoP10 Observation: the A10 London to Kings Lynn, Royston is the only town on that road that doesn't have a bypass.

MoP11 Can this consultation be done again with someone who does know the answers to the questions?

IT There will be further consultation.

RB I invited Ian here tonight due to the lack of engagement from the developers. I'm open to hosting another meeting like this; however, my concern is that the application could reach the Planning stage before we have the chance to arrange another session. I suggest IT advise the developers to hire a hall in Royston and really engage with the public. I think this should be organised by the developers.

MoP12 I'm concerned about all this information, and that we might not have time to comment on the information in time.

IT The likelihood of this getting to a planning committee in the near future is very small.

MoP13 What timeframe are we going to have answers from you?

IT tomorrow. Will send info to Becca.

MP Can Ian make a commitment on behalf of the developer about further engagement?

IT I can ask the client to see if they will commit.

RB I advise that they should invest the time into engaging with the local community.

MoP14 It would be great if you could make a web page with all the actual information on that is kept updated, rather than someone attending a meeting without any answers.

General agreement.

TJ Matt Barnes, Ruth Clifton and I are your ward district councillors. Please get hold of me if you need any support.

IT closing words.

---- Short break ----

5. **Developer Contributions**

RB Developers do pay contributions, but it's not always spent in a timely manner. Developers do contribute large amounts of money that are designed to mitigate the impact of development. If you do a highways scheme it has to relate to the development. For Meridian Gate development funded their roundabout, but wouldn't have been able to fund one elsewhere in Royston.

For info: Section 106 agreements, often referred to as S106, are legal agreements made between local planning authorities and developers. These agreements are designed to ensure that new developments contribute positively to the surrounding community by providing necessary infrastructure, services, or funding. Common examples include affordable housing, educational facilities, public transportation improvements, or recreational spaces.

In addition to these agreements, unilateral undertakings (UU) may also be utilised. A unilateral undertaking is a legal commitment made solely by a developer, without requiring the agreement of the local planning authority, though it still aims to fulfil planning obligations. These undertakings are typically employed in specific circumstances, such as appeals, where the developer independently commits to delivering particular community benefits.

Together, S106 agreements and unilateral undertakings play a vital role in balancing the benefits of development with the needs of the local community, ensuring sustainable and thriving environments.

RB Every application involving 10 houses or more requires a Section 106 (S106) contribution. These contributions cover various categories, including pitch sports, leisure facilities, health, education, and libraries. Areas like health, education, and libraries typically fall under the jurisdiction of the County Council.

Regarding the funding available for a hockey pitch, a site on the heath with steep sides, currently used for football training, was considered as a potential location but was considered too difficult due to permission needed to fence off common land. The Football pitch at KJAR was also considered but the Football Association would not permit this to be resurfaced for hockey. Following this, the hockey club engaged with various farmers and landowners around Royston to explore other options. Over time, the club's committee changed, and with it being entirely run by volunteers, the matter has not progressed.

MP How far out of Royston can the location be?

RB The hockey club looked at Therfield and towards Thrift Farm.

MoP All of Royston hockey is in Cambridgeshire.

MoP1 Isn't there a large space at Hedera Gardens that was dedicated for a school that now isn't going to be a school?

RB Lots of people have suggested that. HCC aren't keen on meanwhile uses for the land.

MB How much is available for/ has been spent on sustainable travel?

RB Some has been spent on cycle racks, Royston Rail Underpass Cycle Links and bus shelters.

General discussion about what Royston Rail Underpass Cycle Links is.

MoP12 Could the lanes on Old North Road be made rideable? They're uneven and riders must cycle in the road.

MB What about health and education S106 contributions?

RB That is HCC's responsibility. The info is accessible on the [HCC planning obligations webpages](#).

MoP12 If the Barkway Road development goes ahead, would the library money be spent in Royston or across the district?

County Cllr Fiona Hill Should be for the benefit of residents from Royston and the villages (depending on the precise wording in the agreement). County Councillors should be notified prior to the funding being specifically allocated.

6. Information Note: Waste

Please see end of document.

7. Community Update

BE presented the [Community Update](#).

BE explained that Outside of the Box, who had previously received grant funding as recommended by the Forum, had a change of circumstances and had asked if part of the funding could be used for another purpose. The organisation have utilized the funding granted towards ChromeBooks, but the sensory mats requested were no longer suitable. They therefore requested to use the remaining funds to purchase a kitchen unit to help teach young people life skills. This has been agreed by the Executive Member for Community Partnerships and the Chair of Royston Forum.

8. Royston Town Council – Mayor John Rees

Town Hall update Over the past 6–8 weeks, all the admin staff have left, and as of 11 March, there have been no admin staff at all. This has been a significant issue. The Mayor has been in the Town Hall every day, along with the Market manager and his wife, who have been helping out to keep the office running.

Things are now improving. A new admin clerk started yesterday, a temporary finance clerk will be joining soon, and a locum proper officer is being engaged. The number of meetings has been reduced to better manage the workload.

Despite the challenges, the May Fayre is going ahead. Thanks to the Market manager's dedication and hard work, the event has been saved.

RB my thanks to John. He is a volunteer Town Councillor. Great to hear that the May Fayre is going ahead. Please record my thanks to Rob Mills.

9. **Herts County Council**

Cllr Fiona Hill

- Integrated plan / budget
- Full details of HLB on the website – the speed table is being undertaken in Burns Road.

Cllr Steve Jarvis

- There is some work being done at the railway underpass to link to Bassingbourne. Network Rail are undertaking the work. Still some issues resolved.
- Still battling to get the developers to complete the work on Baldock Road.
- County Cllrs renewed the contract with the people who mend the roads, with no change to the contract.

MEETING CLOSE 21:33

March 2025 Community Forums Briefing: New bin deliveries in May, ready for the new collection service in August

1. New arrivals: 240-litre blue-lidded cardboard and paper bins, from May

From early May, new 240-litre blue-lidded bins will be delivered to North Herts households, ready to use for cardboard and paper recycling when the new service starts on 4 August 2025. The new bin will be taped up with a note attached advising residents not to use it until that date.

Residents should continue to use their blue paper boxes until the new service begins. We will not be collecting the old paper boxes. We recommend that residents use them for storage, or for putting out additional recycling or cardboard and paper side waste for collection. If unwanted, these can also be recycled at local recycling centres.

The introduction of a separate cardboard and paper waste stream meets the Government's 'Simpler Recycling' requirement, to reduce cross-contamination and increase the quality of cardboard and paper recycling. Annual increases in home shopping deliveries, and manufacturers and retailers moving from plastic to cardboard packaging, is resulting in a greater amount of cardboard arriving in households. This bin helps residents process that. The cardboard and paper that we collect goes to Edwards Recycling. Income from it is used towards the costs of waste collection.

2. Expanding food waste recycling to the majority of flats/communal bin stores

Food waste recycling collections will be reintroduced to flats and areas with communal bins that do not currently have this service.

3. Further changes to the bin collection service in North Herts

The new three-weekly collection cycle for non-recyclable waste, mixed recycling and the new cardboard and paper bin will start from 4 August 2025. Most flats and households with communal bins will stay on fortnightly collections. Food waste collections remain a weekly, with subscription garden waste collections continuing fortnightly. Revised bin collection days will be promoted and circulated nearer the time.

From 4 August, residents can put loose plastics in their mixed recycling bin, in line with the Government's Simpler Recycling requirement for recycling 'soft plastics' from home¹.

Further information

A Waste Department representative has requested to present to the Community Forums across North Herts on the new bin collection service in June, to go through the changes.

In the meantime, the Council webpage covers the key points and offers FAQs:

www.north-herts.gov.uk/bin-collection-service-changes.

1Trailblazers Knebworth, Royston, & Sawbridgeworth should continue using their current system for soft plastics recycling, then switch on 4 August to adding these loose their mixed recycling bin