

Garden City Collection is proud to launch...



Uncovering Letchworth: Reshaping Our Community's Museum Collection

Our major project for 2024/25, funded by a National Lottery Heritage Fund 'Dynamic Collections' grant.

Uncovering Letchworth aims to transform the Garden City Collection, helping us tell everyone's stories.

The Garden City Collection is Letchworth's ACE-Accredited Museum Service. As well as a museum store which physically holds over 250,000 objects relating to the history of Letchworth Garden City, we also run a small 'micro museum', The Museum at One Garden City, with changing displays and exhibits; we work with schools & community groups, and run tours, talks & other events, often in collaboration with the Broadway Gallery; and also share our archives online on our website and on social media.

Uncovering Letchworth will develop and grow our collections in order to increase the representation & diversity of our Museum Service. We will gather and present new stories and objects – to better reflect the wonderful town that we serve.

The project will also transform our practice. We want to embrace co-creation - moving away from being gatekeepers of the town's history & heritage – we want to work with our communities to share and explore it.

Our aim is to reflect our full, rich and diverse community in the stories we tell.



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What We've Done So Far

Project Officer

In late 2023/early 2024 we successfully recruited a new Collections Officer post, to deliver the project over 18 months. After an extensive recruitment process, with an excellent field of applicants and candidates, we were able to appoint *two* Collections Officers, who share the full-time hours of the role between them.



Amandeep Dhillon (left) grew up and lives in North Hertfordshire area and has a background in film curation and programming, working with different communities on a wide range of projects. In 2023, she helped put together some displays at the Museum at One Garden City celebrating some of the South Asian community in Letchworth Garden City for South Asian Heritage Month.

Kava (pronounced Ava- soft 'A') Johnson (right) grew up and lives in Letchworth. She is an artist and Chair of North Herts African & Caribbean Community. In 2023 she was engaged with the museum team as the artist-facilitator in a project funded by AIM/NLHF called 'Forging A Family' working with the Letchworth Caribbean Harmony Group.

She has a professional background in social care.

Collections Review

The first task of the project was conducting a review of the collections we currently hold, to ensure that we are basing the project on fact & data rather than anecdotal knowledge and personal views.

Community Curators

As part of a new co-creation practice, we will be recruiting a new team of 'Community Curators' from different backgrounds and areas of the community to share their stories and objects and to help us shape the museum's outputs, programming and future direction. We will be connecting to find people who will help us make the collection more diverse and representative – we want to move away from being gatekeepers of the town's history & heritage and towards facilitating the stories people want to tell and see.

About the Collections Review

The first task at hand on the project was the Collections Review – which served as an introduction for our new team to the museum’s objects and archives, and allowed us to begin to assess where the strengths and weaknesses of our collections lay.

Given the sheer scale of the Collection, a comprehensive audit could easily have taken the entire 18 months of the post, whilst a superficial desk-based exercise might miss the nature of the collection itself. We decided to base it on a physical examination of the collections we hold, rather than scanning the catalogue, and we felt we were able to get a good deep dive into what we have, albeit we were limited by the time constraints.

We planned a systematic approach, tackling each room, aisle, bay, shelf and box in our collection stores, and recording key information about the treasures therein.

We decided to capture quantitative data about what time period the collections fell into - dividing the history of Letchworth into six distinct ‘eras’ and then captured information about the objects (type, details etc.) within those eras, allowing us to create clear breakdowns of the collections by era.

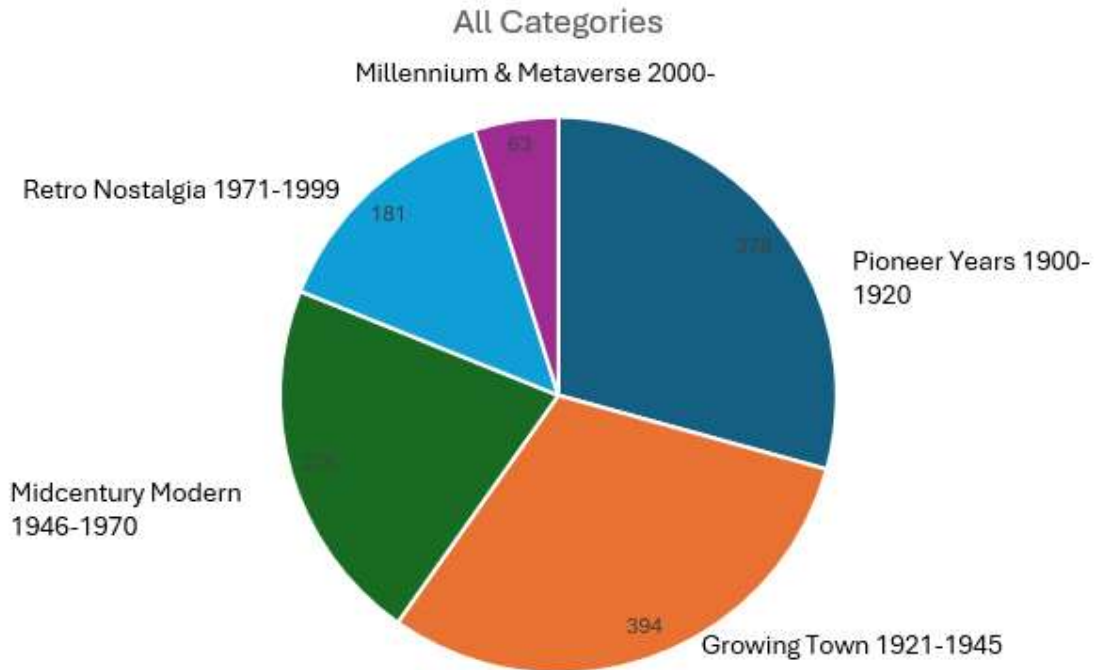
Collection Type:	'Eras'				
	Pioneer Years (1900-1920)	Growing Town (1920-1945)	Midcentury Modern (1946-1970)	Retro Nostalgia (1970-1999)	Millennium & Metaverse (2000-)
Photographs					
Personal					
Industry					

We also made captured qualitative data by analysing the task as a whole and reflecting on the objects and photographs we had explored.

We have attached the full spreadsheet, as well as a number of charts with the collections breakdowns by era to the report.

Whilst this methodology was by no means exhaustive, it did enable us to get a good sense of what the collections consist of and allowed us to make a number of clear conclusions about what the gaps are.

It is clear from the Collections Review that, in terms of ‘eras’, the gaps lie mainly in the 1950s-now.



The last fifty years of our development are still perceived by many as recent or contemporary rather than being acknowledged as modern history. We will aim to address this misconception. We also know that the town’s demographics changed most during those periods, so this partly explains the lack of diversity in our collections.

We also found that there was a lack of items relating to the LGBTQ+ communities, people with disabilities, and specific neighbourhoods in the town (Jackmans, Grange, Westbury, Lordship).

There is also a lack of objects or stories relating to migration - people moving to Letchworth, (either from abroad or within the UK) and yet we know that local data tells us there are many people in Letchworth with these backgrounds.

We reflected that there is a bias towards largely middle-class activity, particularly in the earlier eras, with very little working class voice – particularly in more recent times - about what it’s like to struggle living in Letchworth.

Contemporary collecting is an area that needs attention, albeit there have some attempts at mitigation in our recent collecting practice, we do need to focus (possibly in our more day-

to-day activity rather than as part of this specific project) on contemporary collecting – capturing the town as it is now.

There were particular quirks – we have very little in our collections about certain industries in the town, despite many of them employing large numbers of people, particularly where newer companies replaced the larger more established factories in the period from the 1970s onwards.

Much of our collections relating to the 1970s onwards come from newspaper archives or newsletters, so there is a lack of candid authenticity of everyday life.

This speaks to one of the main findings of the exercise - a lack of obvious personal stories, a lack of direct testimony of people who lived through these times. Whilst an obvious exception is the excellent 'Letchworth Recollections' project conducted by Heather Elliott and John Sanderson, these stories are not easily accessible outside of the publications they published (which separate out and anonymise people's individual stories into a thematic whole).

A focus of our activity on this project will be capturing real people's lived experiences and both preserving and sharing these to wider audiences.



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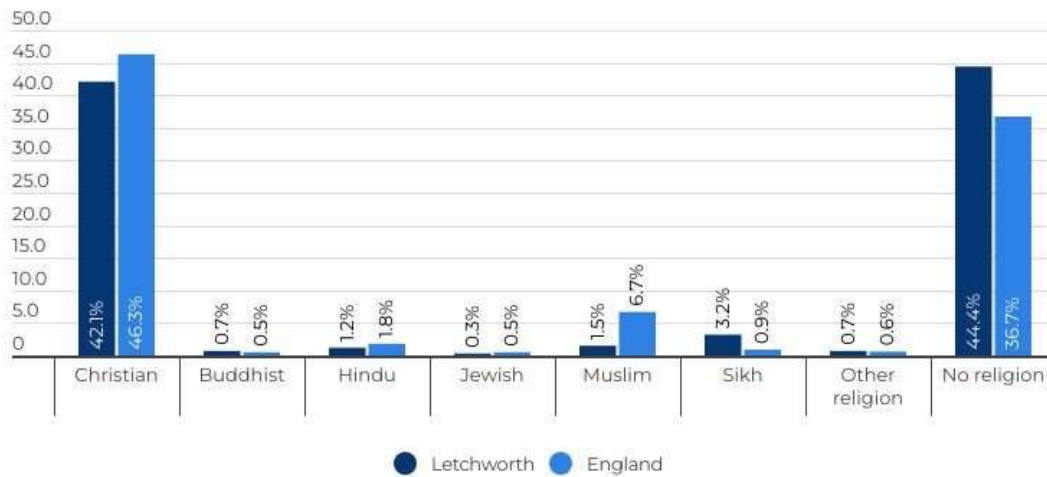
Letchworth Garden City Today

When we compare the findings of the Collections Review with our extensive analysis and research of the town's current demographic and socio-economic make-up, the areas for our focus identified above become even clearer.

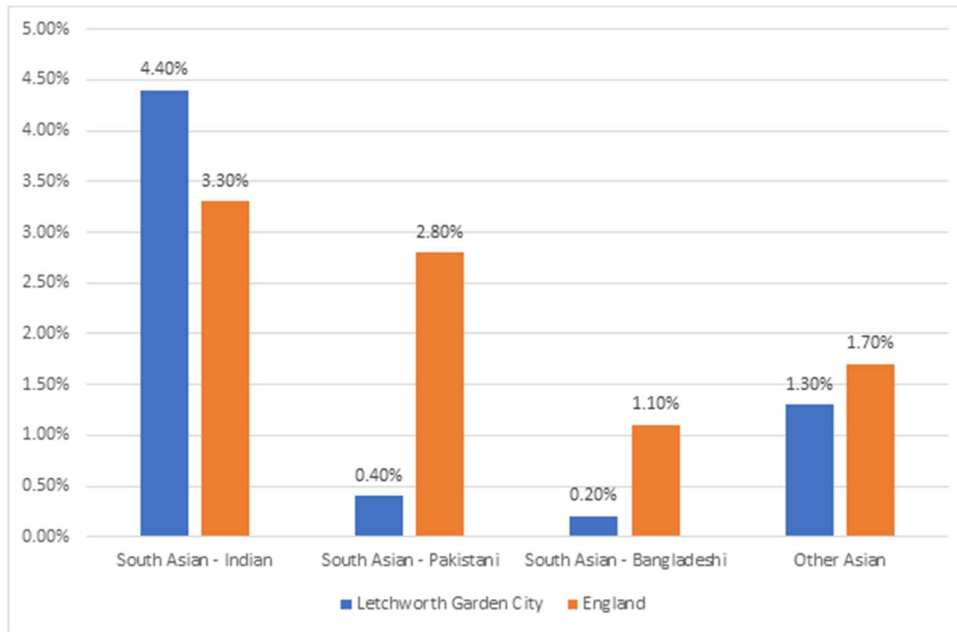
For example the town has a higher than English national average population Sikh/South Asian communities, and dual heritage ('White and Black Caribbean'/'White and Black African') ethnic groups; it has geographical areas with (at the time of the Collections Review) higher-than average numbers of youth unemployment and economic inactivity; the town has higher than English national average rates of disability recorded in under 25's. Letchworth has 30% social housing, compared with a national average of 18%.

We present some of the areas of analysis of Letchworth today, below.

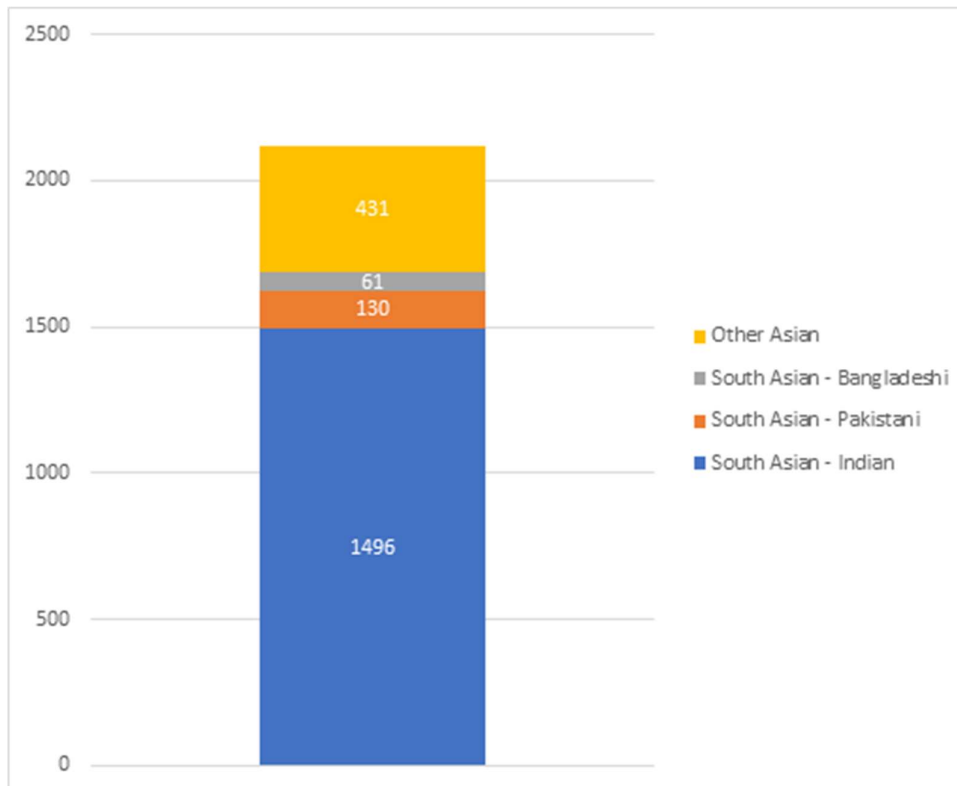
Letchworth's population by religion:



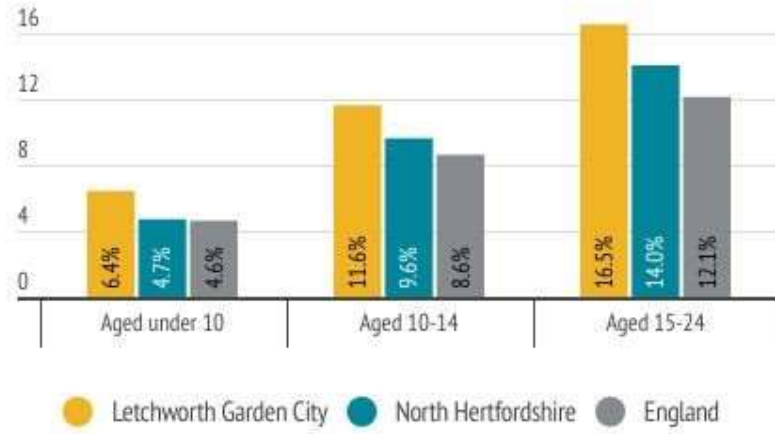
Comparing the % of South Asian ethnic communities between LGC & England:



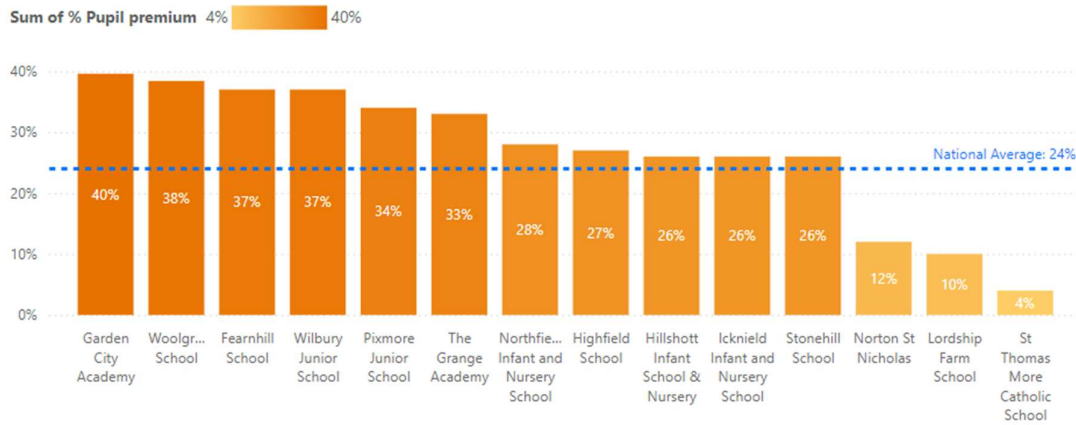
Number of South Asian residents in Letchworth:



0-24-year-olds disabled under the Equality Act:

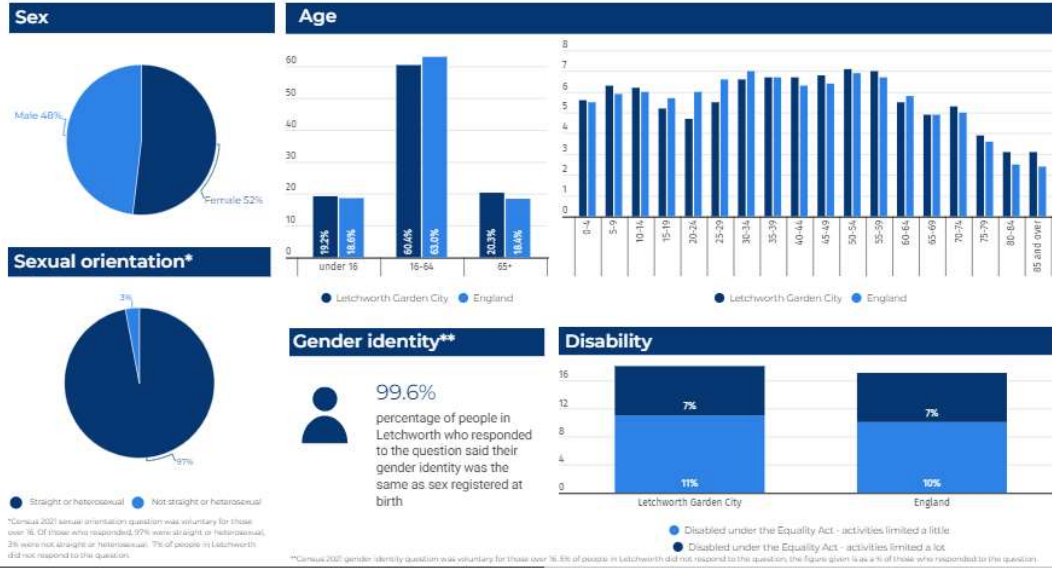


Pupils eligible for Free School Meals - by Letchworth school:

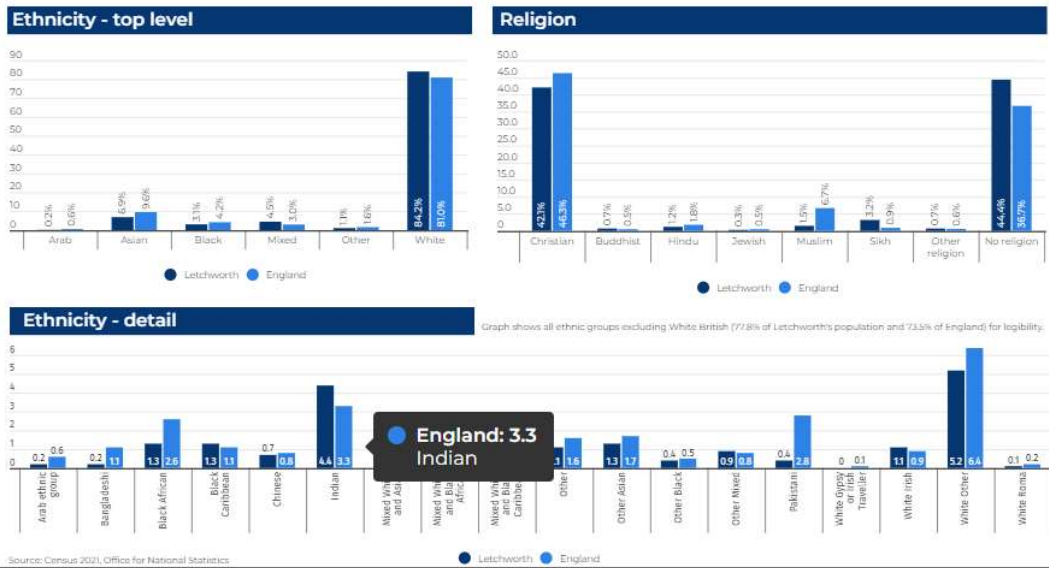


Top line demographic data – Letchworth Garden City (2021)

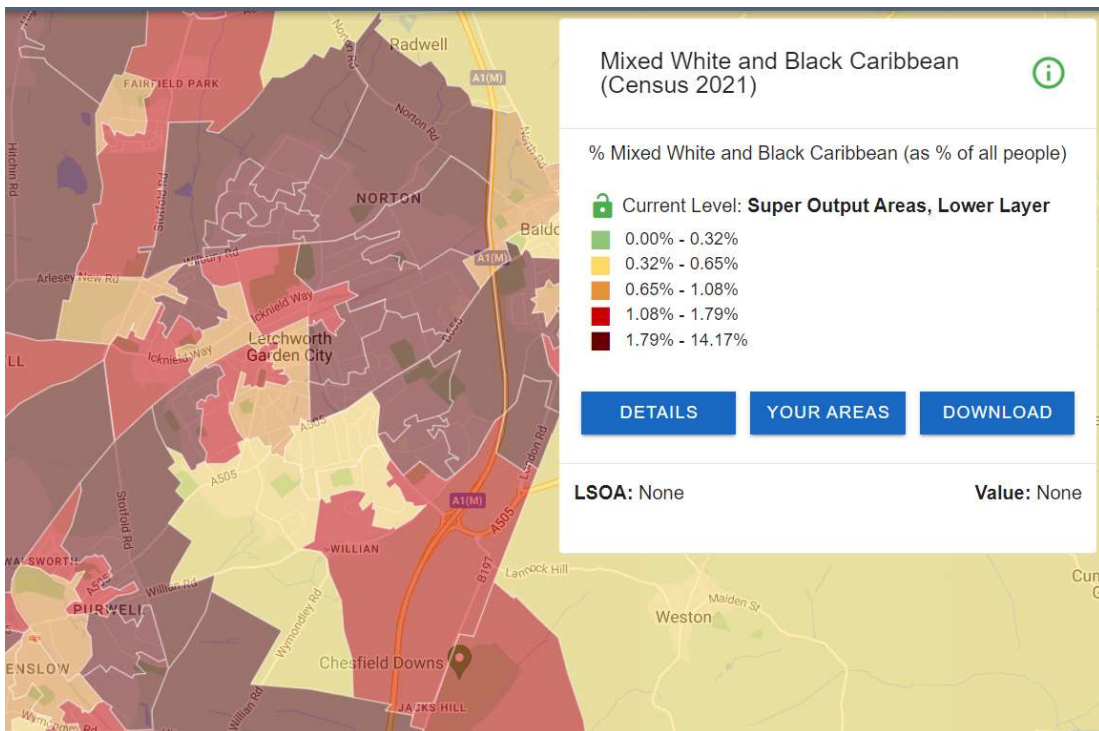
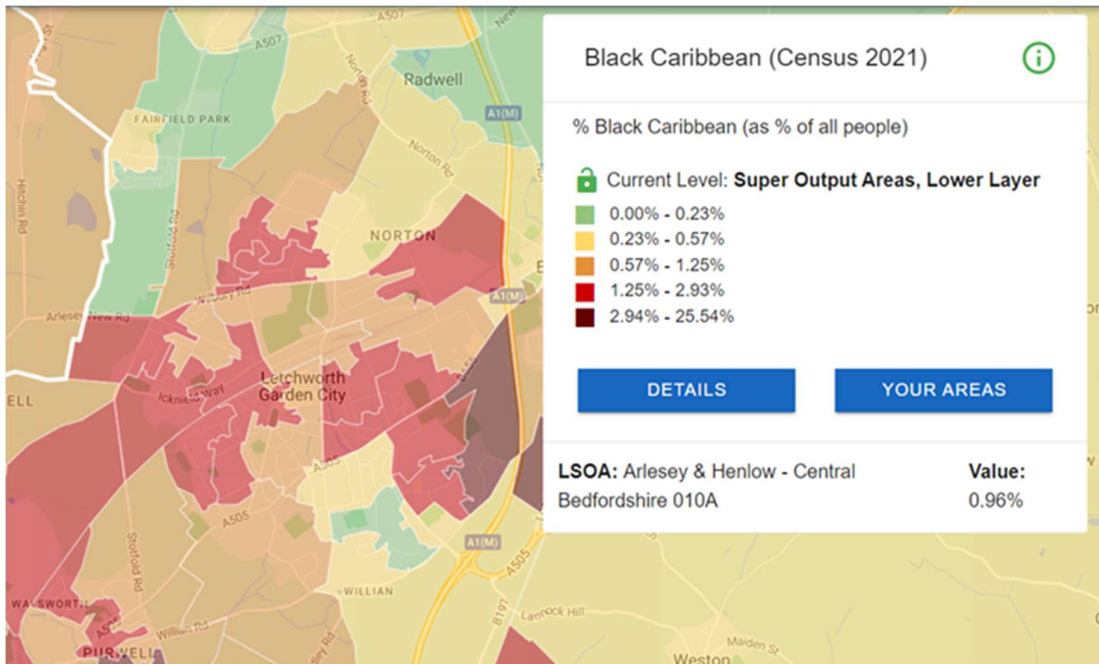
Letchworth's population (1)

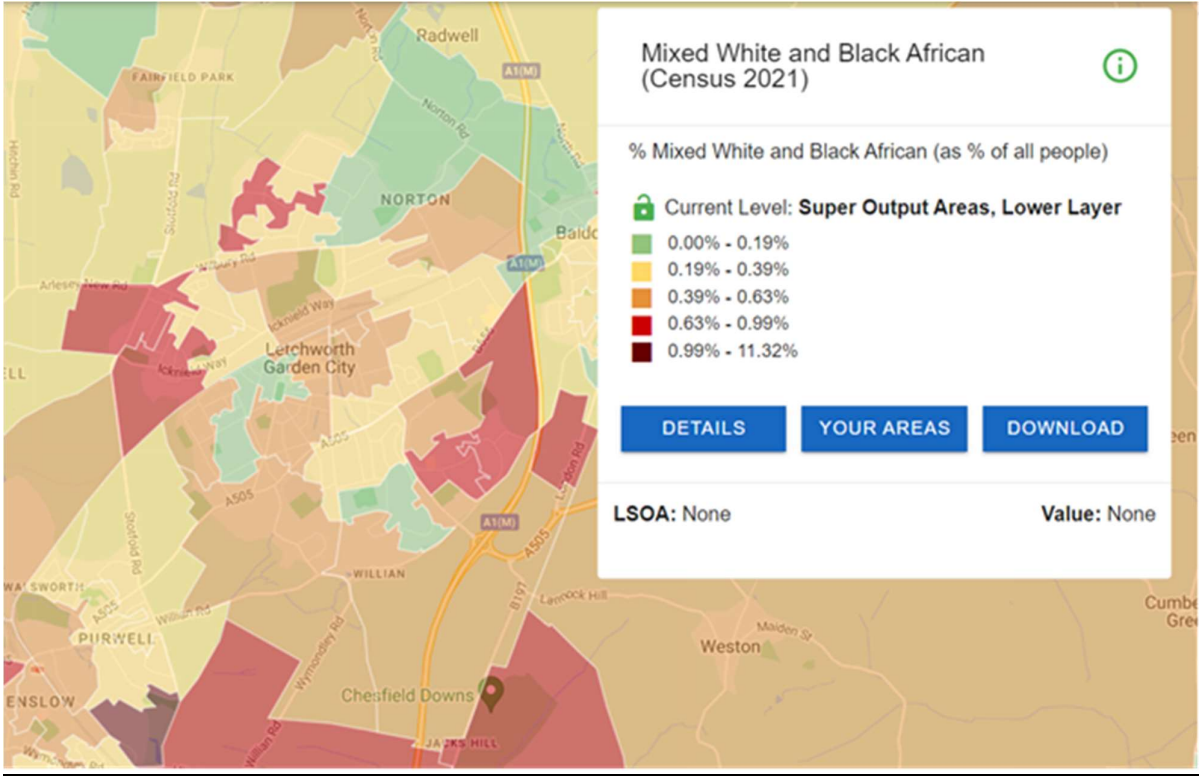


Letchworth's population (2)



Data from 'Local Insight' relating to different ethnic groups:





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What Next?...

Whilst the findings of the Collections Review have already begun shaping our future programming and development, this project will focus specifically on four key areas from the findings:

- 1 People with experience of socio-economic deprivation
- 2 People who have experienced, or whose families have experienced, migration
- 3 People with lived LGBTQ+ experience
- 4 People with lived experience of disability

The Community Curators strand will focus on areas 1 & 2, whilst we hope to recruit participants on our 'Young Curators' strand who can help us explore areas 3 & 4.

We will approach existing groups, as well as individuals, and work to find and engage with people from those key identified backgrounds in order to address the gaps in our collections, increase their representation in our archives and involve a wider range of participants in our future programming and activity, helping ensure we better reflect the town and its people.

Outputs

We will share the stories we uncover through a number of outputs:

- 1 Online - on the Uncovering Letchworth webpage, on our social media channels, on the Garden City Collection website
- 2 Physical – in displays in our micro museum (The Museum at One Garden City) throughout the project, in our Outdoor Museum in Spring/Summer 2025, in dedicated displays at the Broadway Gallery where possible, in future projects, and in special events celebrating the project and convening its participants

We recognize that we have finite resources for outputs in the project, so many of the relationships we build and stories we unearth will feed future funded projects and programmes, in 2025 and beyond.

We will also be working closely with the team developing Place Branding for Letchworth Garden City. One of their ambitions for the coming 12 months is to gather stories from people of Letchworth Garden City, and we will work with them to gather stories which help to meet our identified need for personal stories.



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Junior Curators

Working with Year 6 classes from two Letchworth schools, we are piloting a project called 'Marvellous Me', exploring students' background and identity, how they feel about Letchworth, and their hopes for the future, at this moment of transition in their lives before moving to 'secondary school, working with an artist-facilitator to help draw out their stories and feelings. We feel this will help capture a snapshot of this current younger generation, helping us make the focus of our collections better represent the town's current and future population.

The outputs from the Junior Curators strand - the students' work - were presented in a free special exhibition, '**Play Discover Share**', at the Broadway Gallery, in August 2024, alongside opportunities for visitors to share their stories and reflections on growing up in Letchworth Garden City throughout the eras we identified in the Collections Review.

The Junior Curators' work will soon also be displayed at The Museum at One Garden City, this Autumn

Young Curators

We will recruit four, local, 16-25 year olds from a range of different backgrounds, bringing a younger voice and fresh perspectives to our collection.

They will gain skills in collections care and video editing/production, before researching and co-producing responses around a proposed theme (TBC) drawing on items from the collection, contributions from the community, and their own personal reflections and experiences.

We will then share the videos across existing and new social media channels, with a physical event to 'premiere' the work.

We've attached an outline of all of these project strands in a timeline as an appendix to this report.

Get Involved - or Follow our Progress

Contribute to our work or keep up to date in the project by following us on Facebook, Instagram or on our dedicated webpage at www.discoverlethworth.com/uncovering-lethworth



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Appendix 2

'Uncovering Letchworth' Project Timeline

	Autumn 2023	Jan-24	Feb-24	Mar-24	Apr-24	May-24	Jun-24	Jul-24	Aug-24	Sep-24	Oct-24	Nov-24	Dec-24	Jan-25	Feb-25	Mar-25	Apr-25	May-25	Jun-25
Collections Review		Collections Review		Collections Review		Write Rep: Publish Report													
General Project	Recruitment of Post				Design Logo branding		Publically Launch Project												
Evaluation	Brief Evaluation consultant			Evaluation training			Evaluation check-in					Evaluation Check-in					Collate data	Write up Report	Publish Report
Junior Curators		Work with schools		Recruit Artist Facilitator	Planning in Schools	Sessions in Schools	Sessions in Schools	Sessions in Schools	Outputs on display at Broadway Gallery	Outputs on display at Broadway Gallery	Evaluation			Plan possible repeat with different schools					
Community Curators						Approach groups	Approach Groups	Meetings with Groups Scheduled public events	Meetings with Groups Public Events	Meetings with groups Public Events	Meetings with groups Pubic events	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups	Meetings with groups
								Consultation at Broadway Gallery	Consultation at Broadway Gallery				Publish outputs on social media	Publish outputs on social media	Publish outputs on social media	Publish outputs on social media	Publish outputs on social media	Publish outputs on social media	Publish outputs on social media
Young Curators												Plan activity	Recruit participants	Recruit participants	Weekly sessions Training in Film editing etc	Weekly sessions	Weekly sessions		Display outputs - Mus IGC
															Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation	Evaluation



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Appendix 3

Collections Review Database – see separate document



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