

**North Herts Council
LETCHWORTH COMMUNITY FORUM**

**Meeting held at Howard Garden Social Centre
on Wednesday 7 October 2026 at 7.30pm**

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

In attendance: Becca Edwards (Community and Partnerships Officer) (BE), Laura Hartley (Community and Partnerships Officer) (LH), Rachael Rooney (RR) (Interim Strategic Planning Manager)

Also present: There were 23 members of the public (MOP), including registered speakers.

Meeting started at **19:31**.

1. APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Received apologies from Cllr Tina Bhartwas

2. CHAIR'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

Cllr Billing welcomed everyone in attendance.

Highlighted that the Forum is an informal, inclusive meeting to share ideas and reminded Members to make declarations of interest before an item.

Cllr Billing provided an update on Local Government Reorganisation. Please see end of document for more detail.

3. LOCAL SCHOOL GOVERNMENT RECRUITMENT

Chris Bassett, Chair of Governors at Hillshott Infant School and Nursery, opened the discussion and gave a short presentation.

He appealed for new governors and invited anyone interested to contact the governing body through the school's website.

[Hillshott Infant School and Nursery - Meet the Governors](#)

4. NEW LOCAL PLAN UPDATE

Rachael Rooney (RR) Interim Strategic Planning Manager presented.

[New Local Plan | North Herts Council](#)

The Local Plan was adopted in 2022 and reviewed in 2023, after which work began on a new Local Plan. The Government has since introduced a new planning system comprising five main stages. The Get Ready stage and Scoping Consultation were completed between May and June 2026. Following feedback from that consultation, the Content and Evidence Consultation will open on 13 October and run until 24 November 2026. Further information is available on the Council's website. The Local Plan will then be drafted and examined by an Inspector in 2028, with adoption anticipated in late 2028 or early 2029.

Full documentation for the [Content and Evidence Consultation](#) is available on the Council's website. A site submissions map has also been published. In 2025, the Council issued a [call for sites](#) with potential for development. The submitted sites are now being assessed; inclusion on the map does not mean that a site will be developed.

The Local Plan must provide a mix of larger and smaller housing sites, and the required mix has not yet been identified. Nine public drop-in sessions will be held across the district. Further engagement is planned to reach as many people as possible, including visits to the college and a questionnaire for secondary schools.

DA summarised that the Council was consulting the public about where housing and associated facilities should be located. This work must continue despite the pause in Local Government Reorganisation (LGR).

RR emphasised that an up-to-date Local Plan is required irrespective of the pause in LGR.

MOP raised concerns about demographic outreach, noting that people under 50 and members of ethnic minority communities had reported that they were not consulted effectively. They suggested several community groups through which the Council could broaden its engagement.

5. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION IN RELATION TO GRANT APPLICATIONS

BE updated Members of community grant budgets.

The Community Grant budget available is **£18,353**.

If the applications outlined in Appendix 2-7 are recommended by the Forum and subsequently approved by the Executive Member for Governance, there would be **£9,976** available for Community Grants for the remainder of the 2026-2027 financial year.

Cllr Daniel Allen explained that he can't vote on any of the grants as he is Executive Member for Governance and gives the final approval on the grant but can ask questions.

Received presentations in support of grant applications by the following:

Representative from **Headway Hertfordshire Limited** presented an application for £1,000 towards venue hire and arts materials for their support group. Advised they have raised £400 towards the £1,500 cost of the project.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How people are referred into the support group.

SB proposed to recommend £1,100.

SB Proposed
MD Seconded

10 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,100 to Headway Hertfordshire Limited.

Representative from **Growing Resilience in Teens** presented an application for £1,200 towards developing a coach-led mentoring programme.

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

- The age of children worked with
- How many young people are supported from Letchworth
- Where the coaches are trained

AA Proposed
MD Seconded

10 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,200 to Growing Resilience in Teens.

Representative from Saracens Sport Foundation presented an application for £1,190 towards hall hire and refreshment costs for their Love to Dance project.

Cllr Mantle declared an interest as he is on the committee of Mrs Howard Hall where the activity is to take place.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- How the activities are advertised.
- How many people could be catered for.
- The funding of the sessions.

SP Proposed
CW Seconded

9 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,190 to Saracens Sport Foundation.

Representative from **Resolve** presented an application for £1,500 towards the cost of a key worker.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Statutory services providing this support

MOP shared residents' concern about hard drug use in the town centre and spoke in favour of the organisation.

DA spoke in favour of Resolve.

EF Proposed

TT Seconded

10 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to Resolve.

Representative from **Whitethorn Bowls Club** presented an application for £1,500 towards a perimeter fence around the bowling green.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- The height of the fence
- If they have had advice from pest control companies
- Membership

There was discussion around making recommending the grant on condition of advice from a third party, deferring the application and deferring the application but ringfencing the requested amount.

BE advised money cannot be ringfenced within the grant budget.

TT proposed to recommend on condition of third-party confirmation that the method intended to be used to keep foxes out of the green is suitable.

EF Seconded

10 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,500 to Whitethorn Bowls Club on condition of third-party confirmation that the method intended to be used to keep foxes out of the green is suitable.

Cllrs Billing, Thomas and Debenham declared an interest in the next grant due to their position as members of the association.

Cllr Billing asked for a temporary Chair to be appointed and suggested Cllr Nolan.

EF Proposed

IM Seconded

No objections were raised and Cllr Nolan took over the role of Chair for the following application.

Representative from **Jackmans Community Association** presented an application for £1,987 towards replacing a gate at the rear of the property as part of a wider refurbishment and rebranding project.

Members enquired and received satisfactory answers about:

- Any other security measures they are trying to fund.

MOP spoke in support of the community centre.

DA and **AA** spoke in support of the community centre.

CW Proposed

IM Seconded

7 Members voted in favour of recommending £1,987 to Jackmans Community Association.

Cllrs Billing, Thomas and Debenham returned to the meeting. Cllr Billing resumed her role as Chair.

5. COMMUNITY UPDATE

BE shared information about the Community Supermarket at Jackmans Community Centre. More information can be found here: [Community Help Hertfordshire](#).

6. WARD MATTERS & OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS

Wilbury Ward

MOP raised concerns about increased traffic on Bedford Road.

- The school crossing patrol officer had left and had not been replaced, making the road difficult to cross.
- Considers the speed humps ineffective and noted the high number of accidents compared with Baldock Road.
- Suggested that commercial vehicles using Bedford Road could take an alternative route.
- Although she recognises that zebra crossings and highways are County Council matters, she wished to raise the issue at the local forum.

In response, in his roles as District and County Councillor, **SP** advised that:

- The District Council could not challenge the lack of crossing guard directly, but a County Councillor could ask why the crossing patrol had not been replaced. This can often be due to traffic volumes or staff shortages.
- A zebra crossing proposal would normally be considered following a speed survey and review of accident records. County Councillors could contribute funding through their Highways Locality Budgets.
- A town-wide consultation on 20mph speed limits would be launched shortly. The revised approach could allow restrictions to be introduced on individual roads or in areas where there was strong local support, rather than across the whole town.

- Specific safety concerns could be referred to Highways for assessment and might require a Traffic Regulation Order. Approximately 80% local support would be required.
- Residents can contact their County Councillor about the Highways Locality Budget.

AA discussed the following:

- Recorded mean speeds in the Bedford Road area were 27mph, with 85th-percentile speeds of 32mph, which Hertfordshire County Council consider compliant. Dangerous driving was a matter for Hertfordshire Constabulary and should be reported where necessary.
- She would look into the 20mph consultation further.
- Considers the speed humps on Bedford Road ineffective.
- She referred to Wilbury School, and the school travel plan was discussed.
- The Highways Locality Budget is almost fully committed for the current year but could be considered in future. Yellow lines might be funded through the budget, although other options should be explored first.

DA asked the MOP whether the area's County Councillor had engaged with her on the issue.

SL explained that the County Councillor had not been approached about the issues

SN noted potential sight-line issues with a zebra crossing, as drivers would need a clear view of it. However, nearby locations might be suitable. He suggested engaging with Tesco and the school to progress a possible scheme, noting that Tesco might see its benefits and be able to contribute funding.

SP advised that the 20mph consultation would be town wide. In other areas consulted, if more than 50% of respondents opposed the proposal, it would not proceed; the revised approach would be more targeted.

DA asked how residents would be contacted regarding the consultation.

SP engagement will predominantly be online, and further information will be shared as soon as it is available. The consultation is expected to begin on 19 October.

SP advised that enforcement was a matter for Hertfordshire Constabulary. Residents could approach the police to establish a [Community Speed Watch](#), and District Councillors could contact the police about speed monitoring.

The funding source for yellow lines would depend on the reason for the proposed restrictions and might or might not be the Highways Locality Budget.

MOP asked whether anything could be done about heavy vehicles using Bedford Road.

SP was unsure but noted evidence that 20mph restrictions tended to divert this type of traffic.

CW offered to put SL in contact with volunteers in Willian who had established a Community Speed Watch.

MOP2 offered to raise the matter at the Community Safety Oversight Board.

Online questions concerning bus timetables:

- When will the printed bus timetables be changed at bus stops around the district?
- Why can't the Letchworth 55 and 56 go through Stevenage Old Town main road?

SP advised that:

- Timetable issues could be reported through [Intalink](#) on 0300 123 4050 and offered to follow up on the matter.
- Bus franchising is being explored by Herts County Council. At present, the County Council has very limited influence over service frequencies and routes; franchising would give it greater control.

MOP2, speaking as a BID Board member, reported that bus operators were reducing some services to the Grange and that local Councillors were working on the issue. They were concerned that residents could lose access to the town centre, increasing isolation and affecting the High Street. They emphasised the importance of franchising.

MOP3 asked what communication had taken place between Arriva and Hertfordshire County Council before the service reductions, and whether any mitigating action could have been taken. Their understanding was that the changes were primarily a commercial decision.

SP was not familiar with the specific situation in the Grange and could not comment in detail but did not believe that Hertfordshire County Council had any influence over the decision.

Other

AA - Wilbury Community Forum on Saturday 10/10. Free cake, tea and coffee, as well as other activities.

EF - litter pick on the Grange Rec 10am Saturday 10/10.

DA - Full Council on 8/10, anyone is welcome to attend or watch online.

Details of other council meetings can be found [here](#).

7. TOPICS FOR FUTURE FORUMS

SB advised of the below upcoming topics:

- Letchworth Heritage Foundation - Letchworth's 125th Anniversary Celebrations and Arts & Heritage Centre. The aim is to round this out as an arts-themed meeting.

TT suggested that the Broadway Gallery be the venue for the December Forum.

DA suggested that at least one meeting per year should be hybrid in the Council Chamber in a bid to broaden the reach further.

MEETING CLOSED AT 21:17.

Local Government Reorganisation Update

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.