

**North Herts Council
SOUTHERN RURAL COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Hybrid meeting held at Council Offices, Letchworth and online via Zoom
On Thursday 10 September 2026 at 7.30pm**

The recording of the Southern Rural Community Forum is available on the North Herts YouTube channel: [Southern Rural Community Forum](#)

NOTES

Present: Cllrs Dominic Griffiths (DG) (Chair), Paul Ward (PW) (Vice-Chair), Joe Graziano (JG), Caroline McDonnell (CM), Steven Patmore (SP), Louise Peace (LP), Claire Strong (CS) and Laura Williams (LW).

In attendance: Laura Hartley (Community Partnerships Officer) (LH), Becca Edwards (Community Partnerships Officer) (BE), Tracy Westgate (Community Partnerships Officer) (TW), Alan North (Service Manager Green Space) (AN) and Debbie Coates (DC) (Strategic Planning Team Leader)

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. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Cllrs David Barnard, Ralph Muncer, Lisa Nash and Vijaiya Poopalasingham.

2. 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.

3. PRESENTATION – GREEN SPACE CONSULTATION

Alan North (AN), Service Manager for Green Space, presented on North Herts Councils green space consultation.

Full details, and how to take part in the consultation can be found here: <https://www.north-herts.gov.uk/news/have-your-say-north-herts-councils-green-spaces>

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- The consultation has been shared with Parish Councils.
- The public feedback sessions have been town focused and if there is scope to engage in the village.
- Confirmed that the green space consultation is on North Herts Green Space and not green spaces in general – North Herts Council green spaces listed council website: [Parks and green spaces | North Herts Council](#)
- Consideration to review accessibility, drainage and signage for sites.
- With the recent draught if there will be a programme in place to review and replace what was lost.
- Once the consultation concludes all feedback will be generated in a report that will be presented to the Executive Member and Director for Environment, where key priorities and next steps will be identified.

4. PRESENTATION – LOCAL GOVERNMENT REORGANISATION (LGR)

Cllr Laura Williams (LW), Executive Member for LGR, presented a statement on the recent Government announcement.

Statement:

On 7 September Central Government announced that the current Local Government Reorganisation (LGR) programme is being paused whilst a review takes place. The review has been announced to ensure the process is robust and aligns with the new government's plans to shift power, funding, and accountability from Whitehall and Westminster to local elected mayors and combined authorities.

For Hertfordshire this means that the decision to create four new unitary councils for 1 April 2028 has been paused while this review is carried out. This means there will not be elections to the shadow authorities. The May 2027 local elections planned before LGR was announced will go ahead in the other nine Hertfordshire districts and boroughs. Parish Council elections will continue as planned for North Herts in May 2027 with the next North Herts District Council elections held in May 2028.

This Government states that it remains committed to devolution and remains of the view that unitary councils are a better foundation for mayors and strategic authorities. We await details on the devolution plans and how the Government plans to ensure effective and sustainable local government in the future. We also await further details on the scope and timetable for the review and will update staff, councillors, stakeholders and the public when there is further substantive news. Please accept our apologies if you have come this evening to specifically hear more about LGR.

5. NEW LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Debbie Coates (DC), Strategic Planning Team Leader, updated on the New Local Plan.

Topics covered in the Q&A:

- New Local Plan is going to cabinet on 22nd September, with a view to go to consultation from 13th October to 24th November
- The consultation will be available online through a consultation portal, hard copies in libraries, meetings held for Parish Councils, Community Forum meetings,

Councillor Surgeries and six in person events across the district.

- All sites that have been submitted to North Herts Council (NHC) are being published soon. There will be a static map showing the sites across the district. The map is broken down into parishes so comments can be made on individual sites.
- The *Contents and Evidence* document, which is what is mainly being consulted on, is nearly 200 pages. This is being broken down into chapters, asking questions on the opinion of residents and stakeholders about what NHC should be doing.
- Highlighted that they are sites that have been received and do not mean they have been allocated.
- Public views are being captured through a platform that takes details of their name and comments. Can also comment through email and writing which will be uploaded to the platform. Any comments made through social media or verbal comment can not be taken as it must be attributed back to a person.
- After the consultation closes, there will be a consultation summary and the draft plan will start being developed. There will be Member workshops carried out, with another consultation period planned for autumn 2027.

6. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

The Community Partnerships officer informed those present that there is £13,452 available in the Southern Rural grant budget. The total amount of funding requested for the meeting was £4,300. If all grants are recommended and subsequently approved, there will be £9,152 remaining in the budget for the remainder of the financial year 2026/27.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Representative from **Graveley Village Hall** presented an application for £3,000 towards the purchase and installation of an air conditioning unit for the village hall.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Applying for a larger amount than the usual £1,500 due to project costs increasing.
- Other funding streams and organisations that may be available to support the village hall.
- Potential to investigate solar power at a later stage to make the village hall more sustainable.
- Being added to Herts County Council's (HCC) warm and cool space lists.
- The lower cost to run the air-conditioning unit, using electricity, compared to the current gas heating.

Graveley Village Hall vote

SP proposed to vote to recommended £1,500.

JG seconded.

Members unanimously voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to Graveley Village Hall

Representatives from **Kings Walden Parish Council** presented an application for £650 towards the removal of an existing tree and planting a permanent Christmas tree for future village events.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- The Parish Council owns the land and recreation ground.

- Contractors have assessed and confirmed the tree being removed is dying.
- The Parish Council have considered cost of future maintenance for the tree.

Kings Walden Parish Council vote

CS proposed.

JG seconded.

Members unanimously voted in favour of recommending £650 to Kings Walden Parish Council

Representative from **Lilley Parish Council** presented an application for £650 towards planting a permanent Christmas tree for future village events.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Size and placement of the tree in the village green.
- Environmental benefits of having a permanent year-round tree.

Lilley Parish Council vote

SP proposed.

CM seconded.

Members unanimously voted in favour of recommending £650 to Lilley Parish Council

7. COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Community and Partnerships Officer highlighted:

- Attended the NHCVS AGM & LGR event
- The new [Communities hub](#) page. This includes:
 - Previous grant funding and external funding options available
 - Community Directory – building a list of local community groups.
If you know of or are in a group that would like to be part of these directories, please email community@north-herts.gov.uk to be added.
- Councillors are welcome to attend networks facilitated by the team, these include:
 - Youth Action
 - Community Centres
 - Green & Growing
 - Arts & Culture
 - Wellbeing (organised by NH Wellbeing Team)

8. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

CM – Herts Visual Arts have two studios opening in the Southern Rural area. One located in Great Wymondley and another in St Ippolyts. Information can be found at [HVA – Herts Visual Arts](#)

LP - Ickleford Digital Community drop-in is now starting at 11am on Mondays at Ickleford Village Hall. [Citizens Advice](#) attend every second Monday of the month and also have support from the [Alzheimer Society](#).

JG – There is a Yellowstone themed country music night at Breachwood Green on the 19th September.

JG – Received a statement outlining that Ickleford, Whitwell, Breachwood Green, Preston, Holwell, Lilley, Hexton and Bendish are potential 20 mph zones, but are not currently funded. St Paul's Walden and King's Walden are excluded because their roads are classified as rural lanes, with the B651 through St Paul's Walden classed as an inter-urban road.

LW – Great Ashby Community book swap takes place three times a year, with the next one on 18th October 2pm - 4pm. Each time the tearoom is run by a local charity.

CS – Promoted Pirton Community Choir which is open to all villages and is about people coming together.

CS – Pirton Pavillion are running a community café on Wednesday and Thursdays 8am – 11.30am

PW – Knebworth Christmas light switch on takes place Friday 20th November.

DG - Remembrance Sunday Memorial Service to take place in Knebworth.

9. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

Community Forum on 26 November 2026 topics:

- Anglian water
- LGR update
- Local plan

Venue: tbc

Other future topics:

- Invite Arriva bus service
- HCC to present on highways, sustainable travel and 20mph limits
- S106 contributions and the process
- Inviting the ICB to present.
- Police annual update

MEETING CLOSED 21:20