

NORTH HERTFORDSHIRE DISTRICT COUNCIL

LETCHWORTH COMMITTEE

MEETING HELD IN FOUNDATION HOUSE, ICKNIELD WAY, LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY ON WEDNESDAY, 5 JULY, 2017 AT 7.30 PM

MINUTES

Present: *Councillors Councillor Mike Rice (Chairman), Councillor Paul Marmont (Vice-Chairman), Clare Billing, John Booth, Terry Hone, Lorna Kercher, David Levett and Ian Mantle*

In Attendance:

Claire Morgan (Communities Officer) and Hilary Dineen (Committee and Member Services Officer)

Also Present:

At the commencement of the meeting 2 members of the public.

4 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE

Apologies for absence were received from Councillors Julian Cunningham, Gary Grindal and Lynda Needham.

5 MINUTES - 8 MARCH 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 8 March 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

6 MINUTES - 18 MAY 2017

RESOLVED: That the Minutes of the Meeting of the Committee held on 18 May 2017 be approved as a true record of the proceedings and be signed by the Chairman.

7 NOTIFICATION OF OTHER BUSINESS

There was no other business notified.

8 CHAIRMAN'S ANNOUNCEMENTS

- (1) The Chairman welcomed those present at the meeting, especially those who had attended to give a presentation;
- (2) The Chairman advised that, in accordance with Council Policy, the meeting would be audio recorded;
- (3) The Chairman advised that he had agreed to move Item 8 – Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Manager forward and this would now be considered as the next item.
- (4) The Chairman drew attention to the item on the agenda front pages regarding Declarations of Interest and reminded Members that, in line with the Code of Conduct, any Declarations of Interest needed to be declared immediately prior to the item in question.

9 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION - MS THERAPY CENTRE

The Communities Officer advised that Mr Mark Boscher of the MS Therapy Centre had been called away to attend a sick relative and therefore was unable to attend this meeting to make a presentation.

10 GRANTS AND COMMUNITY UPDATE

The Communities Officer presented the report of the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance entitled Grants and Community Update.

She advised that the report had been written some time ago for the meeting that was due to have been held in early June 2017, due to the General Election that meeting was postponed and therefore some of the information was no longer valid and drew attention to the following:

Grant Application – Cheap as Chips

The grant application for Cheap as Chips had been withdrawn as sadly this organisation had now disbanded.

Mrs Pauline Worland, who had run the organisation for many years retired and there was no one willing to take on the responsibility.

They did a really good job for many years and this should be recognised.

Grant Application – Armed Forces Day

This event had now taken place and, due to the timing of the event, the Strategic Director of Finance, Policy and Governance had authorised payment of the grant.

This event had been very well attended.

Joan Ellis, the organiser of this event for the British Legion had retired and moved away from the area, therefore a new Committee would be organising next year's event.

The Community Officer would offer support to the new Committee.

Updates on Previous Grant Awards

Members welcomed the updates on previous grant awards and commented that this sort of information should be provided on a regular basis.

The Communities Officer advised that she would, in future, report on any grants for which progress had been made or had been granted in the last year.

Highways Matters

Councillor Hone advised that he had not, in his role as a County Councillor, received any requests from Members regarding highways matters and therefore assumed that the Committee was content and reminded Members to contact him if they wished to discuss any highways related issues.

RESOLVED:

- (1) That the Communities Officer be requested to include updates regarding how grant funding awards were used and the success of any events for which grant funding was provided in all future reports.
- (2) That the budgetary expenditure, balances and carry forwards from the Development and Visioning Budgets be noted;

- (3) That the actions taken by the Community Development Officer to promote greater community capacity and well-being for Letchworth Garden City be endorsed;

REASON FOR DECISION: To keep Members of the Committee apprised of the latest developments in community activities in Letchworth Garden City.

11 GRANT APPLICATION - MS THERAPY CENTRE

The Communities Officer reminded Members that Mr Boscher, Chief Executive of the MS Therapy Centre had been called away to attend a sick relative and asked the Committee to take into account the extenuating circumstances and consider the grant application.

This charity was one of the Chairman's Charities in 2016/17 and Members were fully acquainted with the work of the organisation.

She drew attention to Paragraph 8.1.1 of the report which gave details of the MS Therapy Centre and the grant application.

The request was for £1,113 towards the cost of training staff to provide specialist Pilates sessions, aimed specifically at those with MS and other neurological conditions. These sessions would help those taking part to maintain mobility and remain independent and in employment for as long as possible.

RESOLVED: That grant funding of £1,113 be awarded to Hertfordshire Multiple Sclerosis Therapy Centre from the 2017/18 Discretionary Budget towards the cost of training staff to provide specialist Plates sessions for those with MS and other neurological conditions..

REASON FOR DECISION: To improve services provided by local organisations and groups which are accessed by the community.

12 GRANT APPLICATION - ARMED FORCES DAY

The Communities Officer advised that her report had been written prior to the meetings being postponed due to the General Election.

This grant had been awarded under delegated powers and the event had taken place and been a great success.

13 LETCHWORTH GARDEN CITY TOWN CENTRE MANAGER

Prior to the item being discussed Councillor David Levett declared a Declarable Interest as he was a member of the BID Board, but as there was no decision to be made on this item as it was only for reporting purposes he would remain in the room.

Mr Tom Hardy, Letchworth Garden City Town Centre Manager, thanked the Chairman for the opportunity to address the Committee and gave a verbal presentation regarding the issues and activities in the Town Centre as follows:

Town Centre/BID Manager

Mr Hardy had been in post as Town Centre and BID Manager for 18 months and had taken the BID through the 2016/17 year.

They were currently working through the 2017/18 action plan.

At the end of this year work would start on the re-balloting process, which would involve consulting extensively with the businesses within the Business Improvement District in order to devise the 2020/24 Business Plan.

Annual Report

The Annual Report summarised what the BID had been doing over the last 12 months as they worked through the current Business Plan.

Copies had been distributed to those Members present at the meeting.

2016 Events and Activities

Four major events had been held in the Town during 2016 being:

Food and Drink Festival
Town Centre Takeover
Letchworth Beer and World Food Festival
Christmas Light Switch On.

A new general market was introduced, which had evolved onto a food and lifestyle market.

A car boot sale was held weekly and the Farmers Market was now branded as a BID initiative.

The BID supported the Letchworth Festival by providing a stage and taking part in planning meetings.

They provided regular entertainment within the Town Centre such as buskers and street entertainers.

The BID jointly developed the first running event in the Town Centre called Running in the Garden.

Benefits for Business

The BID aimed to ensure that the events had a positive effect on businesses and to support this have produced maps and trails to encourage people to move around the Town and visit shops to get stamps. They had developed different trails to suit different customers including an Easter Trail, Vintage Shop Trail and for the future an Arts Trail.

Parking

The BID had worked with NHDC and other organisations to lobby for improved signage within the Town and car parks and this was implemented in October 2016.

They were in the process of lobbying the Council regarding improved car park payment mechanisms.

The Bid funded the start up of and continued to part fund Disabled Go, a web site aimed to help disabled people access the Town Centre.

Marketing and Communications

The BID had developed new quarterly marketing campaigns such as the Discover Letchworth column in the midweek Mercury and the Our Tom Hardy page in the Comet.

Businesses were kept up to date with a newsletter and the Letchworth in Business Meetings.

Last year the BID ran quarterly radio and newspaper campaigns and worked on expanding the social media input which was a really good and cost effective way to advertise what was great about the Town.

The Town Centre Website was launched last year to highlight the best of the Town and it was hoped to improve this to make it more user friendly for the public.

Work was being carried out on a new website called Letchworth in Business, which would focus on vacant units, stall holders and rooms for hire.

New Openings

There had been a lot of new shops in the Town Centre and many of the vacant units had been taken by businesses, but were not yet open

Developing the Offer

The BID carried out a business mentoring programme focussed on the independent retailers, which considered their visual merchandising and how to use social media and included one to one sessions with marketing professionals to help them get the best of their on-line exposure and look at their window and the customer experience.

The feedback from these sessions was very good and as a result the BID was looking at sessions tailored toward businesses that have visitors to offices as well as business development sessions for traders.

Permanent footfall counters were in place and were providing live data which enabled the BID to monitor how successful an event had been.

One of the challenges was to determine how the events help the businesses and work was being undertaken to develop robust ways of encouraging footfall around the shops. One method tried was to provide a discount flyer at the food and drink festival and the Letchworth Festival, which aimed to encourage businesses to offer a discount for a month to encourage shoppers to return.

The BID was investigating pop-up shops and ideas such as small business sharing premises and the feasibility of delivering this was part of that investigation.

Loving Letchworth Awards were introduced last year to acknowledge the achievements of the Town Centre businesses that continually strived to be the best in Town.

1,189 nominations had been received and an awards ceremony was held where certificates were awarded and the feedback received was given to the businesses which enabled them to improve and use any testimonials on their website.

A Town Centre guide had been produced, that complimented the existing Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation guide.

2017/18 Action Plan

The 2017/18 Action Plan contains much of the elements of the previous Plan, but was now more focussed on developing the offer, finding ways to be more clever about marketing and promotions, better use of social media and devising ways to promote the very best of the Town

From October 2017 the BID would start on the re-ballot process, fourteen months before the due date. This would give time to consult with businesses, consider whether the BID area was correct and consider the amount of the levy.

Funding

The BID had acknowledged the decision by NHDC to stop grant funding of BIDS and Town Centres and had reduced budgets for events so that they could be taken forward. Despite this a large amount of money spent on events was for services provided by the Council such as bins and street trading consents that reduced the ability to provide non profit making events in the Town Centre.

Mr Hardy asked whether the Committee would support a request for an offer in kind by providing these services either for free or at a much reduced cost.

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Mr Hardy concluded by advising that the BID Company was working much better than it had been and that there were now some tangible difference to be seen particularly around business attitudes and public perception of Letchworth.

Members commented that the Council was part of the BID area and therefore contributed by way of paying the levy.

The Communities Officer advised that this Committee did not have the authority to make that sort of decision and that it was unlikely that the Council would agree to give services in kind to one organisation, as this would set a precedent.

Members asked whether trade had increased during the period of the BID and whether the night time economy had improves

Mr Hardy advised that they had undertaken a survey of businesses for which the results had not yet been received, but anecdotally business appeared to be on the increase in Letchworth although it had to be acknowledged that retail in many town centres was struggling and as a consequence there was a rise in service and leisure industries.

The BID was reacting to these changes were promoting the retail already in the Town, but recognising the direction that the Town was going.

In respect of the night time economy, this aspect was improving and was helped by new businesses such as the Garden City Brewery, the Grapevine, Wildwood and Crafty's Beer Shop.

Members asked how the new market was going and whether this affected footfall in the Town

Mr Hardy advised that it was too early to judge the success of the markets as new markets often took time to establish and those in Letchworth had been operating for just 6 weeks. Currently there were markets held on Thursdays and Saturdays with a car boot sale on Sundays and these were constantly marketed, with a review being undertaken every quarter.

Members noted that the Town Centre seemed busier, particularly in the evenings, when parking in the centre was almost impossible. This demonstrated a great change in the way the Town Centre was being used and that more people were coming in the evenings for entertainment purposes.

Councillor Levett advised that Mr Hardy had developed a pack of information that would be given to prospective new businesses to the Town.

The Chairman thanked Mr Hardy for his presentation.

14 WARD MATTERS AND OUTSIDE ORGANISATIONS - MEMBERS' REPORTS

Howard Garden Social and Day Care Centre

Councillor Kercher advised that she had always supported the Howard Garden Social and Day Care Centre and was a trustee, but she would be resigning this position in May 2018 and the Centre was looking for a replacement Trustee. She asked that Councillors support the search for the right person to take on this role.

The meeting closed at 8.11 am

Chairman