

North London LETS

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North London Local Exchange Trading Scheme
Neighbours exchanging goods and services without using money



At the Open Day on **Saturday 7th June 2008** we are planning to include a presentation about our website, featuring an extension to the Members Area, which is under development. The current facilities (which are accessible with ID “nllets” and password “pledges”) enable you to download minutes of MC meetings, but we now have a system available which will enable members to:

- **read the latest Announcements**
- **search the Offers & Wants Directory**
- **amend your Contact details**
- **update your own Directory entries**
- **send messages to other Members**
- **view your own and others' Balances**
- **view transactions over a given period**
- **instantly transfer Pledges online**

Members who are at the administrative level have additional access to enable them to manage the scheme from their own computers. The office team and the management committee are taking steps to familiarise themselves with what is on offer, and we want members to have the same opportunity, so that we can be sure before we start taking steps to transfer any data, that we are adopting the system which best meets the needs of NLETS members.

In addition to the presentation on **Sat 7th June**, the Intro Team (Henu, Woody & Mary) plan to run it from 6pm before the Intro Meetings on **Weds 9th April & 14th May**, at the start of the Committee Meeting on **Wed 7th May** and by arrangement at other times: 020-7607-7852. We are still trying to get a signal in the meeting room, failing which we will do screen shots, or repair to the office.

Moving Forward into the 21st Century

Update from the paper presented by Mary Fee at the AGM of North London LETS - on Sat 23 Feb 2008 at 1a Waterlow Road, London N19 5NJ

First of all, let me introduce myself: I became involved with LETS through PATHWAYS, the information service for Mind Body Spirit I have been running since 1988. I co-founded LETSlink London in 1993 and became a trustee of LETSlink UK, and since there was no funding, had to take over as co-ordinator in the year 2000 when the founder, Liz Shephard, retired due to ill-health. I have been managing the website of NLETS for some time, have upgraded the leaflets now available there as downloads from the Join page and have set up a members' area which currently allows you to download minutes of management committee meetings, once they have been cleared.

Keeping the national map and database updated on www.letslinkuk.net (which in itself could be a full-time job) means making phone calls to check the numbers, so I receive informal feedback from LETS groups all over the country, hearing something of their struggles. The press are always interested to write about LETS, and when new people call as a result of this publicity, they often ask “where do we log on?”

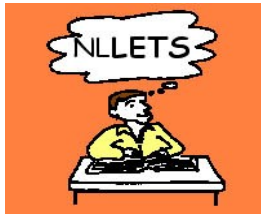
I joined North London LETS in the early nineties, when its founders, Bob and Francis, were still here, and have been aware of its progress over the years, seeing it develop from a tightly run “social enterprise”, to the democratically run organisation it is today. Since I became more involved, it has been painful to note the pre-occupation of the management committee and office team with mailing deadlines due to the paper-based system, with no time or energy left over for connecting with other groups in the community who might be able to benefit from pledges – the most we can manage is working out a rota for an event or stall. Some members are on email, but to reach all of you, messages can only go out in these mailings.

The most frequent request that LETSlink UK receives from groups is for software to help them run LETS. Francis Ayley was running such a system on an Amiga computer, which was still functioning when he left for the USA about 10 years ago. Some time after his departure, the Omega failed, as computers eventually do, and for about two years no balances were published. Through LETSlink, I was able to find an access-based system, NLETS bought a PC, and we installed it. Later it was customised to the needs of NLETS under the guidance of Woody and this system still functions on an ageing PC in the office.

However, NLETS is still a paper-based scheme. From the application and renewal forms the office team key your data into the computer. At mail-out time there is a flurry of activity to produce the new directory and membership list with balances, and get it all printed and in the post. Between mailings, members are in the dark about new people joining, and may not know each others' balances. This is the context in which a few members have over-stepped the mark in building up their commitment, not giving the equivalent in return.

Meanwhile, an international community of software designers has been working to produce dedicated web-based systems for LETS. When such a system is installed for a group, even if the committee continue to input data, as a minimum, members can log on and see the current directory of offers and wants, the state of the accounts, contact details of other members, and dates of forthcoming events, and send emails to each other, and to the administrators. The administrators (who have a higher level of access) can send messages to all the members, put up notices, and do other tasks. Members who wish to manage their own accounts can amend their own entries and do their own transactions, (ie making payment in LETS currency). Other systems are in the pipeline, but after a period of two solid years working on this with technically able assistants, two such web-based systems are now on offer.

One of the programmes we have available is called "Local Exchange" and you can see it, customised ready for use at <http://localexchange.org.uk/nll>



The original version was written for and has been used successfully by Fourth Corner Local Exchange, which is the group Francis Ayley founded in the USA. This system can manage a single currency (like Pledges) or Hours.

We have already installed one instance of this software for Norwich LETS (which was the first LETS in the UK, founded in 1985) and currently I am working with a new start-up in Liverpool, having been approached by a student at John Moore's University. Both of these have been hard work, doing it at a distance by phone and email, because we just don't have a travel budget.

This software looks like an ordinary website, but it has features which only become accessible when you log on. What is "behind the logon" we will be able to show you at one of these demo meetings. There is no real data in there yet so we can have fun enrolling micky-mouse members and doing pretend transactions.

The other software is called

MatsLETS and was commissioned by LETSlink to provide additional features useful for a city-wide system, ie managing a number of different currencies in parallel, one of which could be Pledges. This system is more adventurous because you have your own profile with your photo and mini-blurb. Groups and organisations as well as individuals can join, the directory displays geographically, members can post notices, and also selectively email certain groups eg all those who are offering gardening, etc. If the management group decides to go for the other system, NLETS could still engage with this one by applying for a group account – we will be inviting other LETS groups in London to do the same, to enable them connect with each other more easily. Individuals can also join independently <http://london.letslink.org>



NB LETSlink London is having a launch-event for London-wide LETS on Saturday 14th June 2008, and we have been awarded a Love-London prize in support, so look on the website for further details

Whichever system is chosen, your data will need to be transferred into the new database in one operation, and office staff will need to amend the new system only from then on - to avoid discrepancies and accounting errors. Before deciding whether to adopt either system (or not), office staff will want to satisfy themselves that they know how to output data for printed directories, and will also need to consider how it will affect their current work roles – I'm hoping it will free them up to think creatively about how to develop NLETS. We will also need to bring in a Buddy System to help members who need access or support. In the meantime pledge cheques can still be dealt with by office staff continuing to update members' accounts as they do at present. Individual members who request access to their own accounts will receive their own password by email, and you should guard this carefully just like any other password you use on the internet.

Your feedback, whether or not you have been able to attend a demonstration of these systems will help the management committee decide whether or which of them to adopt. As a minimum please just write to Henu, the Chairperson, with your email address so that we can keep you informed: northlondonlets@gmail.com

Looking forward

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