

Letchworth  
Garden City  
Heritage Foundation

# A view of life in **Letchworth today**



# A Tale of a **Garden City**



**Telling stories about ourselves can help us to make sense of our lives. Towns and cities are no different. Earlier this year we felt it was a good moment in our history to take stock of how things are now. Later this year we will publish and present our new strategy based on our findings. Before completing our strategy, we wanted to look at ourselves and our Garden City afresh.**

The tale of our Garden City is one that starts at the very beginning. A town built from scratch, designed to make people's lives better and happier. A town for everyone, designed for industry and healthy living. For many years we have talked about Letchworth being a unique place to live, blessed with local employment and good, affordable housing.

But there is another tale to be told about Letchworth and in the

following pages a story will unfold based on our facts and figures and statistics. It is one that is real and current. We haven't set out to shock, far from it, but there might be a few surprises. Or perhaps you won't be surprised at all.

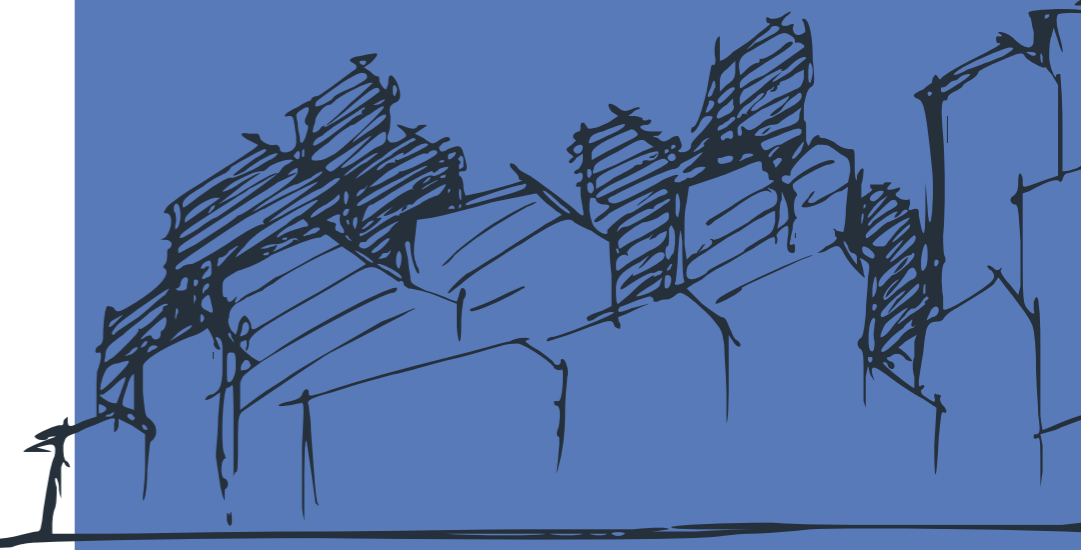
Some of the issues highlighted are familiar and easy to dismiss, for example loneliness and isolation. We know that there's a loneliness epidemic nationwide, despite our propensity to engage with social media.

But we have a problem with that approach. Our thinking is that things can and should be different for us. Why? Because Letchworth is different. It is completely unique. Its very reason for being is to make life better for people. After all, it is a town designed for industry and healthy living. We want to find a way to use our assets to work towards addressing and

solving some of the issues that are being told in this updated story about Letchworth.

The creation of Letchworth is underpinned by a belief in social justice. As a town, and as a Garden City, we were founded on values of compassion. In order to be true to our principles we want to continue to nurture this compassion and social justice. The Heritage Foundation is here to look after not just the physical aspects of our town, but the social, emotional and cultural well-being of our whole community.

Thank you for reading this report. If certain parts of the story resonate, then please get in touch. We would welcome your thoughts and reactions.



# A welcoming town

**There is no doubt that Letchworth is an attractive place to live. The town offers good employment and is well connected – to the rest of Hertfordshire and to London and Cambridge.**

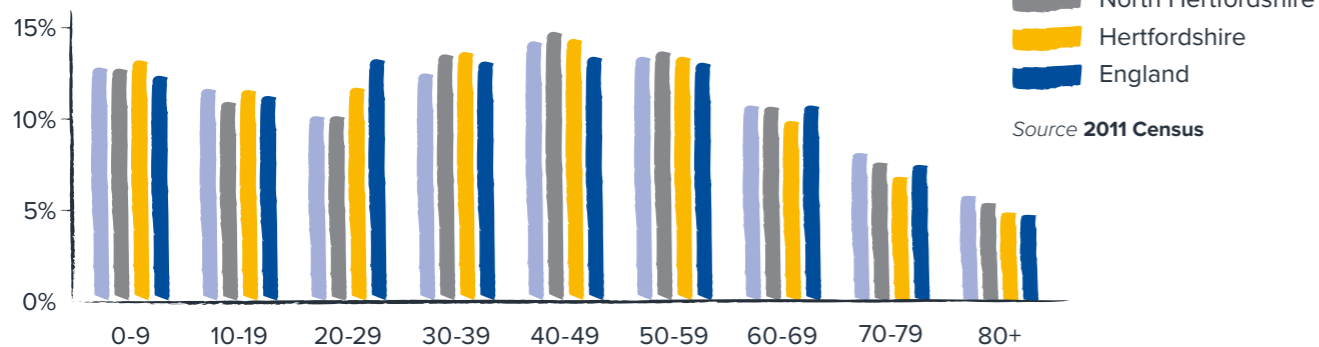
If you look at the figures, Letchworth's population rose from 32,700 in 2011 to 34,300 by mid-2016.<sup>1</sup> Two things stand out. During the same period – 2011 to

2016 – the proportion of 20-24 year olds grew nationally, yet in Letchworth the number of young people has remained stagnant. The reason? We think it could be because at this age young people tend to want to leave their home towns to go to university or to work elsewhere. It could also be that there isn't the housing stock here that suits their needs. Indeed the wider

population growth is modest, some could argue it is stagnant. There's an interesting argument that aligns population growth with the ability for a town or city to flourish – what benefits could a thriving population bring to our town?

<sup>1</sup> Source 2011 Census and ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates (2016)

Population Estimates (2016)



# All welcome

**Letchworth welcomes people.**

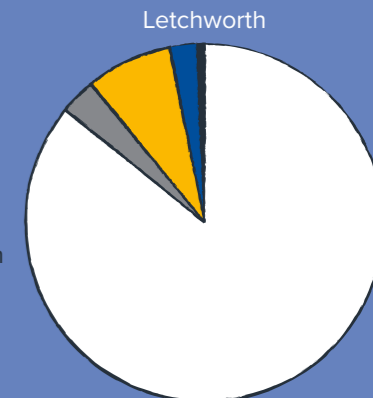
Our town embraces residents of all faiths and none. We have a thriving Sikh community, with 4% of those in the town following the religion, and this is higher than the national average of 1%. We also have a high number of residents who have no religion, and at 31%, this is higher than across Hertfordshire and England. At the time of the census, 85% of people living in Letchworth were from white ethnic backgrounds, in line with the national average.



## Ethnic Diversity

- White
- Mixed/Multiple Ethnic Groups
- Asian/Asian British
- Black/African/Caribbean/Black British
- Other Ethnic Group

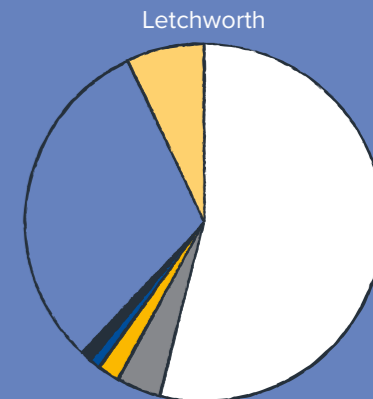
Source 2011 Census



## Religious Diversity

- Christian
- Sikh
- Hindu
- Muslim
- Buddhist
- No religion
- Religion not stated

Source 2011 Census



# A home of **your own**

**Most people living in Letchworth own their homes. After that, the next largest group of residents live in social housing and the smallest group in private rented accommodation.**

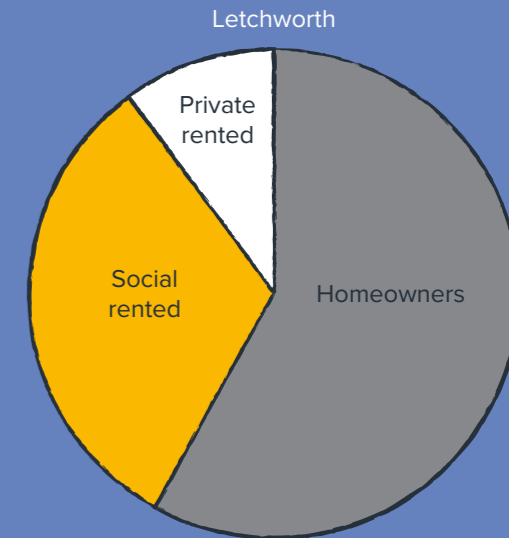
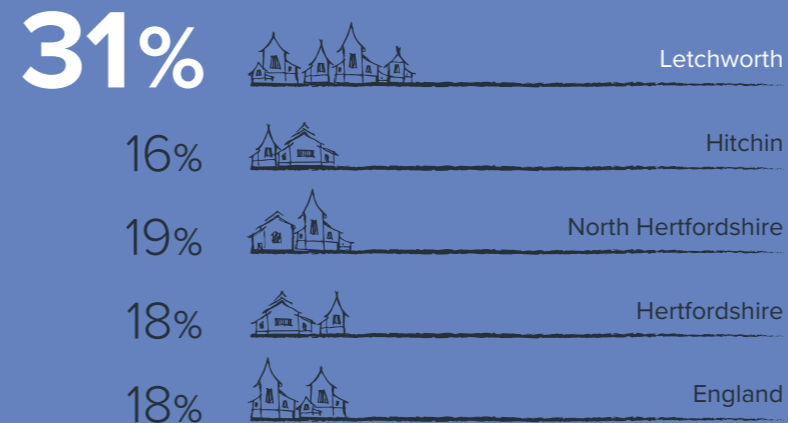
The numbers of people who live in social housing are relatively high: 31 per cent, particularly if you compare them with the national figures: 18 per cent. This of course is a reflection of our history: social housing was originally part of the fabric of Letchworth. But we're wondering if there's a gap here too; an opportunity for those who currently live in social housing to move on to a property of their own,

perhaps using a shared ownership or community-owned model.

What sets us apart from other places is that we have fewer residents living in private rented accommodation compared to other local areas and England as a whole. This could mean that those younger adults who are not eligible for social housing don't have much to choose from in Letchworth. These young people might be those who are newly qualified which means that they might be about to leave Letchworth to work in London or other bigger towns.



## Letchworth has a high level of social housing at



The private rental market is relatively small:

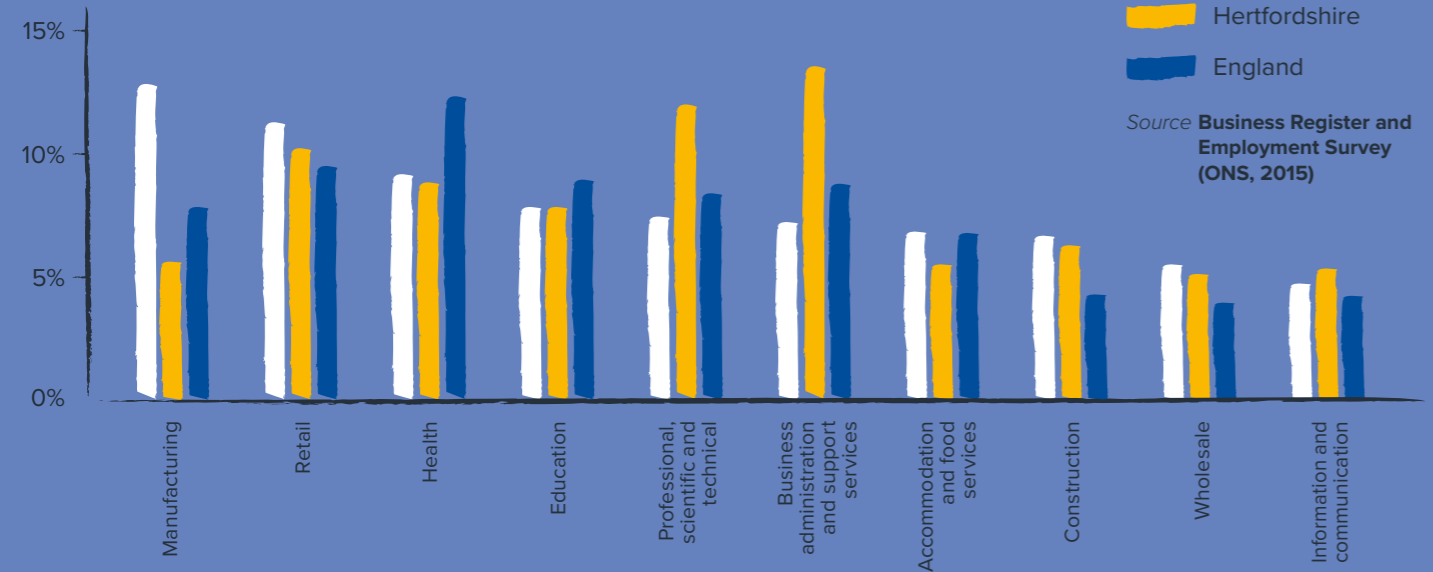


Source 2011 Census

In North Hertfordshire the largest job sector is **manufacturing** followed by **retail and health**

The number of manufacturing jobs is more than twice that in the rest of Hertfordshire and is also higher than the national average.

Top 10 Employee Jobs by Industry (2015)



## Economy

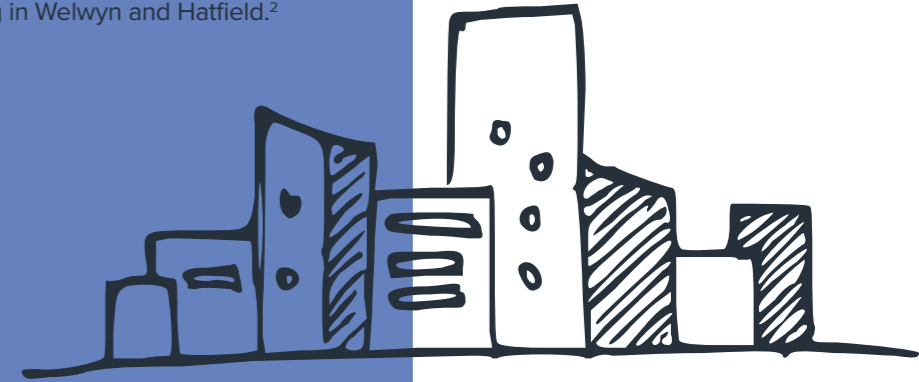
**Our commitment to sustainability and contemporary lifestyles continues to thrive.**

You don't need to go all the way to Shoreditch to find a vegan restaurant. We are delighted that Vutie Beets has opened, offering more choice for both vegans and flexitarians. And at a time when so many towns and cities are trying to find alternatives to single-use plastic, we are pleased to welcome our first zero waste shop. Overall, we have a high number of independent businesses – a cause for celebration – and we're extremely committed to supporting them and the chain shops and restaurants that help make a

vibrant town centre. Of course, a stable town centre offers more employment for residents. A prime example of this is the Premier Inn, which opened on Station Road last year. It employs 23 full time staff, all Letchworth residents and all of whom were appointed through Letchworth's Job Centre.

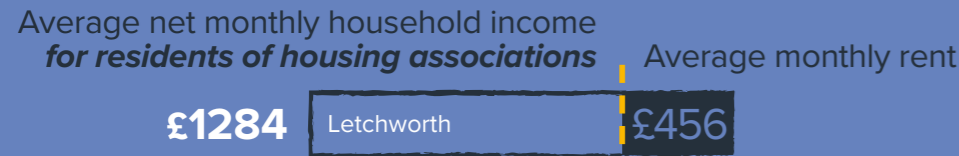
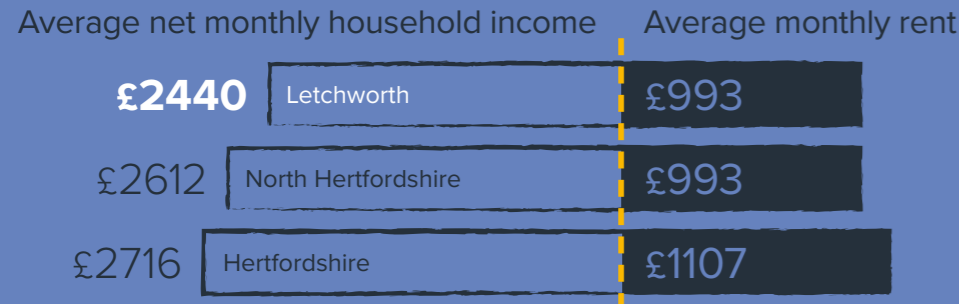
When it comes to commuting, a large majority of residents work locally, with the majority – 42% – travelling within North Herts for work; 11% heading to Stevenage; 10% working in London and Westminster; and 5% of people working in Welwyn and Hatfield.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup> Source 2011 Census



# Letchworth household net incomes are lower

than both the regional and national averages after housing costs (*per week*)



Sources: ONS Small Area Income Estimates (2013/14)  
Valuation Office Agency (2017)  
ONS Social housing lettings in England (2016)

## 1 in 5

Letchworth households are trapped in poverty

Many residents find it hard to make ends meet, with some feeling trapped outside a life that others take for granted. We're not talking flash cars and expensive holidays; but basics like having enough food on the table and being able to buy a suitable winter coat for their child.

This is around

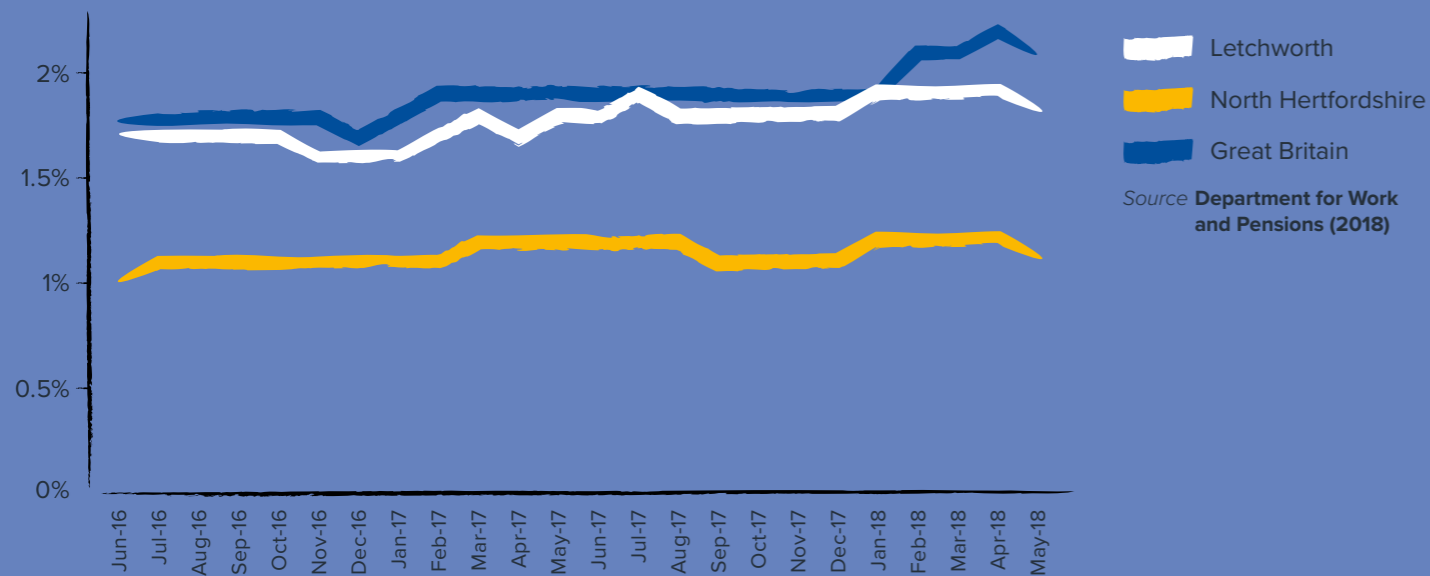


Source: ONS Households Below Average Income (2014)

# The number of people claiming out of work benefits in Letchworth is higher

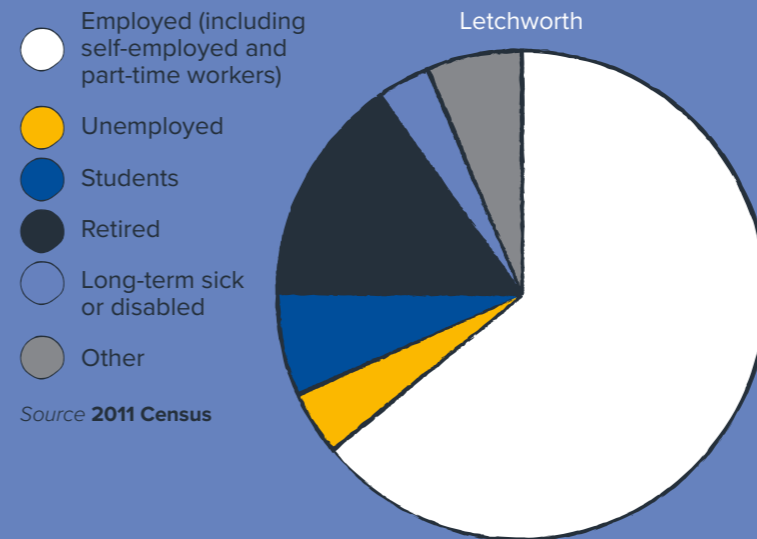
than North Hertfordshire, but slightly lower than the national average

Out of Work Benefits Claimant Count (% Population)

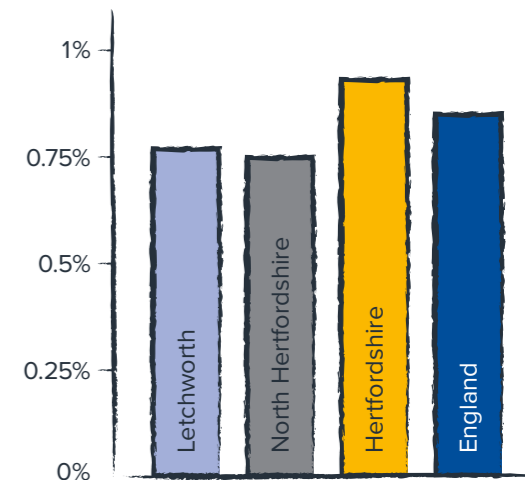


Letchworth has high numbers of economically inactive people, with high levels of retirees and low numbers of students

Economic Activity (Working Age Adults)



Jobs density<sup>3</sup>



The number of jobs available per resident in Letchworth is low when compared with the county and national averages. Hertfordshire overall has a high concentration of jobs but North Hertfordshire is below the national average.

<sup>3</sup> Source: ONS (2018)  
Jobs density is the numbers of jobs per resident aged 16-64. For example, a job density of 1.0 would mean that there is one job for every resident of working age.

# Increasing **skills**

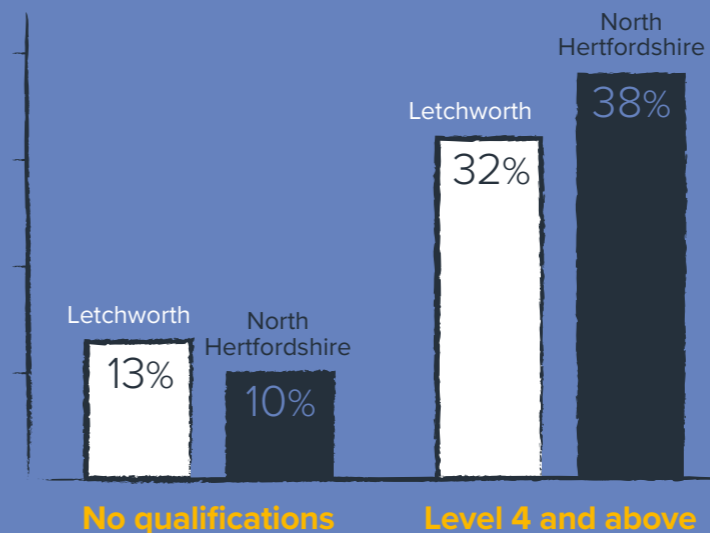
**A large number of our town's working-age residents have no or low skills and qualifications.**

In the previous pages we saw that the majority of Letchworth residents work in North Hertfordshire (42%). Given that the main industry in this region is manufacturing and production followed by retail, high qualifications are not always necessary for this. However, there are many other jobs in the town – and an obvious example is in technology – where high levels of skills are not only desirable, but essential. We know that the key to empowering our population is to increase people's skills to a point where they can choose which jobs and opportunities to aim for. This need to increase skills will also help to increase resilience and enable people to share in economic growth.

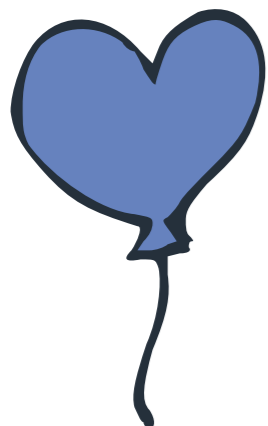


At the time of the 2011 census

**13%** of Letchworth working age residents had no qualifications







## Growing up in **Letchworth**

**We have a challenge. Letchworth has the second highest rate of child poverty in the county and this isn't acceptable.**

There are so many disadvantages for children growing up in low-income families, often small or overlooked things that can have a massive social and long term negative impact. For example, children from low-income families often forgo events that most of us would take for granted. They miss school trips; they can't invite friends round for tea; and they don't enjoy the luxury of a basic one-week holiday away from home.



These are things that can start to erode confidence at a young age. These seemingly innocent social deprivations can lead to young people sensing that life will be limited for them, with opportunities closed off early on, rather than opening up into a positive and optimistic future. We aim to explore what we can do to alleviate this in order to offer every child in Letchworth better prospects. We already work closely with various partners and groups across the town. Our aim is to work even more closely to make services cohesive and more powerful in order to transform the day-to-day experiences and expectations of our children.

# 1 in 4

## children in Letchworth are locked in poverty



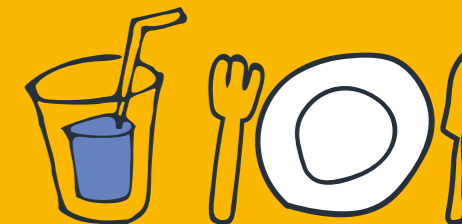
This represents **over 1800** children in Letchworth living in poverty. The levels of child poverty in Letchworth are high, with fewer than 1 in 5 children in poverty in Hertfordshire.

*Source End Child Poverty (2017)*

Number of secondary school pupils in Letchworth eligible for free school meals at any time in the last six years is

# 5.5 percentage points higher

than the national average for state funded schools



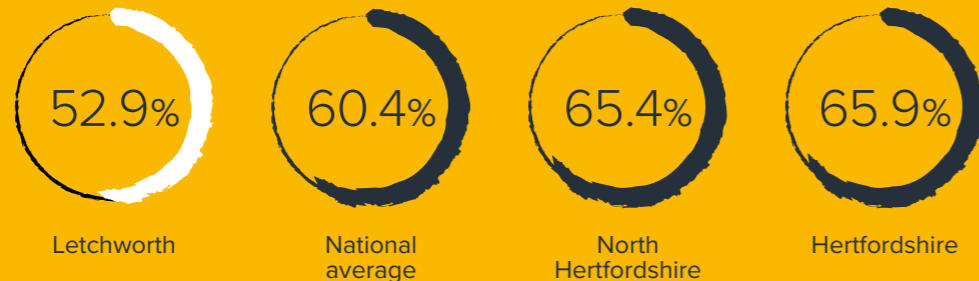
*Source Department of Education (2016/17)*

# Only 52.9%

of Letchworth children are developing well at age 5

Development at this age affects children's life chances. Getting a good start in life helps children to gain the tools they need to thrive for the rest of their lives.

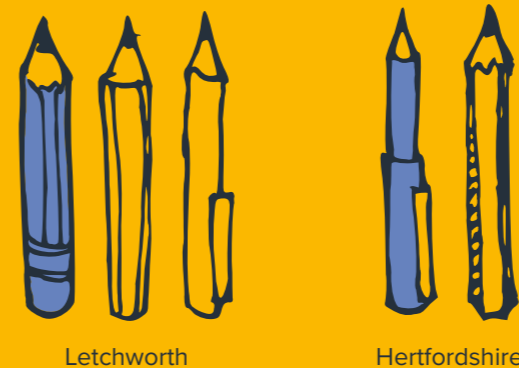
Source **Early Years Foundation Stage Profile (2013/14)**



# Only 1 in 3

Letchworth secondary school pupils achieved grade 5 or above in their English and Maths GCSEs

Source **Department of Education (2017)**



**Our schools are not performing as well as the national average.**

At primary school level in Letchworth 57% of pupils reach the expected standard, compared with 61% nationwide. We are extremely concerned about this. A programme to improve skills to open up opportunities in later life needs to start from an early age. Low levels of development at this age can affect children adversely for the rest of their lives.

There is also a challenge for our young people at secondary school level. Performance here is also below the national average. We have high rates of school absence and persistent absence in particular: 18% of secondary school children are persistently absent, compared to 14% across England.

# Growing old in **Letchworth**

**Life is for living in the way that makes us feel most alive, regardless of our age.**

Just as we believe that every single child in our town should be able to have a fulfilling and socially active

childhood, older residents also deserve to make the most of their lives. As a Foundation, we feel strongly that we want life as an older adult in Letchworth to be something that is celebrated.



# Half

of Letchworth neighbourhoods have older adults who are at high or very high risk of loneliness

*Source* Age UK (2016)

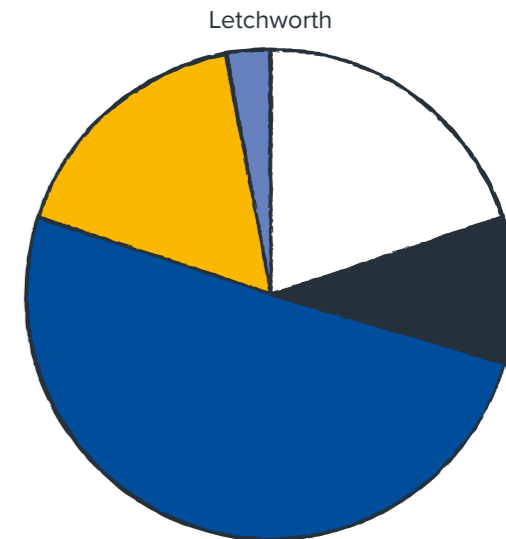
# At 65

the life expectancy of women in North Hertfordshire is **21.1 years**



North Hertfordshire male life expectancy at 65 is **19.3 years**, which is significantly better than the national average of **18.1 years**

*Source* Public Health England (ONS 2014-16)



Population by age group

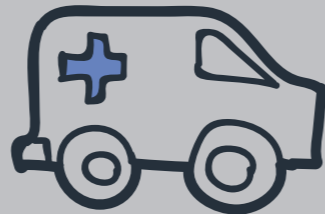
- Aged under 16
- Aged 16-24
- Aged 25-64
- Aged 65-84
- Aged 85 and over

*Source* ONS Mid-Year Population Estimates (2016)

Emergency hospital admissions due to falls in people 65+ in North Hertfordshire are **significantly worse** than the Hertfordshire and national average

*(and has been worse than county for the last 3 years)*

Source **Public Health England (ONS 2015/16)**



Levels of fuel poverty in North Hertfordshire are better than the national average, but **significantly worse** than Hertfordshire

Source **Department of Energy and Climate Change (2014)**

**As we said in our introduction, it's sometimes easy to tell ourselves a story about how things are and that story isn't always accurate.**

There is a story about living as an older adult in Letchworth that is a good example of this. It's easy to believe that growing old in Letchworth means that life becomes even busier. We are lucky to have so many clubs and groups in our town that are thriving and full of older residents, some of whom run the activities. But this isn't the whole story. Sadly, not all of our older adults are living this life of engagement and social participation. The reality is that there are many older people in Letchworth who have become extremely isolated, and not from choice. There are several reasons: health; circumstance; or lack of resources. Again, as with the children who are not able to go on

trips or invite other children to their homes, we feel that for our older residents who want to have more contact with others, we want to support them to make this possible.

We want quality of life to be associated with every stage of life for people living in Letchworth.



**Letchworth  
Garden City**  
Heritage Foundation

Foundation House  
Ickniel Way  
Letchworth Garden City  
SG6 1GD

**01462 476007**

**[www.letchworth.com](http://www.letchworth.com)**

*With thanks to* **Public Health Hertfordshire**

