

North Herts Council
ROYSTON & VILLAGES COMMUNITY FORUM

**Meeting held at Royston Town Hall, Melbourn Street, Royston, SG8 7DA
On Wednesday, 10 December 2025 at 7.35pm**

Actions from this meeting:

XX

NOTES

Present: Councillor Tim Johnson (TJ) (Chair), Councillor Bryony May (BM) (Vice-Chair), Councillor Ruth Brown (RB), Ruth Clifton (RC), Councillor Martin Prescott (MP)

In Attendance: Becca Edwards (BE) (Community Partnerships Officer), James Lant (JL), John Hickmott (JH), Louise Symes (LS)

Also present: At the commencement of the meeting there were 12 members of the public.

Meeting started at **7.34pm**

1. Apologies for absence

Councillor Matt Barnes

2. Chair's Announcements

Cllr Johnson welcomed everyone in attendance.

3. Presentation – Police Q&A

Presenter: John Hickmott (Royston Police Station)

In post for 15 months.

- During this time: new Deputy Constable and Chief Constable appointed, leading to significant changes.
- Restructure introduced desk-based investigations team, freeing local officers for more community presence.
- New Chief Inspector Sarah Gilbertson.
- Local team remains experienced and established, providing 24/7 cover from Royston Police Station.

Neighbourhood Policing

- Operates across five tiers.
- Government introducing [Respect Orders](#).
- Local priorities identified through community feedback:
 - Hare coursing: increased during wetter months. Police response includes Traffic Units and air support.
 - Hedera Gardens ASB: 19 reports; 2 general ASB, remainder linked to one property under separate process. Patrols have not encountered ASB directly.
 - Speeding: focus on Baldock Road due to staffing levels, also linked to Hedera Gardens.
- ASB trend: downward in Royston. Since April 2025, 232 reports.
 - Hotspots: Kneeworth Street (9 reports – fireworks, begging), and Old North Road.

Youth Engagement

- Police were involved in Premier League Kicks (now run by Stevenage FC).
- Regular school visits, including KS1 & KS2 “Mini Police” programme.
- Scouts and schools visit the station.
- Summer open day attracted over 1,000 visitors.

Current Initiatives

- Winter of Action priorities:
 1. Retail crime
 2. Street crime & ASB
 3. Night-time economy (NTE) & Violence Against Women and Girls (VAWG)
- Increased high street patrols, including plain clothes ASB patrols.

Crime Statistics (April–Nov 2025)

- Most crime types decreased except burglary/residential.
- Burglary: 35% increase, mainly linked to derelict properties and urban explorers.
 - Burglaries are reactive; police advise neighbours on property marking and security.
- Theft from motor vehicles: 30% increase (39 incidents, including attempts).
 - 12 related to HGV fuel thefts on A505.
 - Two spates: one night with 11 thefts, another with 9. Arrests made in both cases.

Discussion Points

- Coverage area: Figures include Royston and surrounding villages.
- Nuthampstead speeding: May be recorded under different statistics.
- Burglary clear-up rate: Investigations handled by specialist team. Theft from vehicles managed locally, with >70% success rate.
- Operation Guardian: Dedicated burglary prevention officers. CID now attend all burglary reports. Cross-border challenges addressed with Cambs Police.
- Partnerships: Work with BTP and MET, especially on knife crime and County Lines. BTP to base in Hitchin soon.
- Hedera Gardens fence: New fence reduced cut-through traffic to McDonalds.
- Violent crime: 297 offences in Royston (up 4.7%). Hertfordshire overall up 11%. Majority without injury; includes stalking, harassment, malicious communications.
- Youth crime: Child team supports early intervention.
- Community concerns:
 - Garden Walk traffic violations (turning right into Melbourn Road).
 - School engagement (KJAR visits, Crucial Crew participation).
 - Loss of school PCSOs noted.
 - Nox canisters and off-road bikes on Heath – more reports needed; council responsible for clean-up.
- Burglary timing: Generally daytime when residents are at work, though recent reports show more at night.

TJ thanked police, noting Royston is fortunate with its relatively low crime levels.

4. Presentation – Draft Town Centres Strategy

Louise Symes presented.

- The consultation is underway as part of the Local Plan requirement to develop a Town Centres Strategy.
- The strategy aims to address the decline in high street retail transactions by introducing more flexibility in town centre uses.
- The document is planning-led, designed to guide developers, businesses, and the BID, and should be read alongside other policies.
- It covers all four towns in North Herts, focusing on sectors including built environment, transport, community, and commercial/residential use.
- Structure of the document:
 1. Introduction

- 2. Policy guidance
- 3. Town-specific sections: context, SWOT analysis, and key priorities (developed through discussions with town councils and BID).
- Stakeholders are encouraged to engage and submit comments. Consultation runs until **13 January**, after which responses will be analysed.

Question raised: Is there a timeframe for the analysis? (BE to check and chase results for Royston).

Royston-Specific concerns have been identified

- **Gateway Management**
 - Priority is to encourage linked trips between the Gateway and the town centre.
 - Retail unit formats are under review; smaller units may be amalgamated.
- **Public Realm & Transport**
 - Balance between car travel and sustainable travel, with emphasis on encouraging sustainable options.
 - The market is recognised as a key town centre asset.
- **Strengths** Royston has a low proportion of empty retail units compared to North Herts and the national average.
- **Delivery Plan** A delivery plan will be developed with stakeholders in the New Year and presented to Cabinet.

Discussion Points

- **Government Policy & Small Business Challenges**
MP noted that while government funding is being directed towards helping young people into employment, small businesses are finding it harder to survive. Parking was highlighted as a key issue - many residents from surrounding villages choose to shop at the Gateway instead of the town centre because of easier parking.
- **Gateway Retail Mix**
TJ expressed disappointment with the Gateway, observing that it contains more industrial units than consumer-facing shops. The expectation had been for more retail variety, which has not materialised.
- **Worker Amenities at the Gateway**
RC raised concerns that workers around the Gateway struggle with limited lunchtime options. LS clarified that the strategy is focused on the town centre but noted that the BID provides free one-hour parking via scratch cards, which Gateway workers can use.
- **Achievements to Date**
A member of the public asked what has been achieved under the current plan. LS pointed to improvements such as Fish Hill Square but emphasised that the council's role is to lay the platform and facilitate - delivery ultimately depends on developers and

other stakeholders. Royston has managed to maintain itself, but progress relies on external investment.

- **Consultation & Delivery Plan**

TJ asked when RTC had been consulted; LS confirmed within the last six months. TJ hopes that the final plan in January will make Royston a more attractive place to arrive in, noting that town councillors have ambitious ideas. He asked about funding for projects such as a cinema or The Cave. LS responded that the council does not have direct funds but is open to partnerships. Section 106 money could be used to improve routes into town, and wider grant funding may be available once a delivery plan is in place.

- **Town Shaping & Redevelopment**

A member of the public acknowledged that large retailers cannot be forced to move in, but suggested redevelopment of buildings could improve diversity of use. He asked how the council could make it easier to shape the town. LS agreed these were valid points and encouraged submission through the consultation. Current policies are restrictive, which is why the strategy aims to introduce more flexibility.

- **Public Transport & Bus Services**

A member of the public raised concerns about poor publicity for the hourly bus service from Royston to Cambs, as well as a second interlinking bus. He warned that if services are not used, they risk being removed. LS explained that Hertfordshire County Council (HCC) is responsible for buses. It was argued that RTC and NHDC should also take an interest in ensuring services continue.

- **Diversification of Town Centre Offering**

A member of the public stressed the need to diversify the town's offering to attract more visitors and businesses, ensuring Royston remains competitive and vibrant.

5. Information Note – Proposed Car Parking Tariffs 2026/2027

TJ provided a summary of the proposed tariffs.

Discussion Points

- **Free After 3 Scheme**

- TJ Royston's traditional *Free after 3* scheme may be impacted with the move towards unitaries. LS confirmed discussions are ongoing with BID and RTC, who have raised concerns and are exploring options collaboratively.
- MP Removing *free after 3* risks undermining efforts to bring people into town. While raising current costs may be acceptable, the free element is vital. Shared an example of another town that lost custom after removing free parking.
- RB Agreed it is about convenience rather than money. Highlighted that RTC contributed £20k and BID £15k out of £150k–£200k, meaning the £35k combined does not cover lost income. Stressed that people may not realise the true cost of the scheme.
- A member of the public warned of unintended consequences - without *Free After 3*, event attendees at KJAR may park in residential roads. Also noted that

people collecting parcels often make small purchases at the same time, which helps local businesses survive.

- MP pointed out that businesses are already burdened with rising rates (more than £20k in the past year). Removing *free after 3* would further impact them.

- **Convenience vs. Cost**

- Concerns were raised about rationale: 3-hour stays increasing, shorter stays unchanged, season tickets rising.
- Private offers are cheaper, yet the aim is to encourage longer stays.
- £15 increase proposed for yearly season tickets.

- **Council Position (LS)**

- Increase is around 2%, with no change to 1-hour stays.
- Data shows people are staying slightly longer based on check-in/check-out records.
- Season ticket changes are proposals; Cabinet will make the final decision.

- **Collaboration**

- The Deputy Chief Officer of Royston Town Council explained that discussions between RTC, BID, and NHDC have been open and constructive.
- Strong background work reviewing numbers and options.

6. Community Update

BE shared information about the [North Herts Heroes](#) awards.

7. Royston Town Council (RTC)

- The Town Council is now fully staffed.
- RTC is pleased to subsidise the Christmas Lights Switch-On, which was a lovely event.
- The Christmas tree has once again been placed on the Cross.
- Councillors have been working with officers to review the budget.
- Members of the public are welcome to attend RTC meetings — details are published on the website.
- RTC has grant funding available, and officers are happy to advise on the application process.
- Nominations are open for the RTC Green Award.
- Deputy Mayor Freeman wished everyone a Merry Christmas and a happy, healthy New Year.

8. Hertfordshire County Council - Councillor Steve Jarvis – Leader of Herts County Council

- **Local Government Reorganisation (LGR)**

- Submission has been made to Government.
- Likely to hear more in the summer.

- **Budget**

- County is preparing its budget.
- Required to cut £50k in line with Government direction.

- **Speed Limits Policy**

- Current policy is based on the speed people drive at.

- Proposed changes will see more residential areas reduced to 20mph.
- **Electric Vehicle Charging**
 - In some parts of the country, residents can run a cable across the pavement to charge electric cars.
 - This is not currently permitted locally, but changes are being considered.
- **Bus Services**
 - At present, bus companies run services as they choose, with the Council filling gaps.
 - New legislation will allow councils to specify when bus services must run.
 - Funding from the Department for Transport is available to investigate how this would work in rural areas.
 - Aim is to prevent random changes by bus companies.
- **Road Issues (A505 & Baldock Bypass)**
 - Potholes on the A505 and Baldock bypass are being repaired, expected to be completed by the end of the weekend.
 - Fatalities on the A505 have prompted active investigation into lowering speed limits, which HCC had previously resisted.

9. Ward Matters & Outside Organisations

MP announced that there will be a free community lunch at The Woodman on 16 December. Anyone wishing to attend should contact the pub to have their name added to the list. Unfortunately, transport cannot be provided, though the event is open to all. While the HertsLynx service does go to the venue, it may not be suitable for everyone. TJ commented that it is a nice initiative.

10. Future Area Forums

Next meeting Weds 18 March

Closed 21:20