

Letchworth Residents Group Newsletter September 2026

Next Meeting: 6 Oct 2026, Room, Mrs Howard Hall, 7:45 to 9:15pm

Topic: Where in Letchworth is "20 Plenty"?

Maximising Outdoor Life from Broadway Garden to Howard Gardens

Thank you to David Adam, a consultant with expertise in urban regeneration, for presenting at our July meeting. David lives in Letchworth and is an elected Heritage Foundation Governor. Ideas he explored are shared below.

"Urban regeneration" is usually associated with cities and involves attracting major external investment. Re-energising towns like Letchworth needs an approach that builds a story first. Animating the town through small initiatives to generate momentum and ultimately attract greater public and private investment.

Town Centres can no longer survive just as a place to shop, they need a cultural offering that encourages people to dwell. Letchworth has its own unique story and David explored how this could be the building block for creating a more vibrant town centre.

Ebenezer Howard's initial vision has shaped the town but David reflected that there have been many inspiring residents. Horace Plinston campaigned to save the Garden City Corporation from a private company take-over, ensuring that any profits made from the Letchworth estate are invested in the town. Plinston Hall, named after Horace, is currently closed, but there were plenty of memories in the room of seeing bands play at the venue reminding us that Letchworth is big enough to sustain and benefit from having a music venue.

Annie Lawrence was driven by the idea that fresh air and outdoor living are important for a healthy body and mind and she built an open-air school and meditation centre (the Cloisters), where students engaged in handicrafts, swam in a private pool, and slept outdoors in hammocks. Today, the importance of access to outdoor spaces is understood and Letchworth is fortunate to have been designed with plenty of these spaces that we can develop and promote.

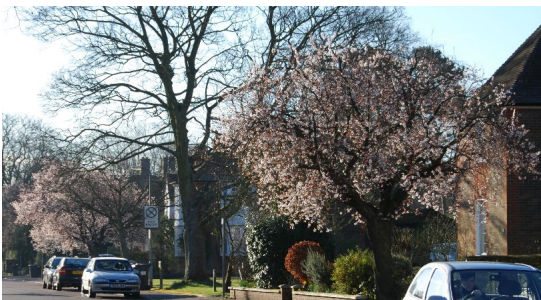


Early Letchworth Garden City buildings were built in the art-deco period and David homed in on the building signage. Asking businesses to have art-deco signage would be a relatively easy way to bring Letchworth's particular heritage to the fore, bringing a coherence to the town centre street scene.



Letchworth had its place in the fashion industry, the Spirella Company made corsets before finally getting into parachutes! If the Letchworth collection has sufficient exhibits, a 'fashion' focused museum and creative space in the currently empty Town Museum could be a new attractor to the town.

David shared an image of how vibrant the Broadway Gardens could look with the addition of a bandstand, deckchairs and some embedded outside games boards. This led to a discussion on the benefit received by local residents from the fairground that intermittently takes over Broadway Gardens, fencing off this space to residents.



Springtime in Letchworth is made special by the abundance of blossom on the cherry trees. It is the Garden City design, the front gardens and verges, that make this display possible. Could we plant more cherry trees and celebrate this feature of Letchworth?

Letchworth has a rich cultural history that could be built upon to develop a Town Centre plan that will make Letchworth a unique place where people will want to visit and 'dwell'.

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.

Bringing residents together to share their visions for Letchworth

Ideas captured from Group Discussions following the Presentation

- The entrance area in the cinema would benefit from a bar area where residents can spend time.
- A music venue should be reintroduced in the town with a space for dancing.
- The existing, limited, night time economy can be expanded, David's evening events are well-attended.
- The Wynd could be expanded to incorporate the indoor arcade.
- Have traditional art-deco signage on all shops.
- Expand Outdoor Equipment: Introduce outside table tennis tables and chess tables. Add Gym equipment on Howard Park. Explore teenagers interest in a new skate park.
- Improve Transport Services and Infrastructure: Have frequent and faster bus routes into a town centre bus station. Redesign Gernon Road, convert it back to a two way street, allow cars to enter Eastcheap from Broadway (avoiding Gernon Road) enabling a safer pedestrian crossing between the Library and cinema forecourt. Have a Hub for cyclists utilising National Cycle Route 12.
- Have an exhibition on upgrading early garden city houses to be energy efficient and introduce open days events where residents can volunteer to show their low energy heritage area homes.

Marking 125 Years of Letchworth Garden City

Letchworth Garden City centenary, in 2003, left a lasting legacy, with the upgrading of Kennedy Garden into the renamed Broadway Gardens and the opening of the Garden City Greenway. Grant funding helped make these centenary projects possible. So how should we celebrate 125 years of Letchworth Garden City? Should it be celebrated through events or should there be a lasting legacy that brings wider benefit? Here are some initial ideas that fall out of Resident Group discussions:

- Plant "pocket orchards" of edible cherry tree across the town.
- Introduce outside table tennis tables in the Wynd, giving older children a focal meeting place.
- Install a covered bandstand in the Broadway Gardens, for anniversary music concerts in the park.

Letchworth's Places of Worship Up for Sale

The Church of England is proceeding with the sale of St Michaels Church but we understand that the car park and church hall are not part of this sale. So what will happen to the church hall? Will it be passed to a remaining Church of England church, St Paul's or St Thomas's? This could give a much needed boost to church funds, whilst ensuring the Westbury community once again has a community hall.

Letchworth has a large number of religious buildings, often on leasehold land that has a religious covenant and planning permission restricted to public religious worship. The Kingdom Hall on the Grange Estate is currently under offer. The Free Church on Leys Avenue has had its last service and is expected to be sold. Some are listed buildings, others not. These venues may be well used by local groups, the Free Church, for instance, has acoustics that are treasured by local music groups. Can, and should, the covenants on these buildings be adjusted to allow them to find a new lease of life in the way that will bring most benefit to Letchworth residents?

Garden Square Consultation

The second consultation (gardensquareconsultation.com/exhibition-materials/) on Garden Square Shopping Centre redevelopment has now closed. The proposal includes five storey buildings, with flats above shopping units. A high development compared to surrounding buildings, but it's a design that should enable energy efficient homes. Balconies provide an opportunity for more greening of the development and could break up the high walls, increasing the number of balconies in the initial design and giving them sufficient depth for growing some plants, could improve the Garden City feel of the development.

The development will include a green pedestrian route between Gernon Road and Leys Avenue which is accessible 24 hours. If the development led to the opening up of the pathway beside the Free Church it would further improve active travel connectivity. If seating and shelter was provided in the communal green space it would provide protection from sun or rain, and could help increase town centre dwell time. The proposed retail space is smaller than currently available which may make it difficult to retain some of the popular stores in the town centre.

Phase I of the development keeps the existing multi-storey car park, but the masterplan diagram suggests that ultimately it may be replaced with residential units. With 220 or more flats in the phase I development, and more to come, will parking become an even bigger issue in Letchworth?