

**North Herts Council
SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Great Ashby Community Centre
On Thursday 11 September 2025 at 7.30pm**

NOTES

Present: Cllr Dominic Griffiths (DG) (Chair), Cllr Vijaiya Poopalasingham (VP) (Vice-Chair), Cllr David Barnard (DB), Cllr Caroline McDonnell (CM), Cllr Ralph Muncer (RM), Cllr Steven Patmore (SP), Cllr Louise Peace (LP), Cllr Claire Strong (CS), Cllr Paul Ward (PW) and Cllr Laura Williams (LW).

In attendance:
Laura Hartley (Community Partnerships Officer) (LH), Claire Morgan (Community Partnerships Team Leader) (CM), Cllr Daniel Allen (Leader of the Council and Exec Member for Governance) (DA)

Also present:
At the commencement of the meeting there were around 5 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting Started at **19:30**

1. ELECTION OF A CHAIR FOR CIVIC YEAR 2025/26

Chair vote

PW proposed DG

CM seconded

RM proposed DB

SP seconded

6 voted in favour of DG

2 voted in favour of DB

DG was elected as Chair.

2. ELECTION OF A VICE-CHAIR FOR CIVIC YEAR 2025/26

Vice-Chair vote

LW proposed VP

DG seconded

No further nominations.

VP was elected as Vice-Chair.

2. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllr Lisa Nash and Cllr Joe Graziano

3. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

DG welcomed everyone in attendance.

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

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.

4. PRESENTATION – LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

Verbal presentation from Cllr Daniel Allen, Leader of the Council and Exec Member for Governance, and Cllr Laura Willaims, Exec Member for LGR.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- Clarification on whether the boundary change relates to councils or constituencies. Cllr Steve Jarvis, Leader of Hertfordshire County Council, confirmed it will be a council review only.
- An offer from the Chair of the Community Centre to help publicise LGR consultation poster.
- Suggestions to use village notice boards to promote the LGR posters and survey.
- A question from MoP regarding whether district and borough councils will be stating their preferred options, and how those options are selected.
 - DA explained that each council submits a single preferred solution to Central Government. These submissions are then considered by the Cabinet.
- A discussion on the representation of parishes and if Parish and Town Councils should be given more influence. There was concern that they are being overlooked in the current process.
 - DA noted that Government has a separate strategy for involving Parish and Town Councils, but no active engagement is taking place at this time.
- Enquiries about when detailed information, such as the benefits, drawbacks, assets, and financial implications of each option, will be made available to the public.
 - DA stated that there a rough figures emerging, but unlikely to be available until shortly before a final decision is made.
- A recommendation to circulate this information to Parish Councils so they can inform residents and encourage participation in the survey.

Information on the Local Government Reorganisation can be found in the links below:

- [Help shape Hertfordshire's future - have your say on changes to local government | North Herts Council](#)
- [Devolution and Local Government Reorganisation | North Herts Council](#)

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Community Partnerships officer informed those present that there is £12,802 available in the Southern Rural grant budget. The total amount of funding requested for the meeting was £2,100. If all grants are recommended and subsequently approved, there will be £10,702 remaining in the budget for the remainder of the financial year 25/26.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

SP declared an interest as an Offley Parish Councillor and abstained from discussions and voting.

David presented the **Offley Parish Council** application.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- The *Hertfordshire County Council Winter Social Celebration* grant application, and whether the Parish Council had applied. It was confirmed that they had applied, but for a separate initiative, a community warm space/lunch event, which will be free for attendees.
- The benefits and constraints of planting a Christmas tree in the village, including considerations around cost, location, and long-term maintenance.
- How the Parish Council budgets for seasonal events, particularly in comparison to the higher costs reported by other parishes hosting similar celebrations.

Offley Parish Council vote

DB proposed.

CS seconded.

9 cllrs voted in favour of recommending Offley Parish Council application for £600 towards the purchase of three Christmas trees for local community festivals.

Keeley presented the **Preston School Association** application.

DB declared an interest and abstained from discussions and voting.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- The scope of the trail replacement, including which elements are being renewed or upgraded.
- The range of users who access the trail beyond school pupils, such as local families and community groups.
- The availability of funding through the Hertfordshire County Council Members' Locality Budget.
- Confirmation that the Preston School Association's application to the National Lottery Community Fund (NLCF) remains open.
- The phased approach to the project:
 - Stage One focuses on replacing essential components to reopen the trail.
 - Stage Two will address all remaining repairs and improvements.
- The estimated age of the activity trail, which has been in place for approximately 10 years.
- The significance of the trail in supporting pupils' wellbeing and outdoor engagement.

Preston School Association vote

CS proposed.

CM seconded.

9 cllrs voted in favour of recommending Preston School Association application for £1,500 towards the replacement of the outdoor activity trail.

6. COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Community and Partnerships Officer highlighted:

- GoVolHerts Virtual Volunteer Fair on 17 September
- NHCVS funding summit and AGM taking place on 18 September
- The [Community Grant](#) deadlines for the remainder of 25/26

DB conveyed thanks from Pirton Parish Council to those who attended the Topping Out event for the new pavilion, on behalf of North Herts Council.

7. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

RM: Council is reviewing S106 contributions. A consultation with stakeholders is planned. Members of the Southern Rural forum are encouraged to share the survey with Parish Councils. This will be distributed via the Comms team.

PW updated on:

- East of Knebworth development deferred.
- Crime is decreasing in Knebworth.
- Casework includes recycling issues, bin relocations and installation of dog waste bins.

LP: Digital inclusion café is restarting. Residents can be directed there to complete the LGR survey.

CS: Pirton now has 20mph speed signs. No additional costs for speed cushions, only signage was needed.

LW: Will raise the issue of bins in Great Asby car park with the Exec Member.

MoP: Raised concern about lack of response from North Herts Council regarding bins. Southern Rural members to follow up internally.

8. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

- November forum -
 - Venue: Knebworth
 - Topic: Impact of the Local Plan and developer contribution
- March forum to take place in the Council Chamber.
- Other topics discussed:
 - Public transport – bus service representative, Herts Lynx, Arriva, etc
 - Inviting the Waste team back again to the forum.

MEETING CLOSED 21:06