

Letchworth Residents Group Newsletter May 2026

Next Meeting: Monday 13th July 2026, NLC Room, Mrs Howard Hall, 7:30 to 9pm

Topic: Maximising Outdoor Life from Broadway Gardens to Howard Gardens

The Evolution of the Broadway Gardens Area

Thank you to Luke Alder from the Heritage Foundation Museum Service for taking us through the history of the Broadway Gardens Area at our May meeting. The plans and photographs shared in the presentation, alongside memories from the audience, provided a rich background of knowledge for a discussion on how this area of the town could develop.

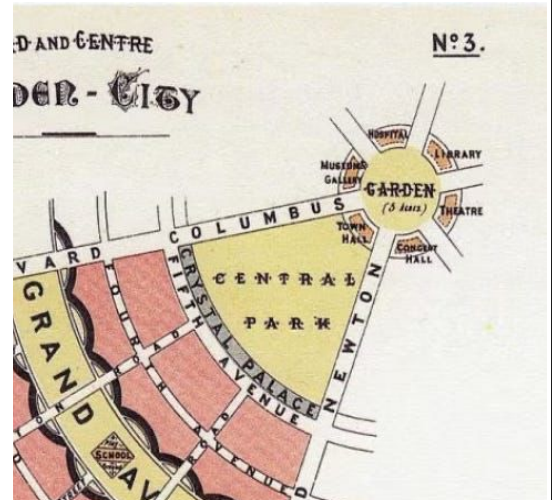
Ebenezer Howards vision for a Town Square was a central garden surrounded by civic buildings, Town Hall, Library, Theatre, Concert Hall, Museum and Gallery and Hospital.

Parker and Unwin drawings show a Town Square with rather imposing civic buildings occupying the southern half of what is now Broadway Gardens and gardens in the remaining space.

Progress on developing the Town Square was slow and early photos show farming activity on the site. The civic buildings, when they started to be built, were located around the 'Gardens' aligning with Ebenezer Howards illustration. Fortescue Hall, which served as a church, was the first building on the site (1908), this was followed by the Museum (1914), Grammar School (1931), Town Hall (1935), and Library (1939). St Michaels Church and the ICL building followed in the 1960s. The gardens developed with a central fountain, rose beds and trees.

The Morrisons corner has seen the most change, with Morrisons and the Goldsmith Centre replacing a 1960s Technical College which had utilised a site previously occupied by a Methodist Church and the police station. The Morrisons building integrates elements of the original town police station.

The name for the area on early plans was the 'Town Square', it was named Kennedy Gardens following the president's assassination. The gardens were regenerated with the support of Lottery Funding in 2003 and renamed as the Broadway Gardens.



Assets of Community Value

Currently Letchworth has one registered Asset of Community Value, the bowls pavilion on Norton Common.

A community interest group or an unincorporated group of at least 21 local members can apply to the council for a building, facility or area of open space to be entered on the register of Assets of Community Value. The Asset must contribute, or have contributed to furthering the social interest or social wellbeing of the local community. If an application is approved the asset will remain registered for 5 years.

If an Asset of Community Value is put up for sale the organisation or group who registered the asset will have 6 months to make an offer for the asset. After 6 months the owner can sell to anyone.

The most recent examples in Hertfordshire of council owned assets being passed to community organisations are the Ward Freman Pool in Buntingford and Water Lane Hall in Bishops Stortford. North Herts Council considered disposing of Baldock Town Hall in 2010 but ultimately entered a lease arrangement with the local community group Baldock Town Hall Limited, to establish an Arts and Heritage centre.

Are there assets in Letchworth that the community feel should be registered as Assets of Community Value?

Expected Soon: Consultation on the Sale of St Michaels Church

We understand that the Church of England has found a buyer for St Michaels Church and its Hall. There is currently a covenant that the land occupied by this church can only be used for a CoE church. As the christian church proposing to purchase the property is not CoE a 28 day community consultation is expected to be hosted in the Heritage Foundation building to ask whether the covenant should be altered to enable the sale.

Contacting Us: If you would like to help run the Letchworth Residents Group, or perhaps you have a topic you would like to run a meeting on, then get in touch by emailing letchworth-residents@lalg.org.uk.

Visioning the Broadway Garden Area: Ideas shared at our meeting

Infrastructure

Barring the hospital, Broadway Gardens had many of the buildings envisaged on Ebenezer Howard Town Square, though the Museum and Concert Hall are now vacant. The Library brings people to the Broadway Gardens and Emil Dale presence in the old Grammar School has livened up this part of the town. It was noted that North Herts College finance team and Youth Services are current occupants of the Town Hall (a grade II listed building), but there was uncertainty as to the level of occupancy of the building. The Town Hall clock got a mention, with a suggestion that its random times are evocative of the film 'Back to the Future'. The old Letchworth Museum (grade II listed) is thought to be a store of artifacts, artifacts that may soon be moving to a new location.

The extent of on-road car parking was noted and the possibility of the Broadway Gardens area providing transport infrastructure, a bus depot and additional car parking, was floated. The lack of drop kerbs and crossing points to the central gardens, unsurprisingly, got a mention.

Although house numbers on South View start at 5 it became clear that none of the plans for the town had ever identified any particular buildings that would be located on these remaining green spaces surrounding Broadway Gardens. A suggestion was made that these sites could be planted as small community orchards.

Plinston Hall was considered as an asset worth saving. Although the Broadway Cinema now provides a theatre space, Plinston Hall's role in providing a concert venue has not been replaced. Its large level indoor floor space lends itself to hosting events that could not be hosted in the Broadway Theatre, with a suggestion made that it could hold dance sessions and classes. Successful events held at Hitchin Town Hall could provide insight to a business case for a refurbished Plinston Hall. A Letchworth venue that offers entertainment past 10pm might be well received!



A food hall, with a rich variety of options to increase its attraction, was another suggested use for Plinston Hall. This would deliver an indoor space that would be welcoming for young people.

An ideas fair inside the Plinston might be a good way for the community to input their thoughts on its future.

Community Building Initiatives

Broadway Gardens has a large paved area that could be utilised more for outdoor events. A Christmas Market was mentioned but it was recognised that this type of event could detract from initiatives to boost activity in the town centre. The Art on Broadway event was cited as an entertaining, enjoyable event that brought the community together on Broadway Gardens. There were recollections of community organised fun days that had taken place in the past. The fun fair attracts people, but since covid it has remained a closed event with a pricey entrance fee which detracts from the community building that more open events deliver.

The following suggestions were made to make the area more lively and community forming:

- Busking points with seating in the vicinity.
- Access to timeslots on a bluetooth speaker (perhaps under the corner domes) with volume controls set.
- Conversation tables / benches – Sitting at these indicates you are happy to talk to someone who joins you. (It would be good to understand why seating provided by water features on Leys Avenue is not well used).
- Deck chairs in the vicinity of the fountain.
- Outlet in a surrounding building that can sell refreshments.
- Some children's play equipment.
- A covered outdoor performance space that can easily be booked by individuals and groups.

If Broadway Gardens are "livened up" then an important part of the project will be timely messaging to local people so they know of activities and events being held in the space.

There was a discussion on whether community building initiatives on the Broadway Gardens would fall under the BID or whether it would require a 'Town Square' manager