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**DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**13 JANUARY 2021**

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Present:

**MEMBERS:**

Douris (Mayor), Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Arslan, Banks, Barrett, Barry, Bassadone, Beauchamp, Bhinder, Birnie, Chapman, Cloughton, Durrant, Elliot, England, Freedman, Griffiths, Guest, Hearn, Hobson, Hollinghurst, Johnson, Maddern, Sobaan Mahmood, Suqlain Mahmood, McDowell, Peter, Pringle, Ransley, Riddick (Deputy Mayor), Rogers, Silwal, Sinha, Stevens, G Sutton, R Sutton, Symington, Taylor, Timmis, Tindall, Townsend, Uttley, Williams, Woolner and Wyatt-Lowe (47)

**OFFICERS:**

The Chief Executive, Corporate Director (Finance and Operations), Corporate Director (Housing and Regeneration), Assistant Director (Corporate and Contracted Services), Group Manager (Legal & Corporate Services), C O'Neil (Corporate and Democratic Support Team Leader) and T Angel (Minutes).

The meeting began at 6.30 pm

**1 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 18 November 2020 were agreed by the members present and will be signed by the Mayor at the next available opportunity.

**2 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest.

**3 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Questions from Graham Bright (Grove Fields Residents Association) to Councillor G Sutton:

Q1: "There was a lockdown when DBC voted to commence the public consultation and there is currently a lockdown. This alone is a good enough reason to postpone or at the very least extend the end date of the public consultation until a date when the lockdown is lifted and the public can properly engage with the consultation. There is a complete lack of awareness in Tring that there is an ongoing public consultation. I have not received anything through my door about how to engage with the consultation. There are many people in Tring who are now shielding, and engaging

with the consultation does not fit within the government's definition of 'essential travel', therefore, the only way to engage is online. Many members of the public in Tring do not have access to the devices, Wi-Fi or the technical know-how to engage online. The current date of the 7th February, does not allow enough time for a fair or equitable access to the public consultation and DBC is opening itself up to judicial challenge.

In addition, on the 16 December the government published its response to the local housing need proposals on the consultation on changes to the current planning system. This sets out important changes to the standard method which has been amended so that the 20 most populated cities and urban centres in England (none of which are in Dacorum) see their need uplifted by 35%.

Government also said "More broadly, we heard suggestions in the consultation that in some places the numbers produced by the standard method pose a risk to protected landscapes and Green Belt. We (Government) should be clear that meeting housing need is never a reason to cause unacceptable harm to such places." and they went on to say "Within the current planning system the standard method does not present a 'target' in plan-making, but instead provides a starting point for determining the level of need for the area, and it is only after consideration of this, alongside what constraints areas face, such as the Green Belt, and the land that is actually available for development, that the decision on how many homes should be planned for is made. It does not override other planning policies, including the protections set out in Paragraph 11b of the NPPF or our strong protections for the Green Belt.

Therefore, there is no logic why DBC should slavishly pursue a plan to build on so much green belt when they should develop a plan based upon 'need' rather than using the standard method figure as a target that must be achieved at all costs.

Therefore my question is, can DBC either:

1. *Extend the end date of the public consultation until 10 weeks after the current lockdown, or*
2. *Cancel the public consultation and rewrite the plan in line with the latest central Government guidance?"*

Response: The Council took the decision to extend the consultation to extend the current consultation from the statutory 6 weeks to 10 weeks in recognition that residents may need more time to review and respond to the consultation. The Council has also put in place an extensive publicity campaign to notify residents of the Local Plan consultation. This included:

1. an article in the Dacorum Digest (63,000 copies)
2. the digital digest (11,400 subscribers)
3. newspaper articles – public notice in the Hemel Hempstead Gazette and Online Hemel Today
4. a mail-out to those on the Council's Local Plan database

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5. a permanent virtual exhibition where residents could view documents and leave a message for officers
6. a local plan video explaining the consultation
7. making arrangements for residents to access the documents (by appointment) at the Forum and to loan documents from Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring library
8. Printed copies of the documents to all town and parish councils.

As at 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 there have been a total of 14,185 hits on the Local Plan website since the start of the consultation. There have been 1,862 individual users access the virtual exhibition viewing a total of 20,295 items.

Officers have only received a very small number of enquiries from residents asking for further assistance in accessing the documents. At the time of writing no requests have been made for paper copies of the documents to be provided and no resident has complained that they have been unable to view a document.

In view of the announcement of national lockdown recently, we will now extend the consultation to close on 28 February 2021 to provide an additional three weeks to the already extended period.

Turning to your specific questions:

1. It is not clear when the current 'lockdown' restrictions will ease and what this will be replaced but. However, it is expected that restrictions will remain in place for some time. As such, the Council does not consider it practical to extend the consultation by an indeterminate period of time. The Council has previously extended this consultation to ten weeks which is significantly more than the statutory 6 weeks required by the Local Plan regulations. However, we do recognise that the recently imposed Lockdown places further restrictions on movement and so the Council proposes to extend the consultation to midnight on 28 February 2021. This would be more than double the required consultation period.
2. The current consultation is under regulation 18 of the Local Plan Regulations. This is still a relatively early part of the plan making process. Moreover, this is the first opportunity in 3 years that residents have had an opportunity to have their say on the Local Plan, particularly on the proposed level of growth and sites; all of which will be very useful feedback for Officers. Once the consultation closes we will carefully consider the points made, together with any changes to Government Guidance, before considering what changes to make to the Plan.

Q2: "Whilst it is good that a large amount of communication has gone out and only a small number of people have contacted DBC to ask about how to access the information, my concern is that there is still a lack of awareness of the public consultation in Tring. Would DBC consider implementing a mailshot to all households in Tring to raise awareness?"

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Response: From the number of hits the website has had so far it appears we're reaching quite a reasonable proportion. We're discussing this with our communications team at the moment and we will be pushing out more information regarding the Local Plan in the coming weeks. I will make a point of mentioning Tring residents in case there are specific issues in that area.

#### **4 ANNOUNCEMENTS**

##### **4.1 By the Mayor:**

None.

##### **4.2 By the Chief Executive:**

None.

##### **4.3 By the Group Leaders:**

Councillor Williams gave apologies on behalf of Councillors Imarni and Oguchi.

Councillor Tindall gave apologies on behalf of Councillor Link.

##### **4.4 Council Leader and Members of the Cabinet:**

###### **Councillor Williams, Leader of the Council**

The Leader presented his update as follows:

Since the last meeting in November I think national news has been dominated by two particular items; one obviously being Covid, being primarily the one that's on most people's minds and prior to the start of the new year to cut the country's position and negotiations around Brexit.

Locally there has been discussion around the local plan but I think it's being covered in other parts of this evening's agendas so I wanted to take this opportunity to update members and colleagues on some of the actions the councils taking in relation to dealing with issues in the last few weeks as the Covid situation has worsened both locally and nationally. My report was drafted a couple of days ago but up to then we had a total of 5854 cases of confirmed Covid within Dacorum with 703 on those occurring in the last seven days between 1<sup>st</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> January. Because it takes time for tests to be processed the figures for the more recent days are provisional, the indication is that the test figures are proving to be relatively high. We know both locally and nationally that some of the significant areas of infection are schools and supermarkets, and locally we've had a significant outbreak at The Mount prison which have been recorded and Hertfordshire Public Health have been carrying out testing there in order to determine the number of people who are actually infected there and to help the prison service with isolating and dealing with those issues. More locally I just want to run through some of the aspects of the council's response and our involvement with assisting other colleagues in dealing with issues as they arise. The council is fully involved with our IMT (incident management team) in dealing with issues locally. We are represented on various tactical meetings across the county so we are aware of issues as they're arising. The councils track and trace service is due to be up and running by the 18<sup>th</sup> January and we have recruited two of the three staff

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members required to run this service locally. Colleagues won't be surprised to hear that one of the main areas of pressure within the council is on our Environmental Health staff who have been taking on and dealing with a significant workload in relation to enforcing various Covid restrictions, visiting supermarkets and other outlets to ensure that we are Covid compliant of mask wearing and rules are being enforced. I'm pleased to say the results to date have been encouraging with higher levels of compliance, and there will be a rolling programme of enforcement visits to supermarkets which I know have attracted some comments about issues around people wearing masks and social distancing etc.

We have managed to and continue to run a complete waste collection service over the Christmas and New Year period with Covid secure arrangements in place and I am pleased to say we've not had any issues with the service there.

We worked closely with the Police and County Council to support the serving of a closure notice under the Covid regulations on Bovington Market and I'm pleased to say that the market has confirmed they will not be reopening their operations while lockdown is in place and as such, HCC has no need to continue with its weekly order.

We have received government funding through HCC to employ six Covid advisors to support our Environmental Health officers. These employees will be out and about in the borough checking supermarkets and public spaces and speaking to members of the public. HCC Covid Marshalls were also deployed in parts of the borough over Christmas.

Following the national lockdown announcement and the continuing call to work from home, we have further reduced the presence of staff in the office to essential workers only. We adopted a more flexible approach to those working at home to help them manage the balance between work and childcare arrangements.

We continue to provide a comprehensive communications programme across all channels working with external and internal stakeholders. From November last year we've increased the digital Digest which has around 11,000 subscribers from a monthly to a weekly publication, alongside the day to day national and county wide campaigns.

We're as you would expect committed to supporting our staff for their health and wellbeing during these challenging times. We have conducted two organisation wide health and wellbeing surveys over the last five months, with the results informing our approach and programme of staff health and wellbeing support. The support content includes our employment assistance programme and the comprehensive support package for occupational health providers which provides staff with free webinars, videos, support and guidance on a wide variety of topics. We're also looking in these challenging times to see if we can free up capacity to support our NHS colleagues as they roll out vaccination centres across Hertfordshire. Although of course you wouldn't expect us to have medically trained staff, we may be able to offer administration support.

Finally on the Covid situation, we have entered into a supply chain arrangement with local hotels as a backup should we need to rehouse significant numbers of residents in a Covid secure environment following any particular incidents or significant outbreaks within the borough.

With regards to Brexit, I am pleased to say that our IMT have reviewed our risk register and many of the risks have fallen away or been reduced as a result of the

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agreement being reached on the final day of negotiations. The effects of Brexit locally have not been significant and have been well managed.

Questions:

Councillor Hollinghurst commented that toward end of discussion about housing numbers and the Local Plan at the previous meeting, the Leader warned all Councillors that developers were taking the opportunity to put forward additional sites and went on to say we must be careful not to upset developers. The Councillor asked the leader; what exactly did you mean by that?

Councillor Williams responded that he did not recall his comments being in that vein, going on to clarify that there will be developers that put forward sites that are not in the plan, as has been the case in recent week. The Leader commented that he not know what context Councillor Hollinghurst would be suggesting the comments would be intended?

Councillor Hollinghurst responded with his gratitude for the reply and reassurance of the meaning of the comments. He then referred to a site between Berkhamsted & Boxmoor owned by Thakeham Homes and asked; can the Leader tell us, is this the same Thakeham Homes that Between May 2017 and May 2020 contributed considerable sums of money to the Conservative Group?

Councillor Williams responded that it may well be, but commented that he has no idea why that would have any relevance to Dacorum Borough Council or the Local Plan.

Councillor Tindall apologised for not having notified this question in advance and advised he would be happy to take a written response. He said the Parliaments public accounts committee has criticised the department for culture, media and sport for failing to make any meaningful progress in delivering on the promise of the full fibre broadband target rollout to 2025. Does the Leader know of any areas in Dacorum that are likely to suffer under the failure of the government to keep to their promise?

Councillor Williams responded to advise that due to the technical nature of the question he will need to take some advice to ensure he responds correctly.

The Mayor reminded Portfolio Holders that when a written response is offered, those should be provided promptly and in future those answers will be included in Council minutes.

There were no further questions.

### **Councillor Banks, Portfolio Holder for Community and Regulatory Services**

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

#### **Regulatory services**

I agree with the Leaders opening comments, Environmental Health Team are working in close partnership with the Local Resilience Forum Partners have continued to advise businesses, inspect for COVID secure compliance and respond to residents' queries throughout the pandemic.

And wherever possible it is business as usual, the Environmental Enforcement Team continues with pest control, animal welfare, environmental crime, fly tipping, filthy and verminous premises and more.

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- A RIPA (Regulation of Investigatory Powers Act) Authorisation has been approved for covert surveillance of fly-tipping hot spot areas. Officers from the Environmental Enforcement Team continue to visit Fly-tips and gather evidence for enforcement action such as Fixed Penalty Notices (9 in Dec) and Prosecutions. December we have recorded 97 fly-tipping inspections/removals
- An Animal Welfare Act warrant was executed on 21st December resulting in 4 dogs being removed from a property. An investigation has now commenced with a view to possible prosecution. This will be a lengthy and complex process as there are also concerns regarding Public Health offences so work will commence in January to start a clear up on the property. Work has started to find fosterers for the dogs.
- 2 CPWs have been issued relating to dogs being walked off lead and chasing walkers/runners.
- Abandoned vehicles, 106 in December, 2 vehicles have been removed and destroyed. Can I remind Members and Residents abandoned vehicles can be reported via the DBC website, simply type 'abandoned vehicles' into the search bar and you will be directed to the report page.
- I am pleased to report Officers met with Herts police and Boxmoor Trust several times regarding the on-going issues relating to livestock worrying. A multiagency approach was agreed. Since that meeting, two possible suspects have been identified. One suspect has been interviewed and the police are now considering next steps. A second suspect was identified and a CPW was served by Officers
- In November, the Trust, Herts Police and DBC met again to discuss proactive patrols on the land which falls under DBC PSPO. Sometime over the coming weeks, Police will be looking to carry out patrols including using a drone and have asked DBC to attend. Proactive working with Boxmoor Trust is continuing.

Turning to People and Communities Group Services

### **Hertfordshire Year of Culture 2020**

A compilation film is being made featuring many of the Year of Culture activities that took place in Dacorum during 2020, which I hope to present at the next Council meeting. .

The main HYOC2020 Celebration Event will take place on 2nd March, which will mark the official end of the campaign. This will focus on the positive contribution of creativity during 2020, including feedback from the Health and Wellbeing Evaluation. There will

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also be a Reflection Event for the key partners to consider how HYOC2020 has met its aims and objectives and what the future for collective action is within Hertfordshire.

I am so proud of the way Officers here and partners delivered in light of COVID I would just like to note a few highlights from the final quarter of 2020:-

### **Virtual Fun Palace 2020**

There were over 1500 engagements on our Facebook event page during the promotion of the event, the videos and workshops had nearly 400 engagements over the Fun Palace weekend and have received further views since.

### **#TAG Intergenerational Community Dance Project**

There were 221 Dacorum online participants from an overall total of 660

### **Dacorum Stories Film Project**

We have maintained a good external presence in around Hemel town centre during 2020. There has been screenings of several community films on the digital screen and the on-going art exhibition in The Marlowes Centre.

This Administration will continue to build on the partnerships created and explore funding opportunities for creative and cultural projects that support both the community and the cultural sector through COVID and beyond.

Questions:

Councillor Tindall advised that he has received reports that individuals are being threatened with prosecution of fly tipping because they are leaving bags of materials at the bring sites around the Borough. He commented that it would appear the bins are either not appropriate for the site or are not emptied frequently enough and asked that Regulatory Services speak to Clean, Safe & Green to find the reasons for supposed fly tipping before they try prosecuting residents who are trying to use the bring sites to responsibly recycle.

The Portfolio Holder responded that she agrees the bring sites have been used beyond their capacity and reminded Councillors that the bins have a pull down hatch in which to put items, to keep out rats and bad weather. Each bring site is clearly labelled and signed that if you leave bags outside those bins they will be considered as fly tipped. Once those abandoned clothes have got damp, wet or spoiled they are no longer suitable for recycling. It is an endless cycle of all good intentions being badly received if items cannot be recycled due to damage.

Councillor Tindall responded that he recognises those comments but asked the Portfolio Holder to consider that the failure of the sites to be in a usable state is not necessarily a cause for prosecution and if a regulatory authority see this is happening they should investigate why.

Councillor Banks accepted the point that Councillor Tindall raised.

Councillor Pringle thanked the Portfolio Holder and referenced the proposal to use private contractors to enforce public space notices, meaning they will be able to issue

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fixed penalty notices against our residents and retain the income from those notices. Does the Portfolio Holder foresee an increase in the issue of these notices due to overzealous use of those powers?

Councillor Banks responded that she is curious to see the outcome of the pilot which will either confirm Councillor Pringles fears or it will reassure residents and Members that we are taking our public space orders seriously.

Councillor Pringle thanked the Portfolio Holder and asked, does the fact we are having to consider the route of private enforcement indicate that historically we have failed to encourage a change of behaviour because we have failed to invest properly in our own enforcement and encouragement methods?

Councillor Banks responded that her personal view is that indeed it could be seen as a failure that we have not managed to encourage our residents sufficiently and that she welcomes the outcome of the pilot to see that.

Councillor Williams addressed the Portfolio Holder, following on from Councillor Tindall's question, and asked; would you agree that whilst we would not want to prosecute those who are trying to use the bring sites inappropriately, we would want to prosecute those that are leaving items that are not suitable for the bring sites.

Councillor Banks agreed.

Councillor England asked the Portfolio Holder; does she agree that if seriously contemplated, the example given of Bedford promises that we can see a huge rise in enforcement events, and if so, is Bedford currently seeing too many fixed penalty notices, or has Decorum's enforcement rate been too low? Adding, is there any evidence this changes behaviour to reduce enforcement action in future?

Councillor Banks confirmed the whole idea of bringing forward a pilot will answer those questions but at this time she is not able to comment further without seeing those outcomes.

Councillor England asked, do you not agree that rather than using our residents as guinea pigs to find out something and using Bedford that has a completely different profile to Dacorum, that we should look at whether there are any other examples we can compare with, rather than carrying out a pilot.

Councillor Banks responded that although she is familiar with the Bedford model, it is not the only one out there and there will be other examples which she will happily provide as a separate response.

There were no further questions.

### **Councillor G Sutton, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Infrastructure**

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

#### **Payments of the new Additional Restrictions Grant (ARG)**

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The Economic Development team working with the finance service have now administered and paid over 200 claims for small businesses totalling over £400k.

Each application is verified by the team before processing for payment to make sure that the funding is going to help the right businesses.

This initial round of funding closed on January 4<sup>th</sup> but has now been reopened with some more targeted publicity to ensure as many as possible of our eligible businesses are able to claim.

This grant sits alongside other grants available to business and there is a lot of work happening to make sure that businesses are being signposted to the right source of support wherever possible.

### **Local Plan Consultation Update – figures as of 12 January**

#### 1. Responses to date –

We have had 183 representations submitted to date, the majority of which have been online. Experience from previous consultations consistently shows that most comments are made and received in the final 2 weeks of the consultation period

#### 2. Numbers on website/virtual exhibition visits/hits –

There have been a total of 14,185 hits on the Local Plan page from 27<sup>th</sup> November 2020 to 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021. There have been 1,862 users access the on the virtual exhibition hosted by AECOM, accessing it 2,083 times and viewing a total of 20,295 items (such as supporting documents, exhibition boards, video content within the virtual exhibition)

#### 3. The consultation deadline

The consultation was agreed to run to 7 February 2021, offering a ten week period (noting the statutory minimum is six weeks); in view of the current lockdown situation and to provide further opportunities for people to engage, we will now extend this to midnight on 28 February – thus providing a thirteen week period in all

#### 4. Obtaining a paper copy of the Plan

We are of course encouraging residents to make use of the very extensive resources we have placed online

We have prepared a short and illustrated summary document explaining the Plan and we will provide it free of charge in paper form should this be required – this document is of course available online

The full version of the Plan – itself a very weighty document - can be provided in paper form at a charge of £30 (this is heavily discounted from the unit cost) – but again this is all available free of charge online

Requests for paper copies of the summary document and full plan can be made to [Strategic.planning@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:Strategic.planning@dacorum.gov.uk) or in writing at the Forum's postal address

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5. How are we responding to recent Government announcements on housing need?

The current Local Plan consultation includes an annual housing requirement of 922. This figure was taken from changes to the methodology that Government consulted on in August 2020. Following that consultation Government has announced that it does not intend to alter the way housing numbers are calculated for places like Dacorum;

We now revert to the current housing method as set by Government and as such the figure for Dacorum has increased to 1,023 new homes per annum. Our Local Plan is of course in draft only and given that we last consulted with the public in late 2017, it is important that we continue the current consultation to gain views on its proposals and policies

Following the end of the current consultation, the Council will need to consider all representations made and the changed position on housing numbers before taking further decisions on the next stages of the Local Plan process.

Questions:

Councillor Ransley addressed the Portfolio Holder and expressed she is pleased to hear information is available in other places but advised that during lockdown the libraries are closed and as such the only way you can view the consultation is by computer and it is those without a computer who are struggling. Also, if a copy is to be borrowed from Tring Town Council, how do we maintain safety if more than one person wants to look at it?

Councillor Sutton advised he would look into the H&S considerations of loaning paperwork. He referred to the broadcasting of information and advised that we will be trying to push this more thoroughly in the coming days and weeks but unfortunately we are in unprecedented times so we will have to cope as best we can.

Councillor Ransley asked that the Portfolio Holder talks to officers about how the information might be sent to the general public without computer use.

Councillor Sutton confirmed he would.

Councillor Birnie asked the Portfolio Holder to confirm that this is a draft Local Plan, and at the second stage, that is after any necessary amendments made in light of this consultation, that the public will be given a further opportunity to comment on what will be the final draft.

The Portfolio Holder responded that yes that is the case. This is the very early stage of the process which is compulsory under Regulation 18 but there is still some way to go before this reaches publication stage. There are also Task & Finish Groups held in the run up to Regulation 18 and these will continue so it will give Members every opportunity to express their view at these meetings.

Councillor England asked the Portfolio Holder, are you aware that Councillor Uttley and myself have been discussing and promoting the Local Plan on the Lib Dem website and also on various local Facebook sites with a minimum of 10 posts discussing various elements of the plan and asked; is he aware of any other bodies doing such promoting?

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Councillor Sutton responded that he was not aware that the Lib Dems were carrying out that promotion and he commented that he is aware that there will be lots of people out there making comments, often uninformed.

Councillor England asked, are you aware that Google Analytics can produce a report on what channels are producing input to the consultation, asking the Portfolio Holder, would you ask officers to generate a report on how the consultation is receiving such feedback?

Councillor Sutton confirmed he would speak to officers and seek a written response.

Councillor Pringle referred to the excluded groups and asked, is Councillor Sutton aware that residents have written in and have asked for hard copies of the documents as they are not able to access the electronic copies. Those people have been advised they would have to pay £30 each if they wished to receive a copy?

Councillor Sutton responded that yes, he is aware as set out in his update. It is a very large document running into several hundreds of pages and would carry high costs to distribute widely.

Councillor Pringle stated, it seems evident that entire groups of people, namely those who are shielding and those who do not have access to ICT, will not have access to this consultation given it closes on 28<sup>th</sup> February and it would be irresponsible to the public health of our residents to suggest that anyone vulnerable should be asked to visit libraries' etc.

Councillor Sutton responded that he respects Councillor Pringles views and agreed that the public's health is paramount. He advised that he is working with Communications and a shorter paper version is to be created, but how that is to be distributed is yet to be seen. He further commented that there is still a remaining 6 to 7 weeks left of consultation which is longer than a usual consultation.

Councillor Rogers asked the Portfolio Holder; with the recent increase in housing numbers by 1032, would the Portfolio Holder agree that Dacorum Borough Council should be vigorously challenging and not accepting figures?

The Mayor advised that time was up therefore the Portfolio Holder will not be in a position to respond. However the Mayor sought clarification that the figure referred to by Councillor Rogers be checked against the number reported by Councillor Sutton. Councillor Sutton confirmed that 1023, as his update, is the correct figure.

### **Councillor Elliot, Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources**

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

#### **Financial Services**

Financial Services continues to lead on the financial reporting and monitoring requirements arising from the coronavirus pandemic to ensure the Council secures the pandemic –related

Government funding it is eligible for.

The service is also supporting the payment of national Covid-19 Business grants and test and trace support payments, to ensure funds are distributed promptly and accurately.

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Alongside the monitoring of the current financial position, budget setting for 2021/22 is the team's current focus, ahead of seeking formal approval of this budget from Council in February.

The role of the accounts receivable service in the collection of debt is becoming more challenging as the pandemic continues. The service is working incredibly hard with our partners to find short and medium term solutions that support the local business economy.

### **Commercial Assets and Property Development.**

The Commercial Assets service is busy liaising, and working in partnership with existing tenants through this difficult financial period, to ensure we support the local economy where possible. The uncertain market conditions brought about by Covid require a flexible and fluid approach to asset management and the service have, and will continue to liaise, with tenants in a positive manner.

The Building services team are continuing to liaise with Health partners and the County Council to support the Covid response in regards to assets and locations for vaccination and testing. This process will be ongoing over the coming weeks and months with different facilities required at different times. The service also continues to maintain the council assets through this period of closure so that when a point in the near future arises that council premises can be open without delay.

### **Revenues and Benefits service.**

The revenues & benefits team continue to respond to government announcements in regards to business grants, test and trace support payments and business rates relief.

The last 2 months since the end of the November lockdown, to the present lockdown has seen unprecedented change in government business grants. The process of interpreting government policy and implementing these policies has kept the service incredible busy.

During December and into early January the service have been implementing and processing 5 different Covid related Business Grants and continued to process the Covid Test and trace support payments to ensure the council continues to support the local residents and businesses as part of the response to the pandemic.

At present the council is waiting for funding allocations and government guidance on last weeks announced government lockdown grants and top up grants. Once these details are received the service will work proactively to implement the policy and process these grants with immediate effect.

Questions:

Councillor Tindall asked the Portfolio Holder; given that Local Government audit is currently under consideration by government – did Dacorum Borough Council take part in consultation and if so what was that input?

The Portfolio Holder responded that he would have to provide a written answer.

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Councillor Beauchamp referred to Council Tax collections and asked; can you give members some indication on how these collections have compared to the previous year in light of the current situation.

The PH responded that the year on year collection of Council Tax is 1.8% down on last year and commented this is not too bad a result given the current circumstances.

There were no further questions.

### **Councillor Griffiths, Portfolio Holder for Housing**

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

#### **TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SERVICES**

- Rent arrears reduced in December following the 2 weeks where rent was not applied. This gave chance for some tenants to catch up with payments and very pleased that arrears were only 19% higher than this time last year, which is excellent considering the current pressures. We will continue to support tenants over the coming weeks as very aware of the potential impact on rent arrears with the new lockdown.
- The Supported Housing team are continuing to focus on regular phone contact with tenants who don't have family or support networks and linking with partners like Age UK to ensure they have regular contact.
- The enhanced cleaning in Sheltered schemes has been reinstated in light of the lockdown, with an antibacterial sterilising machine also being deployed to assist with reducing infection risk.
- ASB cases and reports have started to increase again following the recent lockdown. Staff obtained a Closure order for a property in November following effective partnership working with the Police and we will continue to take appropriate action to protect residents over the coming weeks with courts still open for these and other appropriate interventions.

#### **STRATEGIC HOUSING**

- Additional £119k funding obtained to provide support to vulnerable homeless households during the pandemic and rising service costs, support includes access to medical care and meals.
- New relationship/Service Level Agreement & nomination agreement implemented for new build site at Icknield Way, Tring, with Legal & General.
- Severe Cold Weather protocol operational, additional funding obtained to install pods at the Elms Hostel (pods install 11/1/2021)

#### **PROPERTY AND PLACE**

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- The current restrictions and wider implications of the pandemic, with increased levels of infection are continuing to put significant pressure on all work streams within Property and Place. Staff are now predominantly working from home with only essential inspections and surveys carried out to ensure service delivery.
- All maintenance activities being undertaken are continually being reviewed from a health and safety perspective to ensure safe systems of work are in operation in accordance with Government guidelines. We are continually working with our supply chain to ensure our risk and method statements are appropriate for the work activities ensuring residents safety at all times.
- Statutory and cyclical compliance works are continuing, with good performance against the targets to ensure residents safety within their homes.
- The current scope of works being undertaken in terms of maintenance and refurbishment haven't changed with the continued suspension of non-essential internal Planned Works. However some further Planned Work activities in Supported Housing Schemes have also been suspended to help protect some of our most vulnerable residents in their home.

## HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

Martindale	Practical completion achieved 21/10/20, all social units allocated. 15 market sale units completed. 5 market sales units under offer. 1 more property to sell.
St Margaret's Way	Resident newsletter issued. Attending the Community Review Panel on 11 <sup>th</sup> Feb to present scheme. Planning a further detailed consultation with the local residents.
Paradise Fields	Planning Application approved subject to agreement on some Ecology matters.
Bingham Mews	Progressing well on site. Completion due this month
Eastwick Row	Starting on site in April but with some enabling works taking place Jan / Feb. Local residents have been informed.
Coniston Road	Starting on site in March but with some enabling works taking place Jan / Feb. Local residents have been informed.
Wilstone	Planning Application submitted. Seeking Cabinet approval 19 <sup>th</sup> Jan to appropriate the land from General Fund to HRA .
Bulbourne	Progressing design. Site purchase still with Tring Town.
LA1	Design completed to stage 1. Revised brief received to accommodate access road for Homes England site.
Cherry Bounce	Architect and Employers Agent appointed, project commencement meeting held.
Paradise Depot	Revised brief issued regarding DENS building requirements and meeting set up to brief the professional team.
Garage Sites	6 No Planning applications have been submitted. Seeking Cabinet approval 19 <sup>th</sup> Jan to appropriate the land from General Fund to HRA .
Randall's Ride	Planning application has been submitted. Seeking Cabinet approval 19 <sup>th</sup> Jan to appropriate the land from General Fund to HRA .

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Questions:

Councillor Barry asked the Portfolio Holder; when will regular cleaning schedules for non-supported housing sites will resume?

Councillor Griffiths responded that she does not have the schedules to hand and will have to come back with a written answer.

There were no further questions.

### **Councillor Williams, Portfolio Holder for Corporate and Contracted Services**

The Portfolio Holder said he had nothing in particular to report but was happy to take questions.

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder.

### **Councillor Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services**

Councillor Anderson paid tribute to the hard work of refuse staff to keep services running during the current situation.

He then gave his update as follows:

Refuse:

Thanks to a lot of effort from management and because a lot of our temporary staff have been with us for a few months now and gaining some familiarity, I am pleased to report that the number of missed collections has been falling so we've had less issues over that.

The team are supporting the County wide Covid testing which is being carried out at schools. It is being spearheaded by Welwyn Hatfield District Council and all but two of the Districts in the County are taking part in this major exercise. In our case it involves having to remove the rubbish after the testing has been done.

Officers will be reporting to the next SPAE OSC about the £1million overspend we've had in the service and going into detail in terms of additional staff and trucks that have been required.

I'm pleased to report that the Christmas collection arrangements appear to have worked well and the backlog has all been cleared. We're now back to normal dates which is good.

I have been asked about disposable face coverings being littered by members of the public. Could I urge all members, especially those that have been concerned by the issue, to spread the message on the website to advise members of the public to please dispose of disposal face coverings in the grey bin and not on the road side.

Outside facilities, skateboard and cycle ramps etc. have been closed as of yesterday. I haven't been updated yet but I am waiting to find out if the government guidance

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requires us to close the playgrounds which I suspect is something we're ready to do if we have to.

New developments:

Officers at Cupid Green have completed the first phase of work in conjunction with planning officers to identify our environmental requirements for new developments, for example, ensuring that developers provide the refuse facilities that are required and we've got some guidelines about the open spaces, everything from park benches to litter bins, all sorted in the hope to prevent problems occurring after the developments have been built.

Finally, I did send an email a couple of weeks ago about the issue with the bring sites. We have been working with the council's contractors to try and resolve the issues so that we can reduce the problem of fly tipping. We are putting the signage up now to warn people that they are fly tipping if they leave stuff by them. I don't want members to go away feeling that we are not doing anything about it and trying to prosecute people for fly tipping.

Questions:

Councillor Tindall addressed the Portfolio Holder, expressing that he would be grateful if he could associate himself and the Lib Dem Group with the thanks to all the operatives in Waste Services, further commenting that the continued work on our behalf is to be much appreciated.

Councillor Anderson confirmed he would pass that thanks on.

Councillor Symington addressed the Portfolio Holder in respect of the collection of clothes recycling from Tring and with reference to Councillor Williams comments to large items being dumped at bring sites. The Councillor commented that she believes this is as a result of many people being unable to recycle things due to charity shops being closes. Asking; could we turn around the problem and look for solutions as a Council, in recognition that charity shops will not be open and we want to avoid people just throwing items away.

Councillor Anderson responded that the Council is already doing that, along with talking to contractors to improve collections and resolve the issues.

Councillor Symington responded by asking; how can you justify saying we are doing all we can do, could we not be signposting people more about how they could recycle other items such as furniture?

Councillor Anderson reiterated her belief the Council is already doing that.

Councillor Beauchamp asked the Portfolio Holder; would you agree the work undertaken to restore the white bridge in Gadebridge to its former glory is a triumph for Hemel?

Councillor Anderson agreed and added credit to his predecessor Councillor Janice Marshall.

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There were no further questions.

## **5 MOTION**

Councillor England proposed the motion constructively and having discussed it with Councillor Williams he welcomed a measure of consensus alongside the sometimes different creativity of their wider debates. This council can make clear its commitment to existing Borough residents and voters who are on the housing register or will need to be during the next 18 years. This 16,000 homes or a rationalised locally justified version of that number, if we get that far, is a one off opportunity to build social homes and bring on Dacorum progress through balance and stability of having proper housing for people. This number is large and he doesn't think this opportunity will come again. He was particularly uncomfortable with the local planning consultation being a bit blank on this quantifiable as a component of the overall number, and was as impatient as everyone to see a significant step up in gearing local housing towards reducing overcrowding. He knew that there was some similar feelings on the Conservative side as well, and accepted the difficulty that members will have with making an ambitious commitment such as is actually in the motion without first seeing the financial plan. That was the reason for point 6 which was to create a financial plan so that when we complete our local plan we're talking about something deliverable. Obviously there was the possibility of an amendment which may deal with that in a different way.

He said the town of Hemel in particular has a great history in social housing for people and we should all be proud of that. He commended the officer's work which has gone into this strategy and he brought this motion as a constructive contribution because he felt it was important to have a quantifiable goal of producing more social housing at an expanded level from what we're doing at the moment.

After working through the consultation information to try and help signpost various residents and encourage them to follow through and make a comment it became apparent that the evidence of progress to the crucial goal of supporting health, wellbeing and cohesion of the community, which he saw as the most important goal of all, is that must depend on being able to say by what extent the overcrowding and mismatched housing circumstances of thousands of current residents, how that would be sought. A lot of homes are going to be built and what he was saying was if we go through this and don't build enough social housing, we would have created an unsolvable problem for ourselves. There is a need to define what we mean by affordable and he was gratified that this aspect of the consultation was likely to receive some study as a product of perhaps an amendment. The South West Herts local housing needs assessment say that Dacorum needs 363 affordable homes by a technical definition. It also says on page 7 that 87% of these will only be affordable if they're at social rent, properly affordable by that. So, for this to be affordable for Dacorum's residents and generation over the next 18 years then it's necessary for us to address this.

The front page of Dacorum Digest in December celebrated 300 council homes being built since 2013 and the press release for this achievement pledges 350 more in the next 5 years, but if we build 70 a year as we are currently planning, the deficit of social housing in our area will increase not decrease so we need to say how much better Dacorum expects to do. Working with registered social housing providers is part of this but we can also build for ourselves. We could borrow £1-2million to get started and then as soon as the programme generates its own return to the HRA, we can reinvest and accelerate the programme from there on. He believed that over the course of the plan we can get to a significantly higher figure than where we are now. These are 60 year plans, so he hoped the commitment was to expand on delivering socially rented

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housing built by Dacorum for Dacorum residents. Obviously the details of how we produce this step up will need to be discussed and put in place.

Hemel, where 10,000 new homes are planned is known for being an early new town, a place where social housing was combined with the full range of owner occupied developers with Jellicoe's Gardens and all the neighbourhoods that we know about. The new town context has become a lasting heritage which is now different in context from 1947, now the urgent housing need for which we must prioritise growth, is the grandchildren and great grandchildren of Jellicoe's people. Moreover, he argued that if we are bound to develop numbers that even when reduced from the demands manifested at this instance, that we know are ranging high, and therefore we can only do this one. We must take this opportunity to take the old new town forward as a mixed but coherent community where social housing including attractive units to encourage freeing up family homes has not been forgotten in the headline numbers for the absence of quantifiables for housing for everyday citizens of Dacorum. Obviously this needs to be practical with a financial plan, so he was open to commuting the call for a target of 25% in the first ten years. Let's remember we are investing in the people of this Borough and their health; mental and physical health and wellbeing as a result of being appropriately housed and better able to add value back into the local, regional, national and international economy.

Councillor Pringle firstly took the opportunity to thank the officers who had worked on developing the local plan and also thanked her colleagues for spending a tremendous amount of time drilling down on the plan. She then thanked Councillor England for proposing such a well thought-out motion which not only resonates with the residents of Hemel Hempstead but also the residents of Northchurch and Berkhamsted because although many of our residents appear to be blissfully unaware of the current consultation on the local plan, and almost all of those who have engaged with me have come up with the same question; why on earth are we not planning our house building strategically to reflect what our existing communities already desperately need which is decent quality affordable social housing in Northchurch? Not only for the people that live here but for the next generations and people need to be able to be proud to live in social housing and see it as a perfectly reasonable place to live in. As focus is on our key workers who we recognise at this difficult time are so essential to all aspects of our existence, they need decent quality social housing. Instead what we're being offered is developer led development which she described as ribbon development joining the likes of Dudswell to the village of Northchurch, and the village of Northchurch to the town of Berkhamsted to the larger town of Hemel Hempstead.

There's a desperate plight of local families and councillors will know of the cases where there's a desperate need of housing for people with young families in completely inadequate and in some cases unsafe accommodation and how difficult it is to get anywhere local of them to live. Those people are in a desperate fight and there's nobody who wouldn't want them to have a decent home, a socially build house for their family. It seems that the plight of these people and homeless people on our streets is being used a reason to build on places such as the fields around the village of Northchurch, so we will have what is locally known as the Wishing Tree field in Northchurch is going to be developed upon. That is going to desecrate the view from Northchurch Common and Ashridge as you can currently get an uninterrupted countryside view across the valley and that's going to be spoiled forever. What we need instead is to have something more sensible where we actually listen to what local people want. She urged all colleagues present tonight to support the motion.

Councillor Williams said he had the opportunity to discuss this with Councillor England and was hugely sympathetic to the underlying sentiments of the motion which is that

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we should seek to deliver proportionate to the local plan. He didn't think it was a discussion on the local plan but focuses more on the social housing aspects of that and to seek to deliver a higher proportion of social rented accommodation as a proportion of what's being delivered, bearing in mind that in order to deliver higher level of social accommodation or any other rented accommodation that assumption is that you're delivering more and more housing across the piece and that as we know is in itself challenging. He proposed an amendment to the motion, which was as follows:

1. This Council notes that there are 7859 applications on the Dacorum Housing Register, either waiting for a transfer to housing appropriate for their needs or waiting for the opportunity to be housed by the Council or other registered social housing providers.
2. Since 2013, this Council has committed to building new homes for social rent, 300 being provided by the Council itself, working with Housing Associations and others to supplement that figure.
3. While welcoming the progress made, the Council notes that we will be given a target by MHCLG to provide opportunities in the new Local Plan for the building of over 16,000 homes in Dacorum over the next 18 years.
4. This Council further notes that at current market rates, few of those proposed homes will be affordable by those on the Council's Housing Register, even if a full discount is applied, given the proposed local plan suggests that genuinely affordable' means substantially more than a 20% discount.
5. Therefore this Council commits to build on the positive work of previous years and continue work directly to develop homes for social rent and to seek further opportunities with partner registered providers to accelerate the delivery of new social rent homes.
6. The Council requests that as work progresses on the development of the draft local plan the task and finish group should look at the targets and definitions of affordable housing with a view to planning a greater proportion of social rent homes, which should be quantified as at least a range of feasible targets.

He said his amendment wasn't to disagree with the sentiments of Councillor England's motion but to seek to bring it into a more appropriate mechanism. He felt it was more appropriate to go back to the process from bottom up and to refer discussion about the nature of the affordability of housing through the local plan task and finish process.

Many members will know that the 300 houses we aimed to build from 2012 onwards that Councillor England mentioned earlier was at a time when the borrowing cap was on our HRA and we were very limited on the funding that we could raise to accelerate that programme. since that borrowing cap has been lifted we have been able to be more ambitious in terms of numbers of new houses that we can build and unlike many councils and nearly all housing associations we are almost uniquely building for social rent development because we recognised the need to deliver housing which is truly affordable to our residents. He was sure that officers would be happy to confirm that he had argued with them that the policy of 80% of market rent was not truly affordable and therefore we've stayed away from delivering at that level. Delivering social housing for rent is subsidy dependent because social rent does not cover the cost of developing and building new properties. We're fortunate as an authority that we have quite a large stock and we're spreading the costs of that across the base of that large stock. If we were developing standalone accommodation for social rent it simply

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wouldn't stack up without a massive amount of subsidy and part of the reason for referring this back to the local plan task and finish group is to look at how the various options around affordable rent properties and how they proportionately plan out in requests to developers. We have a huge number of infrastructure requirements on new developments and we need to balance which aspects of those requirements we want to prioritise. We need to recognise that if we have more socially rented properties it will reduce the pot of money available for other things.

He hoped members would recognise the sentiments of his amendment and do not suggest that we shouldn't be looking more ambitiously at social rent properties as that had been his aspiration for this council for a while but to do this is a way which takes into account all the constraints and challenges that we all face in doing that.

The Mayor asked if Councillor Williams had a seconder for his amendment.

Councillor Griffiths seconded the amendment. She said she fully supported the original intention of the motion from Councillor England but also fully supported what Councillor Williams had explained earlier that we cannot bring policy to full council without having gone through all the ramifications of what that would mean to the council otherwise it would probably fall over at the first hurdle. She was delighted to support this amendment which she felt didn't detract from the original motion but in fact enhanced it and made sure it will be implemented into our plan. She felt it was important to note that as a council and certainly from her perspective was to build as many council houses as we possibly can for social rent which has been the policy from the very beginning of our house building in 2012 and that will continue. We will grab any opportunity we can to build more houses than the next target of 350 if we can get the funding to do so but it does have to be balanced with all the other demands on the HRA.

She felt concerned by Councillor Pringles earlier comment of residents being in unsafe accommodation. She urged Councillor Pringle to contact her or the appropriate officers with more details as nobody should be living in an unsafe home. She added that she fully supported the motion.

The Mayor asked Councillor England if he was prepared to accept the amendment by Councillor Williams and therefore go forward as the substantive motion.

Councillor England confirmed he was prepared to accept the amendment and appreciated it.

The Mayor advised that the amendment proposed by Councillor Williams was now the substantive motion and would be voted on in due course.

Councillor Birnie didn't think anyone would dissent with the underlying sentiments behind the original motion and the substantive moment but there were certain aspects of what Councillor England said that had concerned him. He said we've all had problems or our children have had problems with obtaining suitable housing when they get to that stage in life. He explained he used to be Chairman of the Hemel Hempstead cricket club and it was a perennial problem there, to the extent that we continually lost the best cricketers as they got to the marrying stage because they couldn't afford to buy or rent properties in Hemel.

He said Councillor England's suggestion of borrowing £1million frightened him because we're not a bank and neither are we property developers. It particularly frightened him in light of experience of other councils such as Croydon Council which

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had set up its own development company and as a result of that ended up with a debt of £1.5 billion and have to have admit their bankruptcy. He hoped we had a lot of consideration ahead of us on this matter as to how we implement it and we must continue with our customary conservative prudence when it comes to financing any such programme in the future. He supported the amended motion.

Councillor Symington welcomed the motion from Councillor England and for the support it received from Councillor Williams. She said she would particularly like some clarity around the language used, whether it be affordable or social housing, and believed over time there has been a lot of blurring and consequently misconceptions about what these terms mean.

In terms of how the motion was worded she had some concerns with it in so far as it was now worded that it will go through the task and finish group and that's balanced against the fact that both Councillor Williams and Councillor Griffiths have repeatedly said to all members at council meetings that they cannot bring policy to full council without due scrutiny and what they've actually done by amending the original motion was remove the scrutiny that Councillor England had suggested. The formal scrutiny body that is provided by the council is the finance and resources overview and scrutiny committee and that has been taken out and replaced by the task and finish group which she said was a great group, she had been part of it earlier this year and it did work, but it does not have the same statutory scrutiny role that the overview and scrutiny committee would have.

She also felt we should be looking as a Council to be helping to fund council houses ourselves but wasn't sure on the mechanism for that. She said central government wasn't a bank and there were ways of funding these things so we should be looking at that in more detail. She was fully supportive of the motion but felt it was a shame it had been changed from the original motion in terms of its scrutiny.

Councillor Tindall said he had listened to what Councillor Symington was saying and realised that there may be a bit of a misunderstanding about the actual wording of the motion. He clarified that there was no intention to avoid scrutiny, from his understanding the reason for using the task and finish group was that it's already set up and it's part of the local planning process and so it was focused on housing. It is a cross party forum which is informal so therefore can discuss things without having party points being made and can actually get to the nitty gritty of what they're talking about. He envisaged the task and finish group being an early stage of looking at what is possible and that would then be converted by officers into some form of paper which would be presented to overview and scrutiny committees, cabinet etc. so in actual fact the task and finish group is at the very early ideas stage and is not intended by any means to avoid the scrutiny process which would follow.

Councillor Uttley agreed with Councillor Williams that this motion was not about the Local Plan exactly, rather about our need for more social housing, and how our build programme to date, whilst positive relative to many other councils, is not keeping up with the need. Whilst the local plan is not the subject of this motion, we cannot deny the connection with it, and felt it would be useful for some members if we talk a little bit about this affordability point.

As part of the plan there is a measure of affordability which is used by the Ministry for Housing Communities and Local Government that is used in the calculation of how many homes a Borough is supposed to build. This measure of affordability that is used in this calculation is 4 times the average earnings in the Borough. That is, if the average cost of a home is 4 times the average salary then this would be considered

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affordable, and there would be no increase in the number of dwellings that we are expected to build above the ONS projections. Here, in Dacorum, the latest affordability measure is around 12, that is houses are three times the price of what would be considered affordable. The measure of affordability that is suggested by our local plan is 'substantially less' than 20% below market value. This is obviously a little vague, but if we consider that substantially less than 20% below market value is 35% below market value, and apply this reduction to our average house price, then our house price that was 12 times average salary is now almost 8 times average salary. These numbers are just indicative, but even this calculation would make our housing twice what the MHCLG considers affordable. The MHCLG, are trying to apply simple supply and demand economics to the housing market, and the housing market is, sadly, just not that simple. Building social housing is one of the sure ways in which we can actually make sure we are building homes for the people of Dacorum who need them, rather than building 'executive housing' for London commuters. We will always be in the commuter belt of course, but that doesn't mean that expensive detached homes should be prioritised over the needed social housing.

She had spoken before about the difference between the Office for National Statistics Projected household increases and how these tally, or rather do not tally, with the number of homes we have been asked to build per year by central government. Just to be clear, as because she did not think that this can be repeated too many times, the latest ONS projections for household increases in Dacorum, if we take an average over the next ten years, is 355. That is, Dacorum is expected to increase in population by 355 households per year. These are of course, only projections, however, our local plan provides for 922 homes per year. 922 homes per year over the next 18 years.

The latest information from government states that this number handed down from on high is not a 'target' rather a starting point for determining the level of need, and it is only after consideration of this, along with constraints (such as green belt) that a decision on how many homes should be planned for is made. Given this, I think that we are all hoping that a lower number than 1023 can be agreed with the inspectorate. But how many of these homes should actually be affordable according to the local housing needs assessment. Of the number of houses we are planning for in our local plan (currently 922) we are only at present aiming to build less than 10% of these as social housing per year. How many social rented properties do we actually need to build per year? According to the local housing needs assessment for SW Herts, Dacorum needs 316 new social rented properties per year over the plan period. If we build 70 per year as we are currently planning, the deficit of social housing in our area will increase, not decrease.

Finally, whilst she understood Councillor Birnie's concerns about borrowing, she pointed out that Croydon Council was not borrowing simply to build social housing, but also a hotel and shopping centre, which was not being suggested here today.

Councillor England thanked Councillor Williams and Councillor Griffiths for their support and broad agreement on a constructive direction to answering this question for the local plan. He hoped everyone would support and maximise this opportunity. As Councillor Tindall and the Mayor said earlier, the task and finish group is a creative stage and would be converted into a paper, starting and finishing a good process. He was very happy with that. He felt the key thing that the amended motion achieved, which we owe to our residents, was a sense of an ambition and a quantified number, or at least a quantified range of feasible targets, so that we can deliver a good plan. At the moment we have deliverables for a number required by the planning inspector but we really need to think hard, as I know members do, about the size of the housing register and about the fact that we've got people at all stages of their lives who are in

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unsuitable housing and an essentially we can't solve that problem without quite significantly increased the amount of social housing that is available of different types.

Councillor Pringle made the point that developers are leading the opportunities and he felt keen for us all to see social housing as something which should be spread throughout the Borough. Residents want social housing and clearly there are thousands of people who are saying that they're not suitable housed at the moment so he was really glad that this motion has given the opportunity to expand and accelerate the move towards that and he was glad they were able to do it together. He thanked everyone for a good discussion and debate and said he looked forward to the task and finish being an opportunity to pull this apart and come up with some good solutions which we will see down the line.

A vote was held:

43 for,  
0 against,  
0 abstentions,

Therefore the motion was carried.

## **6 QUESTIONS**

### **Questions from Councillor Pringle to Councillor Williams:**

Q1. Does the Leader of the Council support me in calling for HCC to publish the aggregate statistics of the prevalence of CV19 in Dacorum schools and across the county, given that, as we enter another lockdown, with a new variant of CV19 and R-rate currently out of control, it is more important than ever that our local residents and businesses have a full understanding of the prevalence of CV19 in our communities.

Response: No, I don't support that. Hertfordshire County Council have released considerable amounts of information through various mechanisms and have enabled people to see infection rates almost on a ward-by-ward basis. In relation to schools, I trust that HCC have released what they feel is appropriate and I do not support the call to ask them to release further information.

Q2. I completely understand and appreciate Councillor Williams' points about releasing information that could identify individuals, however does the portfolio holder not agree that as we have seen the highest of death rates today it is incredibly important that residents are fully aware of the extent of this virus in every community. Just over a week ago parents were told schools were safe and parents I know relied on that information. I am aware that parents have a misconception about the rates in Hertfordshire schools. Buckinghamshire is doing aggregate numbers, I've seen the correspondence and I only ask that we take similarly responsible steps to represent the fundamental needs of our residents to be kept safe.

Response: I can only reiterate what I have already said, I do believe HCC are publishing the information through its educational public health route or through more national bodies. The information is out there and I think given that the majority of schools are now closed beyond the February half term the information for school

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settings is clear. It is not relevant because for the majority of parents their children are off school for the foreseeable future and their return will be a decision based on infection rates and how things can be controlled. It will be a very different scenario when parents need to consider their options towards the end of February and I think we would need to look at the national picture in light of the situation at that time.

Q3. Does Councillor Williams agree that when we see waves they come in curves and given that this will not go away overnight, I can foresee into the future beyond half term and it is when the students go back to school that we will desperately need this granulated school by school aggregate information. Would he support me in trying to get that information for parents so that they can make informed decisions about the safety of their children? This is not just their right but their duty to exercise parental responsibility.

Response: I think I have already made my position perfectly clear in that similar line of questioning to the first two questions. I rely on the County Council issuing information that they think is personal to the situation and there is more than sufficient information out there for people to make decisions.

Q4. Councillor Williams previous answers appear to be premised on the view that he foresees that the virus will recede in an almost perpendicular manner rather than go down a gradual curve whereby schools will resume but the risk will remain. Can he clarify how he sees us coming out of this through a perpendicular drop in the virus or a very gradual decline, such that there will still remain a risk in the schools that parents will need to have full information about.

Response: I think that's a very scientific question which I'm not qualified to make a judgement on. I think it's very likely that come the end of the lockdown period we will still be in a significant degree of restrictions, maybe a return to the tier system. I'm not in any way making any judgement in any of my answers about how the rate of decline might go because I'm not qualified to make such a judgement. As previous indicated I think we are likely to be in a period of some degree of control for many months to come.

#### **Questions from Councillor Woolner to Councillor Griffiths:**

Q1. In the first lockdown of the Covid-19 crisis, the Government launched a much needed programme of measures, 'Everyone In', to aid rough sleepers over the lockdown period. It appears that the initial work to securing accommodation has wound down, with efforts being concentrated on securing more permanent accommodation.

Although lawful restrictions are now in place for this current national lockdown on a par with the virus' initial onset, the 'Everyone In' policy does not appear to have been brought back into action, despite it being the coldest part of the year.

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Will the Portfolio Holder for Housing & Services please give us her assurance that this is being addressed and arrangements are being made to ensure that the vulnerable don't spend this lockdown outside through the winter?

Response: The strategic housing service has continued to provide support and access to accommodation for all clients at risk of homelessness and rough sleeping irrespective of eligibility. This service is delivered in partnership to ensure that whenever possible no household slips through the net. It is important to note that there are households that do not accept offers of accommodation or support. Where this is the case support and engagement will continue in line with the ask as all services recognise the importance of safeguarding the individual or household. Whilst the government has not repeated it's ask of March 2020 to bring everyone in, it has since requested that local authorities protect those at risk of rough sleeping. Ministry of housing, communities and local government has confirmed that the ethos behind 'protect' is of the previous ask. This is validated by a further request from the Secretary of State on 8<sup>th</sup> January 2021.

Q2. I have heard that in the Marlowes in particular there are more homeless on the streets than ever recently. How confident are you that the plans in place are effective? Do you have any numbers of take up of offers?

Response: I am aware of an increase of rough sleepers in the town centre as are officers and it is important to acknowledge that despite the range of services on offer from strategic housing, DENS and other partners that not all individuals that appear to be rough sleeping accept help from the council. Members should note that those partaking in street activities such as begging are not necessarily rough sleeping or bedding down outside and some have access to accommodation. Others with more complex needs and additional housing related issues may take time to establish the trust with officers before agreeing to come into accommodation. There are also incidents where accommodation is refused because clients do not wish to pay for the accommodation charges which are eligible for housing benefit or to follow the licence conditions and Covid-19 guidance which are requirements for being brought in to accommodation so we can ensure the safety of all residents and staff. I can assure members that all individuals that have been reported to us are all taken seriously and investigated and offered accommodation. Officers are also actively looking for rough sleepers. We are doing the best we can. I don't have the figures but I can get them and circulate to members.

#### **Questions from Councillor Symington to Councillor G Sutton:**

At the last Council Meeting on 18 November 2020,

- Conservative members of the Council voted to press ahead with the Regulation 18 consultation process for the Draft Local Plan against strong representations by the Liberal Democrats.
- This decision was taken during the second national lockdown and just two days after the announcement of a significant change in central government planning policy in acknowledgement of the difficulties that members of the public may have in responding to the government.

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- The only acknowledgement of this changed situation was the Conservative agreement to extend the consultation period from 8 to 10 weeks, thus the consultation was scheduled to end on 7 February 2021.
- As of 6 January, the United Kingdom has been in a third and even stricter lockdown, one which is overshadowed by a rampant variant of the Covid-19 coronavirus and additional extreme pressures on NHS hospitals; a lockdown expected to last for at least 6 weeks and to be followed by a gradually easing down through the tiers.

Q1. Given the difficult conditions in which the Council is having to conduct this Consultation, would the Portfolio Holder:

- a. Confirm what additional measures have been taken to ensure that all residents of the Borough have access to the version of the Local Plan under consultation, and
- b. Confirm what amendments, additions or deletions have been made to the Local Plan to comply with the Government changes, and
- c. Identify how many residents have made representations to the Council having found difficulty in accessing the Local Plan under the restricted Lockdown conditions.

Having regard to these circumstances, would the Portfolio Holder:

- d. Agree that it would be appropriate to extend the Regulation 18 Consultation process to allow for the period of consultation be not less than eight weeks from the end of the Lockdown whenever that will be, in recognition that such an extension would enable full consultation with all residents and stakeholders?

Response:

- a. The Council put in place an extensive publicity campaign to notify residents of the Local Plan consultation. This included:
  - an article in the Dacorum Digest (63,000 copies)
  - the digital digest (11,400 subscribers)
  - newspaper articles – public notice in the Hemel Hempstead Gazette and Online Hemel Today
  - a mail out to those on the Council’s Local Plan database
  - a permanent virtual exhibition where residents could view documents and leave a message for officers
  - a local plan video explaining the consultation
  - making arrangements for residents to access the documents (by appointment) at the Forum and to loan documents from Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring library
  - Printed copies of the documents to all town and parish councils.

As at 12<sup>th</sup> January 2021 there have been a total of 14,185 hits on the Local Plan website since the start of the consultation. There have been 1,862 individual users access the virtual exhibition viewing a total of 20,295 items.

- b. The consultation commenced on 27 November 2020. No changes have been incorporated to the Local Plan since the consultation commence on 27

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November. It should be noted that the current consultation pre-dates the Government's announcement that it will revert back to the previous standard methodology figure of 1,023 homes per year for Dacorum.

- c. Officers have only received a very small number of enquiries from residents asking for further assistance in accessing the documents. At the time of writing no requests have been made for paper copies of the documents to be provided and no resident has complained that they have been unable to view a document.
- d. The Council has previously extended this consultation to ten weeks which is significantly more than the statutory 6 weeks required by the Local Plan regulations. However, we do recognise that the recently imposed Lockdown places further restrictions on movement and so we will extend the consultation to midnight on 28 February 2021. This would be more than double the required consultation period.

Q2. I welcome the small extension of three weeks. Does the portfolio holder accept that as the Dacorum Digest did not show Tring on the map, the residents of Tring might be justified in feeling they were not adequately informed of the impact it might have on their community.

Response: I have already indicated to Mr Bright and to Councillor Ransley that I will speak to the Communications team to see if there is any issues in getting the information out to residents in Tring.

Q3. What are you proposing can be done to rectify this? I would welcome a leaflet with a map of those most affected.

Response: We are working on a simplified version of the Local Plan which will be more readily available as a printed form and more accessible online. Some of the documents are quite lengthy and would require a laptop or desktop computer to access them. It is quite difficult to safely distribute leaflets on a door to door basis with contact being restricted due to Covid-19 so we would have to find another way to get that information to residents.

Q4. Does the portfolio holder agree that the efficacy and effectiveness of a consultation is based on the quality and breadth of access that stakeholders have to the information rather than the period of time given over to that consultation?

Response: I fully agree. There has been a lot of interest shown and as the consultation reaches its completion I'm sure there will have been a lot more. The last time we had a public consultation we had some extremely valuable results and I'm sure we will finish up with a clear picture and the end of this consultation.

## **7 BUSINESS FROM THE LAST COUNCIL MEETING**

None.

## **8 CABINET REFERRALS**

### **Resolved:**

That the following be approved:

**CHAIRMAN**

**24 November 2020**

**8.1 CA/101/20 Budget Monitoring Q2**

**Decision**

That the budget monitoring position for each of the above accounts be considered and:

1. The approval of the revised capital programme to move £2.409m slippage identified at Quarter 2 into financial year 2021/22 as detailed in Appendix C.
2. The approval of supplementary revenue budgets as follows:
  - Supplementary budget of £300k in the Local Development Framework (LDF) budget to fund the costs of producing the Local Plan, to be funded from the LDF reserve.
  - Supplementary budget of £30k in the Waste Development employee's budget to fund a Recycling Officer post, to be funded from the Management of Change reserve.
3. The approval of supplementary capital budgets as follows:
  - Additional capital budget of £180k in the Commercial Assets and Property Development budget to fund the costs of completion of the new Bunkers Farm cemetery, to be funded from a contribution from West Herts Crematorium Joint Committee.
  - Additional capital budget of £210k in the Leisure service to fund a Multi-Use Games Area at The Hemel Hempstead School.
  - Additional capital budget of £70k to fund audio-visual improvement works at The Forum.

**8.2 CA/102/20 Covid-19 Impact Report**

**Decision**

The approval of £76,000 (over two years) additional funding for Citizens Advice Dacorum.

**15 December 2020**

**8.3 CA/112/20 Treasury Management Mid-Year Performance Report**

**Decision**

The acceptance of the Cabinet report on mid-year treasury management performance and prudential indicators for 2020/21.

**8.4 CA/113/20 Equality, Diversity and Inclusion Strategy**

**CHAIRMAN**

## **Decision**

- 1 That the International Holocaust Remembrance Alliance definition of antisemitism be adopted as set out in the report and the illustrative examples that are presented alongside.
2. That the new post for a Diversity and Community Inclusion Officer be included as part of the 2021/22 budget as set out in section 5 of this report.

## **8.5 CA/115/20 Committee Timetable 2021/22**

### **Decision**

The approval of the Meeting Timetable for 2021/22 as set out in Appendix A to the Cabinet report.

### **9 OVERVIEW AND SCRUTINY REFERRALS**

None.

### **10 CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

None.

### **11 CHANGE TO COMMITTEE DATES**

None.

### **12 CALL-IN AND URGENCY PROCEDURE**

The Council noted the following urgent Portfolio Holder Decisions:

- PH/025/20 - Additional Restrictions Grant – Covid-19 Support for Local Businesses
- PH/001/21 - Local Restrictions Support Grant (Open) (LRSG (Open)) – Covid-19 Support for Local Businesses

The Meeting ended at 9.30 pm

**CHAIRMAN**