

## MINUTES

### STRATEGIC PLANNING & ENVIRONMENT OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY

30 SEPTEMBER 2020

**Present:**

**Members:**

**Councillors:** Barrett  
Beauchamp  
Birnie (Chairman)  
P Hearn  
Hobson  
McDowell  
Ransley  
Riddick  
Silwal (Vice-  
Chairman)  
Stevens  
Taylor  
Timmis

<b>Officers:</b>	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Mark Gaynor	Corporate Director - Housing & Regeneration
	Fiona Jump	Group Manager - Financial Services
	Katie Mogan	Corporate and Democratic Support Lead Officer
	Melanie Parr	Climate Emergency and Sustainability Programme Lead
	Alex Robinson	
	Craig Thorpe	Group Manager - Environmental Services
	Sarah Turner	PA to the Corporate Directors

**Also Attendance:**

Councillor Alan Anderson  
Councillor Graham Sutton

The meeting began at 6.30 pm

**121**      **MINUTES**

The Chairman noted that there are outstanding actions; J Doe in regards to feedback on the local enforcement resources shortage and N Polden to email the Chairman regarding the whereabouts of the air quality equipment on London Road,

Lawn Lane 1a and Lawn Lane 3a. The minutes from the meeting held on 28 July were agreed as a correct record of the meeting and will be signed.

**122                    APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

There were no apologies for absence.

**123                    DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

There were no declarations of interest

**124                    PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

T Ritchie asked how much of the 2017 Local Plan Issues and Options consultation has been taken into account in the new document. T Ritchie also asked for clarification when the document was published and distributed as it still seems to be a draft one year on. Also T Ritchie mentioned that Members had contacted him and were finding it difficult to access the document, so queried how this had been circulated. T Ritchie also wanted more details on the extensive discussion with infrastructure providers including Herts County and Herts Valley Care Commissioning Group.

J Doe said the report has been published on the website, it had, in error, a draft watermark on it but it had been removed as the report published is the final version. A link has been circulated to Members of the Committee. The document will be used to inform the Local Plan which is in draft and there will be the opportunity for everyone to comment in the public consultation from November to January subject to the approval by Cabinet in November. There will be a topic paper which goes through the consultation. The main issues that were highlighted in the 2017 consultation were the high housing numbers and the use of green belt land. We need to meet the objectively assessed housing targets and even though we will make the best use of our urban land, we will still need to make some use of green belt land. The concerns around provision of infrastructure will be addressed by the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, which is in progress of development at the moment. When the infrastructure will be delivered will be linked in the detailed processing of each site. Work on the infrastructure plan has been ongoing for a year and we have consulted extensively with the appropriate providers. Members will have the chance to comment when we are in a position to report on that plan.

Cllr Anderson mentioned that the report had previously been to Committee and has already been considered. The Chairman advised that not many of the Members of this current Committee were part of this committee at that time.

Cllr Taylor said that his question relates to the meeting last week and the response sent out on Monday. The Chairman confirmed that the response hasn't been sent out yet and advised that we will get to that later in the correct agenda item.

Cllr Timmis wanted comment about the proposed number of houses in the green belt. The idea that we're not building homes or trying to avoid doing so, is not the relevant issue. What is relevant is that more than a third will be on green field growth areas, which is excessive. Cllr Timmis also mentioned that in parliament today the algorithm used to assess the amount of numbers of housing that is being proposed

was questioned by a Conservative MP and asked why we can't challenge these numbers as a Council.

The Chairman mentioned that this question also is best considered during the next item on the agenda.

**125**                    **CONSIDERATION OF ANY MATTER REFERRED TO THE COMMITTEE IN RELATION TO CALL-IN**

None

**126**                    **COMMITTEE RESPONSE TO THE LOCAL PLAN**

The Chairman confirmed that following the meeting last week a response was drafted and circulated for Members for comment or amendment.

Cllr Taylor asked how the Committee was able to scrutinise the Transport Plan for Tring and Berkhamsted and other parts of the Borough, if they were not able to see the plan. The Chairman confirmed that this point is included in the draft response.

A Robinson confirmed that the draft Local Plan before Members is the proposed Regulation 18 version and consultation on the final Plan will be under Regulation 19 and the consultation report will be included. The draft Infrastructure report will not be in final form until we submit the final plan, it is in a very advanced stage but still in draft form. The Transport studies need some further input from County.

Cllr Taylor commented that he can't scrutinise without seeing the evidence and that there are plans in place for 800 homes that don't have the required transport infrastructure.

The Chairman confirmed the Plan is in draft format but it will come back to us and we will include this valid criticism in the response to Cabinet.

Cllr Taylor requested the inclusion of the word 'interim' in the response. The Chairman agreed that it would be included.

J Doe mentioned a further point from Mr Ritchie which had been missed in his earlier response was that he had confirmed in a response to an MP that the draft was to go to consultation in the summer of 2019. This reflected the timetable at that time, which has now been changed. The Chairman asked that this be confirmed in an email, including Mr Ritchie amongst the recipients.

**Action: J Doe**

Cllr McDowell queried point 3 on the response asking if it was a lack of resources holding up the need for a masterplan being provided at the same time as the Local Plan. A Robinson replied that it isn't lack of resources. There will need to be a lot of time and resources put into the masterplans, but Officers consider that they need to have the documents in place before we start on the masterplans.

Cllr McDowell asked if that was a commitment to having the masterplans in place prior to planning permission. A Robinson advised that Officers would like to have very advanced documents in place on all the strategic sites. This is important to show the Inspector that the site is deliverable. We intend to commence those workstreams in the New Year, so that by the time of inspection we have advanced drafts that can be adopted quickly.

Cllr McDowell mentioned the large site at Tring and queried the number of homes. A Robinson advised there would 1,400 at the site East of Tring and 400 at New Mill which is a total of 1,800, plus the proposal at Dunsley Farm. A Robinson will send the details out.

**Action: A Robinson**

Cllr Stevens queried whether the Planning Inspector would approve the Local Plan if we don't have the Masterplans in place, including for transport infrastructure, and what will stop developers putting in applications on the site prior to that. Cllr Stevens asked how we control the phasing. A Robinson said that it doesn't restrict the phasing, however there are a number of policies in place that make it clear that no development will take place until a sufficient programme of infrastructure is in place.

The Chairman commented that it didn't necessarily have to be infrastructure, it could be any number of things including additional housing. This is included in the response to Cabinet. A Robinson said that the Local Plan will be submitted for examination and for all the strategic releases we have policies in there mandating the development masterplan and design codes. Those documents will be in place and they are subject to public and Member engagement. Those documents will inform the planning application. In addition the strategic policy we have in place on infrastructure (SP7), sets out our approach for infrastructure delivery and SP7, point 3 states that all development will be required to include the necessary onsite and offsite infrastructure.

The Chairman said that the question was about when the masterplans relating to that policy will be part of the pre-planning consultation. A Robinson said that the Plan is out to consultation around Christmas, Officers will take into account comments where possible and once Officers are in a position to recommend a strategy, it will be at that point that Officers will be working with developers on a masterplan. We cannot adopt a masterplan until the Local Plan is in place, but they can be developed so that once the Local Plan is in place they can be adopted.

Cllr Timmis asked how the three principle concerns from the 2017 consultation, namely; the housing numbers, the use of greenbelt and the infrastructure provision will be addressed in the new local plan. A Robinson mentioned that when we get to examination, the Inspectors will be testing vigorously our plan on the release of green belt. We can only release green belt in exceptional circumstances. We will need to demonstrate a very high bar to include green belt and we are confident that we have looked at all the other options, for example use of brownfield sites and other locations. This shows that there are no other options. We have been working for over a year on the Infrastructure Delivery Plan, engaging with a number of stakeholders and the Delivery Plan will be a critical part of the Local Plan, which has been reiterated to all developers who hold land parcels in Dacorum.

Cllr Timmis felt that the public may feel the issues are not covered and asked what confidence can we have that the concerns have been taken into account. J Doe acknowledged that people are concerned, but Officers have to meet the expectations set by Government for high levels of new housing provision in new Local Plans through the standard methodology. We have had to go through a very rigorous process, there is a significant amount of development contained within urban sites but we still have that balance where we have to use green belt, which cannot be met elsewhere. We won't be able to satisfy every public concern but we have recommend to Members a plan which Officers feel would be found sound by the Planning Inspector.

The Chairman confirmed we are aware of the difficult task that Officers have to satisfy Members but Members also have to satisfy our residents and Members are duty bound to take this extra dimension into account. Also we need to consider whether the Government recommended numbers will remain the same during the period under consideration. In this document, one of the problems is that we are looking at a very long period of development, which goes far beyond the demands of the Local Plan.

The Chairman felt it was important to set out the interim comments to Cabinet, which are as follow:

*The Committee congratulates Officers for their production of a commendably professional and comprehensive draft plan for growth in Dacorum that goes well beyond the period of 2020-38 which is demanded by the new Local Plan. The document is clearly directed at professionals in planning such as developers and government inspectors and is in many ways constrained by central government policy such as housing targets that we consider to be unwarranted and unjustified and that will not be welcomed by our residents. The Committee therefore recommends that:*

- 1. A version of the document should be produced especially for the public consultation that concentrates specifically on a new Local Plan and which places all elaboration of growth policy beyond the period of that plan in Appendices. This will have the effect of simplifying the description of the plan for the public whilst omitting nothing. But it will not require their consideration of putative developments that are so far in the future that they may not come to pass. After all, we live in a period of flux and policies and even governments may change long before 2038.*
- 2. For the same reason no land should be released from the green belt immediately unless that land is required for development before 2038. The document will state that Council's policy is to safeguard such land for development if required and thus demonstrate that we have the requisite land supply for future growth areas beyond 2038.*
- 3. To further limit loss of the green belt, in advance of planning applications, master plans should be developed for each major allocated housing site in the new local plan. These master plans should delimit areas for dwellings, infrastructure areas (including buildings roads and paths) and designated open spaces areas (including sports grounds and other leisure facilities).*

J Doe thanked Committee for all their hard work in the Scrutiny of the Plan and the support given to Officers.

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**BUDGET MONITORING Q1**

F Jump presented the budget monitoring report and asked Committee if they had any questions.

Cllr Silwal asked about p4.1 the £564k pressure against budget and initially there were 20 staff in self-isolation and queried if there were any staff in self-isolation now. C Thorpe advised that we have had one go into self-isolation but everyone else at the Depot is back in work. Also C Thorpe mentioned that E Walker confirmed there were 8 in total across the organisation.

The Chairman questioned if Commercial Waste was losing money and queried if it's time we gave that up. C Thorpe said we are making money but it's not making as much as it was, since March we've had many companies go out of business or haven't let us know, so we are not meeting targets and that will be reflected in next year's targets.

The Chairman asked for clarification on what the Housing Cleaning Service is, as it has cost us £50k and he was surprised it didn't come under the HRA. M Gaynor advised that the Housing Cleaning Service provides cleaning for the General Fund.

The Chairman queried appendix B Allotments Improvement Service £40k. F Jump advised that this was included in the budget consultation and could provide further information if required. The Chairman asked for the information to be emailed to him.

**Action: F Jump**

The report was noted.

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**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICE Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

C Thorpe presented the report for Environmental Services and asked for any questions.

The Chairman queried the acronym DVSA. C Thorpe confirmed it was for Driving Vehicles Standards Agency, they control Health and Safety of fleet vehicles.

Cllr Timmis mentioned the parks and tree planting and asked which trees were being planted. She also asked whether the destruction of the woodlands path by 4x4 drivers was done by workers or clubs and whether any wildflower planting was done this year. Cllr Timmis also asked about the verge cutting which made for a better environment and flytipping. C Thorpe confirmed that he could send a comprehensive list of the trees being planted. The 4x4 damage was probably done by our contractors but he will confirm that. C Thorpe also confirmed that wildflowers were planted and verge cutting was left, but with verge cutting we need to agree with County, as they are the customer and we get complaints when we leave it due to sightlines. However, the team continues to work with M Gaynor and M Parr on the Climate Change group. C Thorpe also confirmed that he would provide some detailed figures on flytipping as he'd just completed a FOI request which contains comprehensive information.

**Action: C Thorpe**

Cllr Silwal mentioned the two indicators that were red, WR01 and WR03, where the collection is 214 and target is 120 but it's still in the red. C Thorpe advised the figures were for the quarter, so it's actually target 750 and we went over that and the collection total for everything we do was 1,187. We have about 614,000 collections every month so the missed number is fairly miniscule and is down to the number of temporary staff we've been using, plus the number of parked vehicles on the roads where, as a result, we're unable to get into the street and the assisted collections that have been missed.

Cllr Ransley asked what makes a missed bin collection justified. C Thorpe said that it was where the bin had been put out and we had genuinely missed it.

Cllr Beauchamp raised concerns over the reporting structure for missed collections and asked if the system is working effectively as a resident had mentioned that it hadn't worked for them. C Thorpe advised he was not aware of any problems and the high number of reports suggests that genuine missed collections are being captured and there isn't a great problem,. The problem is the amount of staff we've had off and we've had to use our spare vehicles on rounds due to social distancing, so we haven't had the vehicles to do the missed collections. Missed collections will reduce over time.

The Chairman queried the collection and sorting of lightbulbs and asked if there was a separate method for disposing of light bulbs. C Thorpe confirmed that fluorescent bulbs are hazardous waste and shouldn't go in the general waste bin, they should be taken to the household waste site.

E Walker confirmed that there was a 16% decrease in flytipping on last years figures.

M Gaynor reported that C Thorp's team provided quite a lot of information in the Climate Change report that is included later in the agenda.

The report was noted.

**129**                    **PLANNING, DEVELOPMENT AND REGENERATION Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

J Doe presented the Quarter 1 Performance report for Planning, Development and Regeneration. There were no questions raised.  
The report was noted.

**130**                    **ENVIRONMENTAL AND COMMUNITY PROTECTION Q1 PERFORMANCE REPORT**

E Walker presented the report to Committee and asked for any questions.

Cllr Silwal queried the food and hygiene inspections from 23 March to 01 September and asked if we received any complaints. E Walker confirmed that we did deal with complaints during that period and all of those complaints are followed up routinely within our three day response time.

Cllr Stevens asked for the actual numbers for the increase in verminous properties. E Walker said that we normally get up to five cases per year and in the last six months we have dealt with approximately 10 cases.

The Chairman questioned point 4.7 where it states we have done work for someone else and asked whether we were paid for this. E Walker advised this was an audit we undertook for the CCG to help them strengthen their health and safety arrangements, for which we were paid.

The report was noted.

## **131                    CLIMATE CHANGE EMERGENCY PROGRESS UPDATE**

M Gaynor presented the Climate Change Emergency update report to Committee and asked if there were any questions.

The Chairman queried the date on 3.2 and asked if it was a typo. M Gaynor agreed that it was and he would change the date to 2021.

Cllr Timmis commended the fantastic amount of work that has been done in a very short time. Cllr Timmis really liked how you can get involved. She said that the Parish Council in her ward has set up a little Climate Change Sector and it will be useful to pass on to them and residents how you can get involved in the newsletter. Cllr Timmis asked whether solar panels referred to the Council's own housing or whether there was support for other tenures. M Gaynor advised that we already have solar panels on sheltered schemes but it does get a bit more complicated on other housing in that you have to protect against the panels disappearing during right to buy sales. However we will be looking at the whole subject as it's an integral part of energy provision and CO2 reduction.

Cllr Timmis asked if Dacorum would say to all residents that we would help out regarding the Green Homes Voucher Scheme. M Gaynor advised it would be their decision as there would be some form of payment. Our aim is to promote grants through the website making sure people are aware of what's available. We would like the website to be a trusted means of communication without a vested interest in commerciality. We had a meeting today with a company who we may use to access Saalex funding, which is an interest free loan.

The Chairman mentioned that he had been contacted recently by a company who have solar panels which feed into a local battery source, which then redistributes the power as and when required. M Gaynor said this is one the options we can pursue with new developments in the future. With respect to insulation and the green programmes put forward by Government, it is a fabric first approach.

M Parr added that as a result of the work we are doing with the Saving Energy Trust, we will have all the necessary information relating to each property in the Borough, regardless of tenure, so we will know what improvements are needed. The modelling will show the carbon emission savings, financial saving and how much it will cost for the necessary improvements.

Cllr Beauchamp mentioned that the local plan will mean that we'll have a number of tall buildings and asked how we can look at inclusion of solar panels. J Doe advised



that solar panels are not specifically mentioned but there are a number of policies which refer to energy generation and climate change and it would be something we would explore when considering plans in detail.

Cllr Stevens said that this was an impressive piece of work and should go down well with everyone who is concerned about climate change. Cllr Stevens said that Berkhamsted Town Council is actively pursuing initiatives to mitigate climate issues and asked how we can link into the Communications Working Group. M Gaynor said there are some proposals for Town and Parish Council's and the wider community to get involved because the only way we will get to the Borough zero carbon target of 2050 will be to get everyone working together. M Parr advised that community work is going to be integral, so engaging with residents and business will be important and a Dacorum Climate Action Network (Dacorum CAN) is envisaged, which will comprise organisations involved as a hub on any initiatives or campaigns. However, because of the pandemic it's difficult to plan anything at the moment.

Cllr McDowell asked about energy procurement and noted that we had gone with NPower again, rather than renewable energy suppliers. Apparently, the only way we will get renewable energy will be through Renewable Energy Guarantee of Origin certificates, which apparently are not worth the money they are written on and it costs a supplier £1 per household to buy them. Cllr McDowell said could we look at absorbing this costs going forward or reduce our usage. M Gaynor said that this was one of the subjects discussed at a meeting today and reducing the amount of electricity will reduce the CO2. The routes we've gone down at present represent a quick fix but this is not something we'd rely on in the longer term, when we can rely on the increased use of renewable energy across the country and when we will be looking to see the best possible longer term use in procurement, including weaning ourselves off gas. Whilst a lot of research has been happening, other sources of energy are not sufficiently advanced in terms of mass production.

Cllr Silwal asked about the people selected for training in the report and asked if it should be available for all. M Gaynor said the selective element is just for the in-depth training of people involved in the projects, but there will be a half-day training session for all, including Members. The Chairman mentioned that this would be a worthwhile subject for compulsory training for Members.

The Chairman referred to 3.1.4 where extending the heating system at Summer Court is discussed and requested more detail. M Gaynor confirmed this is a small estate with district heating employing a biomass boiler, with other environmental improvements like insulation. It was commissioned in such a way that it has the capacity to extend to the rest of the estate. This only involves 60 or 70 homes but it's a good example of what we can do.

The Chairman said the more of such projects the better. M Gaynor said that ideally it would be a town wide network but it's unlikely we would be able to achieve this. However, we would encourage district and community based heating systems in new developments.

The Chairman enquired about 4.2 where the Government seems to have shot itself in the foot with a proposal which is contrary to national targets of zero carbon by 2050 and suggested that MHCLG drop this to allow the highest energy efficiency standards that can be incorporated into Local Plans. M Gaynor confirmed that the

future homes standard proposal is higher than we've had before but it doesn't bring homes up to zero carbon standard, even though it is considerably higher than the old Code 4. The Government have proposed in the consultation that local planning authorities should not have the power to require higher energy standards than those that apply to the Future Homes Standard in their Local Plan. If this proposal is agreed, it will be impossible to achieve zero carbon homes across the country.

The Chairman requested that we lobby the MP. M Gaynor said we could try and we did respond to the consultation to that effect and provide a briefing for the MP.

Cllr Ransley reminded the committee that the Borough has two MP's and suggested that we lobby both. M Gaynor agreed.

The Chairman echoed the earlier comments about the report and said it was stunningly detailed and in noting the report, we should mention the Committee's pleasure in receiving such a good report.

## **132            WORK PROGRAMME**

There were no amendments to the Work Programme and the Chair reminded Members that they can email him any requests for inclusion of topics for discussion in the future.

The Meeting ended at 8.30 pm