

# Annual Review 2023-24

## Building a deeper, more connected society across Hertfordshire.

Dear Friends and Supporters,

It is with immense pride that I reflect on another year of impactful work by Community Development Action Hertfordshire. For over 50 years, we have been dedicated to improving lives across our county, bringing together people and communities, championing the disadvantaged, and advocating for the needs of rural communities, farmers, and businesses.

### **Embracing new Leadership**

This year marks a new chapter for CDA Herts with the arrival of our incoming CEO, Kevin Poulton. Kevin's wealth of experience and deep-rooted commitment to community development will undoubtedly steer us towards a future filled with growth and innovation, building upon our strong foundation of service to the people of Hertfordshire.

### **Making a Difference**

Our work touches lives in many ways and I'll shine a light on our 'Rural Digital Learners' project, funded by Clarion Futures, which equips residents with confidence and skills to bridge into an ever more digital world.

Along with the Community Garden in St Albans, developed on land generously provided by Oaklands College, is a vibrant hub for cultivating community cohesion and wellbeing.

### **Looking Ahead**

We are committed to building a deeper, more connected society across Hertfordshire. Through our unwavering dedication and strong strategic partnerships, we will continue to champion the needs of our communities and create opportunities for all to flourish.

With gratitude,

Allison Alexander  
*Chair, CDA Herts*

### **Rural**

- Affordable Housing
- Rural Support
- Village Halls Advice
- Energy & Sustainability
- Community Transport
- Digital Inclusion

### **Health & Wellbeing**

- Community Resilience, Empowerment & Diversity
- Mental Health and Suicide Prevention in Diverse Communities

### **Community Development**

- Community Garden
- Consultancy
- Infrastructure Support
- VCFSE Networks Consultancy

# Community Garden



The small band of garden volunteers continue to make the one acre of garden accessible and open to all. The community groups are well established and have repeatedly told us that the space is a little gem in St Albans, is vital to health and wellbeing, and provides opportunities without constraints to work with people of diversity and with varied interests.

The interactions between the diverse community groups and the garden volunteers who provide weekly maintenance and support is a model of excellence for community cohesion. The garden beneficially impacts on health and wellbeing together with creating firm social friendships within the project and beyond.



## Outreach to new groups include:

- 🌸 Older people including those who no longer have their own gardens (for example living in sheltered accommodation or care homes) but retain an interest in gardening providing an opportunity for them to get out and tackle social isolation
- 🌸 People who report that their day to day activities are limited by their disability
- 🌸 Minority ethnic groups including St Albans' significant Bangladeshi community
- 🌸 Single parent families and single people
- 🌸 Increasing referrals from health providers
- 🌸 Creating new growing areas and access paths catering for users with a range of physical abilities
- 🌸 Organising annual events to celebrate the achievements of existing users and the produce they have grown, and to promote the site to new users and the general public
- 🌸 Facilitating evening sessions for various groups including Passport to Leisure/Daylight Club, Czechs & Slovaks, St Albans Woodcraft Folk, Woodcraft Group



# Community Resilience, Empowerment & Diversity

The Project's emphasis continued to adjust and adapt to the findings in Year 2. The Team concentrated on capacity building with groups from Ethnic Minorities whilst strengthening their voice with connections to public services helping them shape the offerings available for people who looked like them.

The Team made significant progress in ensuring that services were appropriate and relevant through regular briefings, network meetings and attending many local community activity sessions. The community groups are in the main volunteer led and English not their first language.



We made good progress with our advocacy and support services at the health and care forums, raising awareness of the gaps and the need for consistent communication but there remains a need for information in different languages.

The year concluded with three Connected Community events, in Stevenage, Bishops Stortford and Watford, attracting 773 attendees. The events celebrated the

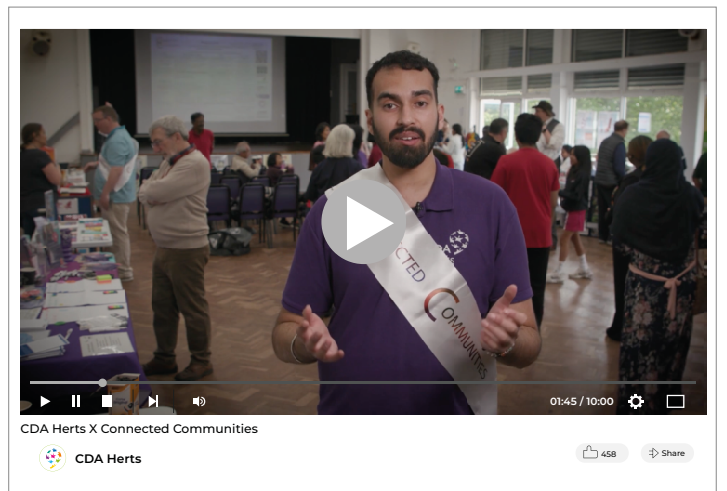
different cultures of the local communities, and shared community led solutions to health inequalities in 4 themed areas – Total Wellbeing, Healthy Heart, Access to Services, and Healthy Ageing.

Watch our video about the Connected Community events at: <https://player.vimeo.com/video/954442245> or click on the image below.

**120** Ethnically diverse groups

**1,172** Social Media impacts

**87** Community Leaders in peer support group



## Rural Life Projects

We have continued advocacy with public agencies to include rural proofing within their services no matter how difficult the logistics are to manage due to geography and time taken to deliver services compared to service delivery in urban areas where the reach is higher and easier to logistically deliver.

Significant progress was made in raising awareness of rural need with Herts County Council's Cost of Living Response Group which has led to a Rural Task & Finish Group to be set up and an Information Project delivered in partnership with Village Halls through Citizens Advice services in North and East Herts.

## Community Transport



**Tewin Community Transport Minibus continues with our support to provide a vital service for the elderly, vulnerable and lonely in the village.**

We have had 6 regular users and a further 6 who use the Minibus when special trips are arranged, for example to Garden Centres. Working with the Steering Group which comprises Minibus Users we have slowly implemented measures to increase numbers and are benefitting from the involvement of one Parish Councillor. Numbers of Users have increased slightly but due to the withdrawal of public funding for community transport the future is bleak without additional grants. Thankfully A £6k grant secured from the National Lottery Awards4All programme has helped sustain the Project for this year and through the next 12 months.

## Who's Who

### Vice Presidents

Harry Bott DL  
Anthony Edwards  
Jean Pooley  
Brain Rowley  
Robin Guenier  
Christine Nairn

### Board of Trustees:

Allison Alexander (Chair)  
Jodie Deards (Vice Chair)  
John Dawson (Treasurer)  
Susannah Fenton (September 2024)  
Mary Lambe (retired October 2023)

### Staff:

#### Chief Executive Officer

Kevin Poulton (September 2023)

#### Advisor to the Board

Kate Belinis DL

#### Finance & Communications Officer

Yvonne Saxton

#### Rural Services Manager

Tim Hayward-Smith

#### Community Resilience, Empowerment & Diversity (CRED)

Rushna Miah  
Anand Mann

#### Senior Business Development Manager

Sue Whiterod

#### Play Area

Viv, Hilary

#### Rural Housing Enabler

Giles Meredith

#### Rural Digital Inclusion Officer

Stuart Izzard

#### Rural Support Networks Officer

Lynsi Hayward-Smith

#### Volunteer Gardeners

Eva Adamkova, Phill Coates, Sue Coates,  
Hilary Dempsey, Debbie Hallcole, Imke  
Hoffman, Lauren McQuillan, Kirtida Mehta,  
Ken Moorton, Val Moorton, Sue Watt, Anne  
Wingate, Farhat Zia.

# Rural Affordable Housing

**We completed a Housing Needs Survey and delivered a draft report in Much Hadham in East Herts. The Survey achieved a 28% response rate with 224 returns.**

We have worked with a Community Land Trust and commenced a Survey in Ashwell (North Herts) funded by the Parish Council who are looking to explore options for affordable housing following the formation of a Community Land Trust within the village.

We gave a presentation to Barley Parish Council in conjunction with a registered provider who agreed that we should conduct a Survey in the parish. We are negotiating funding for the Survey.

As part of Eastern Community Homes partnership, we delivered a Community Led Housing training session for prospective self-builders in Letchworth Garden City.

We are continuing our support of Letchworth Garden City Heritage Foundation in their aspiration to deliver Community Led Housing and delivered a successful Seminar to recruit potential members for a Community Group.

A previous Survey in Kimpton in North Herts has yielded two potential sites for affordable homes. Planning permission is in place for 10 units in Graveley in North Herts pursuant to our Survey.

Our Flamstead Survey received a return rate of 30% with 29 households reporting housing need. Our on-line Survey option received an unprecedented 50% return through use of QR codes, social media marketing and supporting publicity from the Parish. We delivered our report with a recommendation of 12 affordable homes for the community.

# Community Energy & Sustainability

Our Community Energy Network is used by the participants to share information and concerns about climate change and lack of progress towards Net Zero.

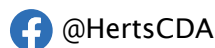
We have worked with Power for People to support their Local Energy Bill and we were instrumental in mobilising local people to lobby their MPs to support the Bill through its Committee stage.

We disseminated information about The Groundwork Trust Carbon Training Programme and Solar Together Schemes through our Networks and eBulletins.

We organised the Village Halls Consortium Annual Conference which focused on Energy Efficiency and Net Zero. We have been working in partnership with Utility Aid and East Herts Council to help fund Village Halls to benefit from a free Energy Efficiency Surveys and qualify for funding to implement carbon reduction measures.

## Keep in touch!

See what we are up to throughout the year by following us on social media. Or check out our website.



# Rural Support

**We have continued to support the Rural Support Networks (RSN) although we now have no dedicated funding for this work and have one volunteer helping.**



We supported 50 active groups with approximately 1000 volunteers, supporting 1000 people. Numbers fluctuate, and we are undertaking a further Survey to update our knowledge of this voluntary rural activity and to identify the specific causes and the effects of need.

We continue to offer support, advice, information, training, resources and funding to Hertfordshire's Rural Support Networks which are informal groups of volunteers helping the local vulnerable, elderly and lonely.

We have provided monthly health and community news bulletins which the designated Community Information Champions (CICs) for each Rural Support Network disseminate locally to thousands of people. We held one Network Meeting attended by 4 CICs volunteers plus Citizens Advice, Adult Care Services, Herts Healthy Hubs, FCN Farming Community Network, RABI and Mind, Age UK. We had a presentation about Co-production Boards.

We have now amalgamated the Rural Support Network Meetings with our Rural Loneliness Forum which provides opportunities for discussions about access to services and rural outreach between service providers and rural volunteers who support and signpost those in need of services.

We apply for grant funding for Rural Support Networks on their behalf as most are not constituted organisations with no bank account so are not eligible to apply. The prime source of grants was Household Support Fund. Our key strategic aim in applying for these funding pots, as well as creating supporting resources, is to keep awareness high, about rural disadvantaged people, amongst the statutory bodies.

We are now a partner in Herts County Council's 'Cost of Living Response Group'. The presentation we gave on rural issues was very well received by the meeting of 35 participants from commissioning, statutory, and voluntary service providers. This led to Herts County Council convening a Rural Task & Finish Group which led to a Citizens Advice project being delivered for rural communities in Village Halls in East and North Herts.

We completed a second round of Household Support Funding this year which has delivered another £9k of grants and reached 1,400 beneficiaries. This is an increase of 500 over the previous funding round which we attribute to the effect of the cost of living crisis on rural families with children as this was the group with the largest growth area of need. Families from 12 Villages across the county were helped.

# Village Halls Advisory Service

Our Village Halls and Community Buildings Consortium continues to thrive and causes increased demands for support. We held two Consortium meeting with 31 and 25 participants respectively and had input on Energy Contracts from Utility Aid, Recruiting Volunteers from Communities First Volunteer Centres.



In total over the 12 months we received 215 requests for help from 83 different Halls involving 335 requests for information about 43 different topic areas. The most popular topics have been Committee, Trustee and Governance issues, Governing documents, Banks and banking, Energy and Climate Change, Fire regulations, H&S issues, Electrical, Safety & Inspections, Disaster and Resilience planning, Hiring, Flooring maintenance/repair and Defra Grants.

Our Countywide Annual Conference was held on 20 March during Village Halls Week when we chose to embrace the theme of Energy Efficiency and Net Zero. Held on Zoom,

the event attracted 40 participants including 30 Committee members representing 20 Halls. We had presentations from Utility Aid, ACRE, Stagg Architects (Go Green Design Guide), ARC Energy, Heating Save, Sustainable Herts, East Herts Council plus Consortium members Hunsdon, Flamstead, Kimpton, Little Berkhamsted and Colney Heath Halls.

In partnership with East Herts Council Health Hub we have facilitated the involvement of 6 Village Halls in a Rural Outreach initiative. Each Hall has received a banner, leaflets and posters for display to create better access to healthy living information for rural people.

**215** requests for help  
from **83** different Halls

**355** requests for information  
about **43** different topic areas

“The support that we, as managers of community buildings, receive from the Village Halls Adviser is invaluable.

The network meetings have gone from strength to strength, introducing us to a range of specialists, e.g energy brokers, energy efficiency survey and grant sources enabling us to work more effectively.

However, for me, the introduction to University of Hertfordshire’s Pro Bono Law Clinic was the highlight of the year, giving me an initial framework for a legal agreement which identified issues that I had not even thought of.”

Jane Lutman Chair  
Flamstead Village Hall Management Committee

“We have definitely benefitted from CDA Herts advice especially earlier in the year and for being able to see how other Centres deal with and organize the varying problems that arise from time to time when looking after community buildings.

The collective approach to some matters is also essential in getting a measured and in-depth reply from government and national agencies and for the advice and guidance from ACRE.”

John Bailey  
Thorley Centre Manager

“Tring Together is delighted to be a member of CDA Herts. They have been an invaluable source of information and pragmatic advice. Whatever the question, they always know where to look for the answer.”

Vivianne Child  
CEO Tring Together Nora Grace Hall

## Rural Digital Infrastructure and Village Halls

**We undertook our Village Halls Connectivity Survey thanks to partnership working with University of Hertfordshire and an MSC student, Aisha Salihu, who covered this Project as her final dissertation. Aisha worked extremely hard and diligently and produced a comprehensive Report.**

Aisha and Tim our Senior Rural Services Manager worked together over a period of some weeks designing and publishing the Survey questionnaire which was launched in August followed by an intensive period contacting every Village Hall to encourage their participation. We made contact by email and telephone with 130 Village Halls and the response was very encouraging with over 90 responses.

The aim of the Survey was to ascertain the level of Village Halls’ access to the internet, what the demand is and how it is used and what are perceived benefits for the community. Where there is no internet access, what are the reasons, is there a perceived demand and do they wish to address the situation? We have also asked about 4G and 5G coverage in these communities.

“The Report has helped us better understand the scale of the poor access to internet in many of our Village Halls. Out of 70 Village Halls Surveyed 35 (50%) reported as having no internet access and not even a landline. We have been working to identify resources and negotiate an offer to meet this important need to connect our Village Halls, vital centres of community support.”

Tim Hayward-Smith, CDA Herts



# Digital Inclusion

We continue to be very proud of our engagement, support and encouragement of local Digital Volunteers, which was key in ensuring that the project developed further and became more sustainable via continued grant funding support from Clarion Futures Digital.

Three 'Digital Learners' Drop-In sessions are held at Little Hadham Village Hall, Datchworth Village Hall & Tewin Memorial Hall. The informal drop-in format combined with tea and cake make them more accessible, reducing potential stigma.

## 100% of 'Digital Learners'...

Would recommend the Digital Drop-In Sessions to friends

Rated the support as excellent or good

Now feel more confident in the use of IT and digital technology

Said the set up at the Village Hall was excellent

Pages from a joint document with Clarion Futures Digital:

## Our impact during 2022/23 and 2023/24

**189** digital 'drop-in' sessions delivered across 4 rural venues

**3,074** hours of individual digital support and advice provided

**£5.13** of social impact generated for every £1 invested in the project

### Georgina's story

Georgina, in her 80's, is a novice learner who regularly attends her local digital 'drop-in' session, or 'computer club' as she calls it.

Although a Doctor in her working life, Georgina had never set up a personal online ID or email account and neither does she or her husband have any form of internet connection at home.

She does have a secondhand Apple Mac however, which the local digital volunteers have helped her to start to use. This support has included downloading various useful apps and setting up her first ever personal email account so that she could email her daughter in Scotland.

Without the internet at home, being able to make use of the Village Hall's internet connection at the weekly 'drop-in' sessions to catch up with matters that she needs to do online, has become an important part of her life and as such, Georgina now wholly relies on the Village Hall as a local Digital Hub.

**4,310** hours of volunteer time utilised to support new digital learners

**285** new digital learners supported

**£172,197** of social impact generated through the opportunity for regular volunteering

**28** new 'digital volunteers' recruited and trained

**£303,240** of social impact generated through the delivery of the 'drop-in' sessions

## Generating social impact

By helping people to access, and make effective use of, the internet, the digital 'drop-in' sessions generate a range of outcomes and additional value that can be measured in pounds and pence.

**£15,000** of project funding + **£44,100** of 'in kind' volunteer time

Total investment of: **£59,100** Resulted in a total of: **£303,240**

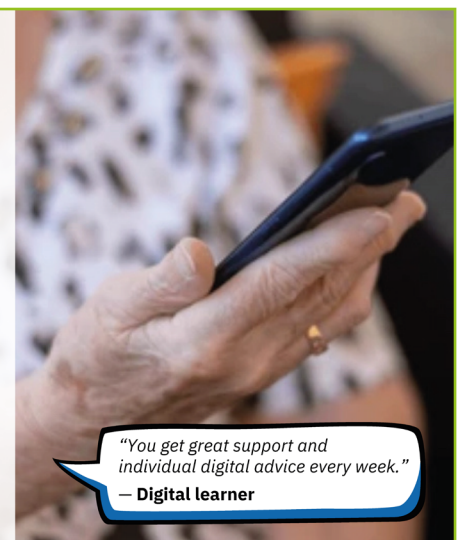
worth of social impact being generated - that can be broken down as:

- £68,400** related to improved confidence
- £72,105** related to reduced isolation
- £82,650** related to time saving
- £12,540** related to more time spent on hobbies
- £49,305** related to financial savings
- £18,240** related to improved job seeking skills

This means that every £1 invested in the digital 'drop-in' sessions generated £5.13 in social impact.

**£1** → **£5.13**

As a comparison, an evaluation of the NHS Widening Digital Participation programme estimates a return on investment of £6.40 for every £1 spent by the NHS on digital inclusion support.



"You get great support and individual digital advice every week."  
— Digital learner

Improving lives through the internet in rural Hertfordshire

## Digital Inclusion (cont.)

**104**

'Drop-in' Digital Inclusion 2-hour sessions, based at 3 rural village halls

**1,794** hours

of Digital support, advice & guidance provided

**155**

unique Digital Learners have been supported

**897**

Digital Learner attendances in total over the year

**2500**

Digital Volunteer hours given 'in kind'



## With thanks

CDA Herts would like to say a BIG 'thank you' to everyone who has supported our work over the past year.

### Community Garden

Garden Volunteers  
Highfield Park Trust  
HCC Ward Councillors

### Rural Services

ACRE  
Defra  
East Herts Council  
Hertfordshire County Council  
Utility Aid

### Rural Affordable Housing

Dacorum Borough Council  
English Rural Housing Association  
Eastern Community Homes  
HASTOE  
North Herts Council  
settle Housing Association

### Rural Support Network

Clarion Futures  
Hertfordshire Community Foundation  
Rural Digital Inclusion

### Community Information Champions

Hertfordshire County Council

### Play Area Scheme

HMP The Mount  
PACT (Prison Advice Care Trust)

### Community Resilience, Empowerment & Diversity (CRED)

ICB Hertfordshire and West Essex

### eBulletin Sponsors

Allied Westminster (Insurance Services) Ltd  
Norris & Fisher (Insurance Services) Ltd

### Membership

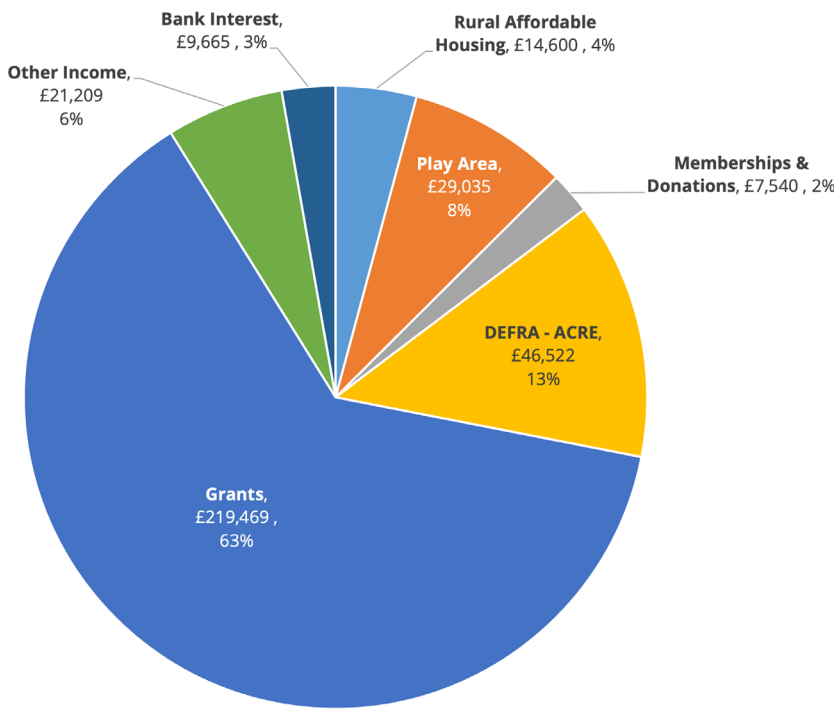
Parish and Town Councils  
Village Halls  
Community Buildings  
Community Groups  
Individuals

# Income and expenditure 2023–24

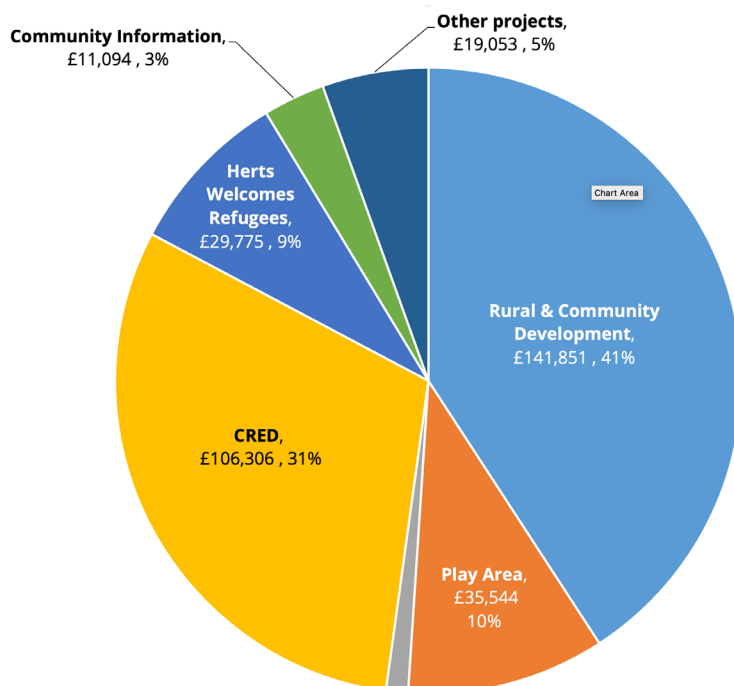
We are pleased to report that we delivered a balanced financial position. The following charts provide a breakdown of where our income has come from and what it has been spent on over the past year.

For a full copy of CDA Herts' audited accounts for 2023–24, please see our website [www.cdaherts.org.uk](http://www.cdaherts.org.uk)

Our £348,040 income came from:



Our expenditure totalled £347,576 and was spent on:



**CDA Herts**

**Community Development Action  
Hertfordshire**  
Unit 2, Mead Lane Industrial Estate  
Merchant Drive  
Hertford, SG13 7BH

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