

## LGCHF Annual Town Meeting 26<sup>th</sup> June 2024 held at the Broadway Hotel, Broadway, LGC, SG6 3ZX

Chris Pattison – Vice-Chair of Board	CP
Becky Hayes	BH
Charles Chong	CC
David Adam	DAd
Faiza Spittles	FS
Ian Mantle	IM
Jane Perry	JP
Jenny Heaton	JHe
Joanna Dew	JD
John Hillson	JHi
Judith Nash	JN
Kevin Jones	KJ
Kieran Khangura	KK
Lynne Ceeney	LC
Nigel Squibb	NS
Peter Lennie	PL
Roger McIntyre-Brown	RMB
Simon Franklin	SF
Tabitha Wilson	TaW
Tim Wilson	TW
Terry Hone	TH
William Armitage	WA
Graham Fisher – CEO	GF
Mark Coles Executive Director – Property	MC
Matthew Peak Executive Director – Finance	MP
Stuart Sapsford Executive Director – Communities, Culture and Heritage	SS
Emma Hone – Planning & Development Programme Manager	EH
Steven Gordon-Wilson – Head of Communications and Marketing	SGW
Kerri Wishaw – Communications and Marketing Business Partner	KW
Ed Paxton – Volunteering Manager	EP
Claire Pudney – Heritage Advisory Service Manager	CPu
Fiona Grant – Research and Evaluation Manager	FG
Zoe MacLennan – Design Development Officer	ZM

CP welcomed the attendees to the meeting and advised that he was standing in for GH who sends his apologies. CP introduced the Executive Directors and wider staff team.

CP explained that the format of the Town Meeting would be slightly different this year with workshops running on separate tables and that this would provide an opportunity for the public to help shape Foundation policy and delivery over the next 4 years and a chance to ask Senior Officers in attendance questions.

CP noted that there are 3 key priorities for the meeting this year, and that is to explore Brand Letchworth, Sustainable Letchworth and A Great Place to Grow Up. Feedback from the meeting would be available online in the coming weeks.

CP then introduced GF who provided an overview presentation of the work carried out by the Foundation through 2023 including details of grant funding provided. GF was able to run through the financial operating model used and provided figures for return of investments and income generation from both Standalone Farm and Broadway Cinema. [A copy of the presentation can be found here.](#)

*Questions were requested prior to the meeting. Once these had been asked and answered, further questions were taken from the floor.*

Q1 Ian Allott

Has the heritage ever considered a nearly carless town centre. Making the town centre virtually free of cars will improve the air quality, it will reduce the dirt that clings to the buildings. It fits with sustainability discussions that are happening, it also fits the 'A great place to grow up' theme. The town centre will be safer, cleaner and more family oriented. Have a look at **Pontevedra** a town that went virtually car free a number of years ago and see the benefits that the town has experienced  
See <https://citychangers.org/pontevedra-the-little-utopian-city-that-drove-out-cars/> for a good overview.

GF

We do not have the power to do anything about it as we do not cover roads, this falls under the responsibility of NHC and HCC. There is an important opportunity as a Spatial Plan being worked on which may give an opportunity for further pedestrianisation, however, we can have an input but won't be able to control or deliver this. Many retailers in town lack in support of this so there would need to be a balance.

Q2 Daria Bonanno

How can we strike a good balance between housing expansion and available services including traffic and congestion?

GF

Public consultation carried out as part of the LG1 development site shows that transport and services, particularly health services, are a key area of concern. As part of the master planning process, which has been developed with input by NHC and HCC, broader issues have been raised which can be reviewed as part of a constantly evolving process. There is a concern that traffic around the Grange estate will increase, which we recognise, but this is one of the costs of the development of new housing. It is hoped that footfall within the town centre will increase with the new residents visiting their local shops.

Q3 Helen Collins

We've got some fantastic buildings in this town that I can see going to rack and ruin. On Broadway, the Grammar School is laying half empty, I believe and Plinston Hall that we used to have. Can we bring these alive again and use as homeless shelters or youth centres to reignite some interest to bringing people into the town.

MC

The grammar school is being fitted out and will be used by an association called Emil Dale Arts School who are moving to Letchworth from Hitchin. This will see 600 students coming into the town and we hope that the building will be in use for the longer term.  
  
Plinston Hall is now being marketed for sale and a range of uses for the building are being reviewed. It is hoped that a re-use of the building can be announced by the end of this year.

	<p>The Church on Broadway is not owned by the Heritage Foundation but by St Albans Diocese. We have been working together since the church closed. We believe it is under offer to another faith group. We will continue to try to preserve the building as it is.</p>
<p>Q4 Glyn Holt Ebenezer Howard designed Letchworth as a new cutting-edge town and surely, he would have wanted it to remain so. We now find ourselves in a cost of living and climate crisis yet LGCHF policies have not adapted. I'm focused on the design principle that prevents people like me having solar panels on the front roof elevation of properties in heritage areas. Solar panels that would save my family money and provide green energy for us and wider Letchworth. Surely your design standards could be updated to allow these temporary additions subject to them being of an acceptable design, making Letchworth a greener town leading the way in installing solar in heritage areas.</p>	<p>GF the Heritage Foundation have pledged to review our Heritage Design guidance in terms of looking at sustainability and heritage and hope that thoughts and feedback from this evening tell us what change is acceptable. Liaison with North Herts Council will be necessary for any changes, especially in Conservation Areas and any planning implications need to be thought about. Some people within the town feel that the addition of PV panels on the front of a historically significant building is unacceptable. We need to listen to both sides of the debate and decide how we can suitably move forward.</p>
<p>Q5 Robin Ghisi When walking into Letchworth, there appears to be more and more hairdressers and nail bars. There also seem to be a lot of cafes. Because we seem to have such a small range of shops, does this encourage future investors to take on retail outlets as there is no diversification of other types of shops which would encourage more people into the town to shop.</p>	<p>MC A supply and demand driven model is used and are not alone in our town in seeing such demand. Hitchin has over 80 places to purchase coffee. Retail properties are on the market, but it is difficult to find retailers and when they do come along they can find it hard to sustain their business due to online shopping. Not every shop and bank is owned by the Heritage Foundation and other landlords are also struggling to find tenants for empty properties. This problem is not Letchworth specific; behaviours of people have changed and has an impact on the shops that we do have.</p> <p>We do try to limit the amount of cafes and hairdressers, we do not allow vape shops but sometimes, we need to bring in rents to allow charitable activity.</p>
<p>Q6 Phillipa Parker Are there plans to provide public lavatories in the town centre? Currently, people are directed to those in Morrisons including by the library staff who act as a de facto tourist information centre</p>	<p>GF We agree that this is a major consideration for the town, however, this is not something that the Heritage Foundation has direct responsibility for, and we would need to work in partnership with North Hertfordshire Council.</p> <p>To use an empty shop would take away an income generating building and would have a cost to fit it out. Management can be complex, the Council has faced</p>

	<p>issues with repeated vandalism at Howard Park. The BID have been working to encourage café and pub owners to make public toilets available to the public without being a customer. This works well elsewhere as it is a model that is more manageable and is much less susceptible to vandalism and anti-social behaviour.</p> <p>We can have a conversation with the Council, there are toilets available at Garden Square Shopping Centre which is not managed by us.</p> <p>CP We have to be mindful that significant revenue costs would be incurred which would take away from funding away from charitable things.</p> <p>LC advised that there is a campaign for public infrastructure who are working with local authorities across the UK trying to find solutions to this. There is no requirement in law for public toilets to be provided by Councils. More information can be found at <a href="https://cfpi.org.uk">https://cfpi.org.uk</a></p>
<p>Q7 Sue Lyons Letchworth has a very strong arts and crafts heritage which is part of the whole ethos under which it came into being. When I went to the Fenners Open Studios last week, there were a lot of very sad artists telling me that they were being made homeless and they weren't sure where they were going to go. It seems a tragic loss and I know that this is Digswell Arts Trust and not you but to have the building repurposed and not know where the artists are going, the vibrancy has hugely improved over the time I've lived here and it seems sad</p>	<p>GF I share your frustration and disappointment with Digswell Arts Trust. We gave them the building for free, with no rent payable, and we, as a charitable landlord, expected community and charitable impact in return for a free building. It has failed over the years to be able to do that and so I'm afraid that we got to a point where we said that it wasn't working and to be fair to Digswell, they said we can't do it as we haven't got the capacity to deliver community impact. It's deeply disappointing and it's very frustrating for us because we have worked very hard over many years to get them to a point of working with schools, The Settlement or other organisations. We got to a point where I can't say to my Board of Trustees that there was any community impact for giving away that building which is just not acceptable. It is a legal requirement of our Trustees in terms of their duties. Stuart is working on a way forward for some of the artists in the building.</p> <p>SS We have met with the artists and tried to find options for them and have looked at properties where we may be able to accommodate them and put support in place for them to be able to create their own collective, as this would be expensive on their own</p>

	<p>but together it could be possible. There have been some successes as part of this and working alongside Garden Square Shopping Centre, we have located some places for them to go. Unfortunately, some have chosen to move away from the area which is a real shame for Letchworth.</p> <p>The Culture strategy is coming towards the end of its second year and we are trying to enhance skills and opportunities to artists. We will continue to work to find accommodation for these artists which is affordable to allow them to trade and continue using their skills and practice.</p>
<p>Q8 Chris Jones The Advisory Management Committee deals with householder decisions made by officers. I believe the governance requires the Foundation to identify a representative body to nominate 2 local people to go onto the Advisory Management Committee. I don't believe we've ever actually canvassed to find a representative body, nor have we ever seen who represents us and we do not know who the people on the Committee are. It would be good to have representation who we can identify.</p>	<p>CPu The Advisory Management Committee is a requirement under the Scheme of Management, and it is there as a review body. It is not just for what we do but it is used by applicants who haven't been successful for a review of their case. We are currently in the process of looking at reviewing it. It is set up in a way that 2 people are appointed by the Heritage Foundation and another 2 who come through the community. The problem we have is that we do not have a community body that we can access so we are looking at getting new members through social media and by going to schools to ask them to add the information to their newsletters. Any suggestions for this would be welcome and we are looking to complete this by the end of 2025.</p>
<p>Q9 Graham Taylor I think I'm not alone in never completely understanding what it is that the Foundation can do, North Hertfordshire Council can do and Hertfordshire County Council. It's probably my fault as each one is trying to tell me. The information on the table looks very good and thank you very much for that. Could someone enlighten us all as to how it all fits together as it would be a good thing. Why are there no bike lanes in the world's first garden city. I know the Heritage Foundation can't provide bike lanes and that this is probably the County Council that does that. There are lots of people using pathways, including electric scooters.</p>	<p>GF I completely agree about the confusion with North Herts Council, Herts County Council and ourselves. I'd be interested to hear what would help people to understand. The District Council have recently developed a little guide about what they do and what the County Council do. Maybe this is a good model for us and we may be able to do something similar. We are fortunate enough to have the leader of the Council in the room, so we can perhaps encourage him to think about how we could work on that together.  In terms of bike lanes I agree, I do feel that there need to be more, there has been work around a cycle strategy and there is a sustainable travel plan for Letchworth so there is policy commitment to make cycle lanes happen it's just the money required to effect the change that is a problem.</p>

	<p>There have been various bidding opportunities for government money and there have been some cycle infrastructure improvements in small amounts. I'm hoping as we go through LG1 and through Section 106, we've got plans and policies in place but cash will help to bring about the actual change. I am a cyclist and I'm personally interested in this, and I know it would make a difference to the town.</p>
<p>Q10 The corporate presentation is great, its really nice to see all the money that's been used for good causes, the arts and everything. Just like the political parties in the general election, there has not been one mention of pensioners and older people in Letchworth. We don't have an additional funding stream. I notice that we have lost our bus route along Wilbury Road. It's nice to see the Men in Sheds initiative has been installed at Standalone Farm and I thought that it may be a nice place to go, addressing the commitment to mental health. When I enquired, not only do you have to pay a subscription, but you also have to pay for a CLC check and I was told, that's because, there will be vulnerable people and children on site which is fine, but I can buy a ticket to enter Standalone Farm and do not require security clearance. I don't want to be doing that under my own expense when I am retired so are you prepared to revisit this?</p>	<p>SS I understand the point but there is a commitment in place as part of the arrangement. We are responsible for our customers through staff that we have to supervise activities in certain areas. There are unsupervised areas which Men in Sheds and other partners have access to and it feels like there is a greater risk by not affording a DBS as they are now called.</p> <p>We regularly review this as well as other health and safety requirements and it's a requirement we have with our partners to ensure an extra level of safety.</p>
<p>Q11 Mike Wright This is a garden city, I am proud to have lived here for 80 years. Nowadays, it doesn't look like a garden city. I'm aware Daniel Allen is here from North Herts Council; I think you need to get the grass cutting crews out and maintain the verges. I may be wrong but the stretch from the A1 down to the long about I think is the responsibility of the Heritage Foundation or used to be.</p>	<p>GF My understanding is that we paid for the landscaping of it many years ago. Maintenance is a County Council responsibility under a contract to the District Council.</p> <p>CP We would encourage people to talk to their local Councillors regarding hedgerows and verges.</p>
<p>Q12 Julia Sonander One of the things you said you wanted to do is to do more on the relief of poverty and sickness. I think one of the things you could do with that is to actually sort the Design Principles out to address high fuel prices and climate change and mould and things in our houses so I hope in the next session we will finally make some promising progress on improving solar panels and external insulation. There has been huge progress in the offer that is out there and the Design Principles have stayed stagnant and we find that if you make an application it just sits and gets kicked back with questions. Can we take advantage of changes in technology and the offer and move the design</p>	<p>CP Our officers spend a lot of time thinking about these challenging technologies which might be wonderful in terms of sustainability performance but are relatively new and quite transformational in terms of their appearance. This is what tonight is all about so and we look forward to hearing your contribution, this is an opportunity to try and shape the Design Principles moving forward in the workshop session.</p>

standards to be fit for a town that Ebenezer Howard would be proud of.	
<p>Q13 Jas Phugura</p> <p>I have been coming to these meeting for 10 years now, and I get the same old excuses, we don't get anywhere. Can the Heritage pick one project that it will stand behind and deliver in a year's time so that we have something you commit to and get done.</p>	<p>CP</p> <p>If you rear our annual report you will see what we deliver on an annual basis, it's a multi-million pound dividend to the town every year and that delivers an awful lot.</p> <p>We have spoken about the Cinema and Standalone Farm, these are substantial offerings which require year on year investment and effort. When you take into account all our other charitable activity, it would be lovely to have a large amount of capital expenditure every year to commit to a big development project which you could always point to, but that requires a lot of capital and means we would take investment away from things which perhaps you don't see or take for granted so it's challenging but where we want to get to with the strategic plan is to drive up the performance of our estate, reduce its cost to us and that means we've got an even bigger charitable dividend to spend on the town and as highlighted in the presentation, we can build up pots of money to spend on large capital projects which you would probably take note of.</p>

CP advised that the attendees would break out into three groups under the themes to help shape our 2028 priorities;

The first one is Sustainability and Heritage - how should design guidance and character areas be evolved and what aspects of the scheme need to develop to adapt and address the challenges of climate change and the need for energy efficiency in our stock.

The second is Great Place to Grow Up – the impact of Covid on children and young people has been quite profound and we are still grappling with what the long term implications. Inequality in parts of the town has driven up for many communities. How can we offer best opportunities for our children to grow up here, how can we leverage our natural environments, we're keen to hear how we make Letchworth a Great Place to Grow Up and how you can help us to deliver that change.

The final theme is Brand Letchworth and having a stronger town identity and brand. It's important to economic success as well as encouraging charitable partners to come on board with us and invest in what we are trying to do. We have collaborated with the Council, the BID and local businesses in the town to develop a brand and want to hear from you how we can develop that further and take it forward particularly at a community level and make it resonate at that level.

*The attendees split into workshop groups for an hour.*

CP advised that information from this evening will be collated. CP thanked attendees for giving up their time to come along to the meeting and advised that further workshops may take place. Thanks were given to staff for attending the meeting and working with the residents of the town.

For any further questions, contributions or ideas, residents were urged to make contact with the Heritage Foundation.

The meeting finished at 9.10pm