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**DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**16 SEPTEMBER 2020**

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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, Imarni, Johnson, Link, 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 and Woolner (48)

**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 6.32 pm.

**1. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meetings held on 15 July and 5 August 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**

There was no public participation.

**4. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

**4.1 By the Mayor:**

The Mayor announced the sad passing of former Dacorum Councillor and Mayor, Maureen Flint. He invited members to share their memories of her.

Councillor Williams said he had worked with Maureen for a long period of time and although they may not have seen eye-to-eye in regards to politics, there was no doubt that she was a long serving and vital part of the Gadebridge community and of the Labour party in Hemel

Hempstead. She chaired the Leisure Committee when Labour were in power from 1995-1999 and she was Mayor in that last year. He felt she set the bar in her Mayoral year and attended in the region of 500 events. She officially opened the refurbished Hemel Hempstead Leisure Centre and also introduced the Remembrance Parade. He said she was a really hard working councillor, she gave a considerable amount of her time to the community and it was a big loss to the people of Gadebridge.

Councillor Hollinghurst said he had worked with Maureen for a considerable amount of years and knew her very well. He felt she was a very friendly councillor and colleague and her heart was always with the people she represented in Hemel Hempstead. He always enjoyed her company and felt very sad about her passing.

Councillor Bassadone said Maureen served the people of Gadebridge admirable for several years and will always be remembered for the time and effort they put in and for the borough of Dacorum. She hoped next year we could do a memorial service for her to remember her.

Councillor Imarni said she had got to know Maureen as a fellow councillor for Gadebridge but she had stepped down in 2015 when Councillor Imarni was elected. She said every door she knocked on in Gadebridge the residents knew Maureen and had good things to say about her. She met her family during the Election period and worked with them at the local polling station. Maureen always put community above political parties and was always friendly and helpful. She expressed how happy everyone was to see Maureen because they knew she genuinely cared about them and worked so hard for the community. She will be very missed in Gadebridge.

One minutes silence was held in remembrance of Maureen Flint.

The Mayor announced that on Sunday 13 September he attended the reef laying to commemorate the Battle of Britain and this gave the opportunity to reflect on the huge sacrifices and bravery of all those involved.

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

None.

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

None.

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

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

The Leader referred to the coverage of heightened incidents of coronavirus in the borough. He was pleased to say that with our joined up working with Public Health in Hertfordshire and other agencies, incidents of coronavirus in Dacorum had steadily come down. However we shouldn't become complacent as this could easily change if we don't abide by social distancing and increased hygiene standards etc. He checked the figures today and there had been 11 cases within the last 7 days, and we had the second lowest incident rate of the 10 districts in Hertfordshire.

Questions:

Councillor Stevens asked if there were any plans to open the Berkhamsted Civic Centre. The Portfolio Holder said he had discussed the reopening of Berkhamsted and Tring Civic Centres with the Chief Executive but given the difficulty of maintaining social distancing and the access to enter and exit the building, we did not have a date to safely reopen them yet.

Councillor Symington referred to the Black Lives Matter protests. She asked if the Portfolio Holder could comment or detail any response from the council to these events. The Portfolio Holder advised that the council hadn't formally responded to these events but we were undertaking a review of our equalities policies, particularly our external policies, to ensure equality in our community. Councillor Symington asked if there was a timescale to report back to members. The Portfolio Holder said he didn't have a fixed timescale but the review of policies would go to Cabinet and he would expect them to be finalised in this calendar year.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if DBC had received a questionnaire from the Centre for Public Scrutiny in relation to the climate emergency. The Portfolio Holder said he was unsure, it would have gone via the appropriate officer so he would have to provide a written response. Councillor Hollinghurst said Hertfordshire County Council had received and responded to the questionnaire. He asked if the Portfolio Holder could ensure the questionnaire was completed and then circulate the responses to members. The Portfolio Holder confirmed he would.

**Action: Councillor Williams**

Councillor Adeleke highlighted that we did not have a coronavirus test centre in Dacorum. He wondered if the figures were low because individuals were unable or reluctant to travel to get tested. He asked if the Portfolio Holder was able to do anything to help get a test centre in the borough. The Portfolio Holder didn't feel that the figures were inaccurate. He said it would be advantageous to have a test centre in Dacorum but given the pressure on resources we cannot have centres in every borough and some travelling will be required.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder advised that the Berkhamsted multi-storey car park opened on 1<sup>st</sup> September and he was pleased to say that it was operating well. He highlighted that out of the 78 business permits spaces available 77 had been sold.

In July the leisure centres and sports facilities re-opened. He advised that the take-up and customer satisfaction had been positive.

The Forum remained open but with restrictions in place. The library had now reopened with a maximum of 20 customers at any one time and with a 15 minute limit. It was also possible to book a 1 hour slot to use the computers in the library.

The Citizens Advice Bureau, the Registration Service and Dacorum's Customer Service Unit were all available on an appointment only basis. The café had also reopened.

There were no questions from members.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

- All staff at Cupid Green that had been shielding were now back at work.

- We were looking to finish the rollout of food recycling from flats at the end of this month/beginning of next month.
- He has been working on a biodiversity press release to try to persuade members of the public to increase biodiversity where they are.
- He hoped members had seen the press release regarding the renovation of the white bridge in Gadebridge Park being started.

Questions:

Councillor England asked if the Portfolio Holder had any update on the condition of chalk streams in the Dacorum. The Portfolio Holder said he did circulate the response from the Environment Agency a few months ago but interestingly he had been contacted about it today and would provide the information to members. **Action: Councillor Anderson**

Councillor Bhinder asked if the Portfolio Holder would elaborate on his press release on biodiversity. The Portfolio Holder advised he was trying to persuade members of the public, particularly those that have gardens, to look at doing gardening plans for next year in terms of planting good pollinators and trees. He said they were also looking at wild flowers in the borough but were constrained by Herts Highways. Simon Coultas was leading the development of the councils Biodiversity Strategy.

Councillor Birnie asked if we had made progress with planting more trees in the borough and if we were involving the public in this, for example, schools? The Portfolio Holder said the council still planned to plant 1000 trees by the end of this year, availability permitting. We were planning an event to involve the public in the planting of some trees but due to coronavirus and social distancing that no longer looked possible. He added that involving schools wasn't practical as not everyone has gardens and it could cause unnecessary problems.

Councillor Beauchamp said he was pleased to hear that all staff at Cupid Green had returned to work and asked if that would mean the normal grass cutting regime would commence. The Portfolio Holder suggested if there were concerns that grass wasn't being cut when it should be it needed to be reported through the appropriate channels.

Councillor England questioned if it really wasn't possible to have the tree planting event whilst staying within government guidelines. The Portfolio Holder felt it was too much of a risk for virus transmission and we needed to avoid taking unnecessary risks. Councillor England suggested that outdoor activities were significantly less likely to encounter social distancing problems and transmission of viruses. The Portfolio Holder advised that such events would go against the 'six person bubble' rule.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

#### **Environmental and Community Protection:**

Due to swift and robust action by EH, Community Safety, Economic Development and Communications teams in partnership with the Public Health Team at County, and Public Health England the recent Covid-19 spike in the Dacorum area seems to have been controlled and we now have a 'green' RAG rating on the County dashboard, with the second lowest incidence in Hertfordshire (on 10.09.2020). Although this is positive news, this is not a

time to be complacent and we must continue to pay our part in remembering to follow the rules. Hands, cover your face and make space and the 'rule of 6'

Actions taken by DBC in partnership with the Local Resilience Forum Partners, including County Council Public Health Teams, Public Health England, Trading Standards, National Health Service, Police and Fire Colleagues.

- EH Team carried out surge contact tracing for all relevant cases and contacts.
- 450+ licenced and food businesses written too, 76% visited in person.
- Generally broad compliance with Covid Safe rules, but small numbers required follow up visits for compliance required by the EH Team
- Fire and Police colleagues visited town centres to encourage personal responsibility and are considering the similar action across the County this weekend.

Team awarded funding for backfilling staff, to enable to Environmental Health Team take on the increase in workload during the Covid 19 response.

Environmental and Community Protection Team will continue to prioritise the Covid-19 response so it may take longer to address some of the other service areas.

There has been a huge increase (400%) in the number of Filthy and Verminous Cases since April that the Operations Team are dealing with. The approach taken by the team is to work with other agencies to support the individuals however in a number of cases enforcement action is necessary. There are a number of steps that need to be taken to go through the legal steps required to help residents clear and treat the property, this does take some time.

Corporate Health, Safety and Resilience Team have provided support to all Council departments in making the services operate in a Covid secure way.

Questions:

Councillor England asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed with him that the PSPO enforcement costs were proving uneconomic and also discouraged cycling. The Portfolio Holder said she would need to check the mathematics, however the PSPO'S were not there to discourage cycling but to combat anti-social behaviour and to protect residents and shoppers in the pedestrianised areas of the town centre.

Councillor England felt that a better way to manage public order in the town centre needed to be found by encouraging responsible active transport and the health benefits of cycling. He asked what progress had been made in demarcating a channel for cyclists in the town centre on which works were still in progress when he asked the question in January this year. The Portfolio Holder said she and the council as a whole fully supported cycling, however groups of people cycling at speed through the town centre, using the ramps and doing wheelies, was unacceptable. She said they will be encouraging cycling and green transport through the local plan.

Councillor Imarni asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed with her that The Old Town Hall was an obvious cultural centre for the borough and a heritage site, and we must do all we can to get it reopened as soon as possible once it is Covid secure. The Portfolio Holder agreed and said that staff will be doing everything they can to ensure a safe reopening, however the issue is with the venue being so dated it doesn't lend itself to small numbers. She said she would update Councillor Imarni on any progress of reopening.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if the Portfolio Holder would organise a review of demarcated cycle routes where cycling is currently forbidden. The Portfolio Holder suggested that the

question may be better answered by Councillor G Sutton but the PSPO's were put in place to address anti-social behaviour following public consultation, scrutiny through our committees and the final decision being made through full council. She gave reassurance that cycle routes, walkways and green transport will be considered as part of any future plans in the borough. Councillor Hollinghurst said this information was encouraging.

Councillor Hollinghurst asked if the Portfolio Holder could look at the possibilities for Tring Skateboard Park to gain funds for refurbishment. The Portfolio Holder said she hadn't been made aware of any issues with the skateboard park but agreed she would look into it and let Councillor Hollinghurst know.

**Action: Councillor Banks**

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

#### **HEMEL GARDEN COMMUNITIES PROGRESS**

- The Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) programme continues to make good progress.
- The HGC Programme team, led by Dacorum Borough Council, St Albans City and District Council, Hertfordshire County Council and Hertfordshire LEP partners, is progressing guidance and initiatives to shape the new development and help transform the wider town. It aims to deliver 11,000 homes and 10,000 jobs for the area by 2050 and a variety of place making infrastructure and initiatives.
- A bid for next stage Capacity Funding for the financial year 20/21 was submitted to MHCLG on 4 September. We bid for £850k funding to support the programme; this included some collaborative transformational work with Aylesbury and Harlow Gilston Garden Towns to support a solar bulk buy scheme for residents and digital connectivity, and to enable next stage studies to be funded. A funding award announcement is anticipated in late autumn, though receipt of allocations is unlikely to be until next March.
- Most recently the programme has been engaging with local residents and Councillors to find out what they most like about Hemel Hempstead, and how our great New Town should inform the shape and style of the new areas to be developed.
- This work on creating a 'Spatial Vision' for Hemel Garden Communities is nearing completion and will inform the content of masterplanning for the area – with the aim of achieving beautiful places for people to live and work in with sustainability and addressing climate change issues at its heart.
- I would like to thank all involved in participating for their valuable input and look forward to further constructive involvement of the local community as the plans develop.

#### **RE-OPENING TOWN CENTRES SAFELY**

- As the country and our local area continues to recover from the Covid-19 lockdown earlier this year, we have developed plans to help our town and shopping centres re-open safely to the benefit of our residents and to promote the retail economy in these difficult times.
- The Council is participating in the national Re-opening High Streets Safely scheme, which is backed by funds administered by MHCLG from the European Regional Development Fund.
- As such, Government has made up to £137k available to Dacorum for this purpose.

- We have submitted a Grant Action Plan to MHCLG to set out our proposals for reinvigorating our retail areas.
- These include business development support to work with traders to help them provide a safe shopping environment and to develop their business models, marketing, communications and where necessary any further adaptations to high streets to help social distancing.

## **PLANNING WHITE PAPER**

- Members will be aware that the Government is proposing major reforms to the planning system.
- There are two consultation documents – a white paper and further proposals, which include changes to the way each Council area's housing needs are determined.
- Both documents are the subject of a comprehensive report to SPEOSC on 23 September, which will help inform the final responses to Government which I will be overseeing.

## **DACORUM'S NEW LOCAL PLAN MOVING FORWARD**

- I am pleased to report that the first draft emerging Strategy for shaping the future of Dacorum in the shape of our new Local Plan – which will run to 2038 – is now complete.
- This has followed many months of hard work from the Member task and finish group and from the Officer Strategic Planning team. I would like to thank all involved in the process for getting the Council to this point.
- The emerging Local Plan will be considered by the SPEOSC at its meeting next week, on 23 September and then will progress to Cabinet in October and to Full Council in November for final consideration before it is issued for public consultation at the end of the year.
- I would remind Members that emerging Plan is in draft form and following the public consultation the Council will consider all views put forward before a final version is agreed for submission to the Secretary of State.
- The engagement of our residents and other stakeholders in the process is of course essential. I will be working with the Officer team over the next few weeks to ensure that we have in place a wide range of opportunities for people to consider the plan before giving us their views.

## **JOBS BOOST AT AMAZON**

- I am pleased to note that Amazon will be creating a further 80 permanent roles at its fulfilment centre in Hemel Hempstead, to add to the 500 permanent jobs it has there currently.
- On top of this, it is also hiring for a further 500 seasonal roles
- The news follows the surge in online demand for goods across the Country.
- This is good news for our local economy and underlines the benefits we have at Maylands Business Park with its excellent access to the motorway network.

Questions:

Councillor Pringle asked how many dwellings there currently were in the borough that have had planning permission granted but have not yet built. The Portfolio Holder said he had a rough idea but would prefer to speak to officers for an accurate figure and let Councillor Pringle know. **Action: Councillor G Sutton**

Councillor Symington asked if the Portfolio Holder had any comments on the practice of pre-meetings, such as those for the development management committee, which are disallowed at some local authorities as they are perceived to undermine the integrity of the planning process by potentially reducing the level of predetermination. The Portfolio Holder said this matter had been questioned before so advice had been sought and it was determined that there was nothing unconstitutional about it. He said he had sat on the committee from 2003-2015 and had chaired the committee for those last two years and there was no predetermination on the decisions.

Councillor Symington felt we were in a different situation now and members are all given the opportunity to ask the officers questions in advance of the meeting and can also receive answers. The argument that information needs to be shared in a different pre-meeting is negated by the fact that this occurs anyway now because of the new process through Microsoft Teams. The Portfolio Holder advised that all members were able to ask questions of officers and it wasn't restricted by political party, as long as it wasn't predetermining a decision.

Councillor Adeleke asked who was policing the instruction to wear face masks to ensure safe shopping environments in the borough. The Portfolio Holder said this wasn't part of his portfolio. Councillor Banks said she would provide a written response. **Action: Councillor Banks**

Councillor Hollinghurst made reference to the motorway improvements at the junction of Maylands Business Park. He asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed that the emphasis and focus on that project is misplaced. The Portfolio Holder disagreed and felt we needed to have a free running junction at M8 to help stop congestion and the build-up of pollution. He said we must bear in mind that the land that borders the motorway will be a large industrialised area which will include the movement of heavy good vehicles, and we will discourage the use of cars as much as we can but we were unable to stop businesses operating.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

#### **Financial Services:**

Financial Services is leading on the financial reporting requirements arising from the coronavirus pandemic. This covers both internal reporting and the external reporting requirements necessary to ensure the Council secures the pandemic –related Government funding it is eligible for.

The service continues to ensure prompt payment to staff and suppliers, as well as a sensitive approach in dealing with the Council's debtors.

The extreme wet weather episodes that occurred over the summer have also kept our Risk and Insurance team very busy.

The Council's external audit process of the financial statements for 2019/20 are nearing conclusion, with the final accounts published and due to be presented at Audit Committee on Thursday the 17<sup>th</sup> September. The External Audit process has again being a very smooth



with positive feedback from our external auditors on the financial strategies taken and the processes in place.

Alongside the monitoring of the current financial position, budget setting for 2021/22 will be the focus for the service over the next few months. Current circumstances present a number of challenges for this process this year but the continued fiscal scrutiny that is undertaken each year at budget setting will continue.

### **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 have been busy during the summer implementing additional covid secure changes to operational buildings, such as Tring Victoria Hall and Berkhamsted Civic Centre so that these valuable community hubs can remain open in a safe and secure manner.

### **Ex-Civic Centre**

UKPN have completed works to energise the new substation. Decommissioning works to the old substation are on-going and anticipated to complete imminently. Dacorum's demolition contractor is on site and Phase 2 of the old Civic centre demolition works re-commenced last week, and is due to be completed this week

### **Revenues, Benefits and Fraud:**

The revenues & benefits teams have been extremely busy for the last few months, supporting residents and local businesses as part of the Government's response to the pandemic.

The team has now paid out over 1,900 small business and Retail, Hospitality & Leisure grants totalling £26 million to local business rate payers. These grant schemes have now being closed in line with government guidance.

The service has also issued over 1,000 Retail, Hospitality, Leisure and Nursery businesses with a business rates holiday for the current year, to a value of £25.8 million.

The council tax team are now starting to get in touch with residents who have fallen behind with their payments, so that we can find out what issues there are and provide or signpost to support which is available.

Questions:

Councillor Beauchamp asked if the Portfolio Holder agreed it was fantastic news that the old civic centre building had at last been demolished. The Portfolio Holder agreed and gave some background on the delays. He gave tribute to the Estates Team that had worked through a very complicated process to bring this altogether.

Councillor Birnie queried the current void status of commercial assets. The Portfolio Holder advised there were 28 void properties; 3 were under offer, 18 were for refurbishment and/or maintenance and the others are on the market. He said despite the pandemic, occupancy

rates had remained on target at 96% at the end of quarter 1, although the level of arrears was up at 12%. Councillor Birnie questioned the status of rent arrears. The Portfolio Holder said he would provide a written response. **Action: Councillor Elliot**

Councillor Riddick said it was reported at the last finance and resources overview and scrutiny committee meeting that we were projecting a pressure of £5.8M and asked for the Portfolio Holder's thoughts on the next six months. The Portfolio Holder advised that the forecast was written earlier in the year and things had changed since that was reported. The most up to date position will be reported to cabinet next week but he advised that the council were now projecting an in-year pressure of £2.5M.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

#### **Tenant and Leaseholder Services:**

- The Income and Tenancy Teams have updated their processes to adapt to the latest legislation that Notice periods will need 4 weeks or 6 months depending on the reason for enforcement action. They have also started preparing for a return to court for possession claims after 20<sup>th</sup> September. Out of 5 court cases that were 'stayed' at lockdown, only 1 is likely to now progress to court for further action following regular contact and support from the Income Officers to reduce the level of arrears.
- Supported Housing Officers started carrying out door step visits throughout August. As of 2<sup>nd</sup> September they had seen 86% of all sheltered tenants to carry out a welfare check. While tenants were phoned regularly throughout the past 5 months, the ability to see tenants face to face while ensuring social distancing, led to 128 referrals for additional support from agencies like AgeUK and Adult care. Additionally in August we have had 41 alarm faults reported compared to 10 in the previous months indicating that regular home visits are still crucial to support our older tenants.
- Lounges in sheltered schemes will remain closed for general tenant use after considering the government guidelines and carrying out a risk assessment. A letter has been sent to Supported Housing Tenants to inform them of this. We are working with partners like AgeUK to identify how organised activities could be facilitated safely to improve health and wellbeing for supported tenants.

#### **Strategic Housing:**

- The service is continuing to receive and respond to approaches for housing/homeless assistance in line with government guidance and change in priority need status as a result of Covid-19;
- Currently there are 160 households in temporary accommodation (95 pre- covid) and we are seeking suitable move on options for those accommodated;
- Advertisement of the newbuild developments at Magenta Court and Martindale have been undertaken and allocations/lettings are well underway;
- The service has submitted a grant funding application to MHCLG for the Next Steps Accommodation Fund to assist with rehousing of homeless households in line with government announcement.

#### **Property & Place:**

General - The contractors have increased the scope of works now being delivered from emergency, statutory compliance and health and safety related repairs to start to work through the backlog of day to day repairs. The capital investment program has restarted, focusing on external works or those which limit the time spent in the property or number of trades in order to help keep people safe.

Leasehold Services - Numbers of leaseholders continue to rise, we currently have 1803 leaseholders on our records. In May 2020 the Leasehold team was increased to provide ongoing services to the leaseholders, which has enabled quick responses to all service charge queries.

Garages - There has been a steady demand for garages throughout the pandemic and in May June and August there were more garage licences commenced than terminated and for the period from April to September, a net gain of 9 garages were let. A further 243 garages have expressions of interest and are being validated before going through the commencement process.

Voids - Empty homes have been impacted throughout the pandemic and the number re-let have increased from 10 in April to 37 in August and the works to sheltered schemes are restarting with appropriate risk assessed method statements in place.

Compliance - Gas Safety – Servicing gas appliances has been challenging, especially at the peak of COVID-19 with tenants shielding and self-isolating. Thankfully, due to the commitment of the team and our contractors (Sun Realm), performance has remained high and we achieved 99.99% compliancy in August.

Fire & Electrical Safety – Risk Assessments continue at our blocks of flats and we programme the resulting works in accordingly, based on risk. We have strengthened the team with the addition of a Lead Surveyor focusing on electrical safety, which provides greater resilience in achieving compliance in our dwellings.

## Housing Development

Kylna Court	Final 12-month defects inspections completed. Rectification works currently underway after Covid pause, 75% complete.
Corn Mill Court	Final Account resolved with Osborne. End of 12 month Defects Inspections being arranged.
Martindale	Completion due mid-October. 12 market sales units offers accepted, 2 completions handed over.- sales activity slowing
Magenta Court	Handover revised from 9 <sup>th</sup> to 16 <sup>th</sup> Sept as essential certification not in place  There were a number of Minor snagging items in units along with a full builders clean still outstanding and H&S issues in relation to uneven areas of external block paving  It is worth noting that this is a really excellent development and the quality is very much present but unfortunately for these reasons we could not accept handover on the 9th.
St Margaret's Way	Design progressing and looking to maximise the site by incorporating some bedsits over garages into the scheme.

Paradise Fields	Planning Application has been submitted. Homes England have been in contact regarding car park sale.
Gaddesden Row	Progressing well on site. Completion December. 3 houses
Eastwick Row	4 No tenders received for Main Contract Works. Interviews completed and a preferred bidder selected. Recommendation to go to Sept Cabinet.
Coniston Road	Tender documents returned for Principle Contractor (18 No) Shortlisted 3. Interviews completed and a preferred bidder selected. Recommendation to go to Sept Cabinet.
Wilstone	Design commenced. Meeting planned with Estates to agree land value.
LA1	Design commenced. Meeting held with Homes England
Cherry Bounce	Tender documents returned for Architect and EA. Shortlist and Interviews for Architect & EA underway.
Paradise Depot	Design underway. Tender documents being adjudicated for M&E and Structural Eng. Meeting held with DENS to share design options 2 design options being consider, increased density with undercroft parking or parking policy complaint scheme outside of the building footprint. Land value has been issued by Estates. Meeting set up with Estates to review and agree way forward with delivering the DENS building
Garage Sites	8 No sites - Initial design complete and ready to submit for pre application with Planning Dept.
Randall's Ride	Initial design complete commencing site due diligence checks.

Questions:

Councillor Birnie asked if we had been affected by the most recent government restrictions in relation to cladding. The Portfolio Holder advised they were up to speed with the recent proposals and were monitoring it very carefully. She confirmed it would affect us if put in place as we have properties 3 storeys high and over. Work was already progressing on The Elms to make that compliant. A report on the matter will be going to the housing and community overview and scrutiny committee in the near future.

Councillor Birnie asked if The Elms was the only property impacted or if there would be others. The Portfolio Holder advised there could be others but she would keep members updated.

There were no further questions.

## 5. MOTIONS

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Freedman and seconded by Councillor Uttley:

This Council resolves:

- to require all public firework displays within the local authority boundaries to be advertised in advance of the event, allowing residents to take precautions for their animals and vulnerable people

- to actively promote a public awareness campaign about the impact of fireworks on animal welfare and vulnerable people—including the precautions that can be taken to mitigate risks
- to write to the UK Government urging them to introduce legislation to limit the maximum noise level of fireworks to 90dB for those sold to the public for private displays
- to encourage local suppliers of fireworks to stock 'quieter' fireworks for public display.

Councillor Freedman said the motion was inspired by the RSPCA and other animal welfare charities aimed at making fireworks less frightening for animals and vulnerable people. Sadly fireworks inadvertently lead to the distress, injury and death of a significant number of family pets, farm animals and wildlife every year. He didn't want to illustrate the evidence behind this claim especially as the motion didn't call for any restrictions, rather it seeks to use the council's position as a community leader to help educate people both to the dangerous side effects of fireworks but also to the safer, quieter alternatives that are becoming available. He hoped this motion would encourage our community to be good neighbours whilst enjoying the fireworks and we're asking them to do this by firstly giving them advance notice of displays especially those with animals or conditions, encouraging the community to be aware of the problems fireworks may contribute to, and finally to encourage the sale and use of the quieter and safer alternatives. He explained that although the motion was inspired by animals, the noise of fireworks also has an impact on those with mental health conditions. He hoped that encouraging the use of quieter, safer fireworks would increase the range and availability locally, and that the high decibel and high range products would reduce in popularity and be replaced by these better alternatives. Finally this motion asks DBC to add its name to the list of councils calling on the government to add the decibel level to the criteria of fireworks marketed to the general public. Currently fireworks containing over a certain amount of explosives are regulated and only available to those licenced for holding public displays. The basis of this regulation seems to be risk associated with physical injury caused by a fireworks explosion. This motion simply asks the government to consider the damage done by sudden noise as part of that criteria. He felt this motion didn't reduce any capacity for residents to enjoy fireworks in the manner that they currently do but at the same time it acknowledges the problems they may possibly cause and strikes a balance.

Councillor Anderson said he had sympathy with the motion and with what it was trying to achieve but he couldn't support it because it was impractical. He said the government had already introduced restrictions on time limits and also that it would be in the interest of the operator to advertise events in advance anyway. He advised he was contacted by a couple of residents around bonfire night last year and although he had sympathy with them he wasn't sure what we as a council could practically do to encourage stockists to provide quieter fireworks. He had every sympathy for pets and pet owners but it was a difficult thing to get through and he couldn't support the motion.

Councillor Pringle spoke in favour of the motion. She said she has had pets for a number of years and also had a son that was diagnosed with autism so she could confirm that it does have an impact on pets and those with mental health conditions. She appreciated it was difficult to enforce but felt we should be ambitious in trying to support our residents and lead on education and information at not a great deal of cost. She suggested information packs that residents could access or download to help advise them on how to resolve issues surrounding fireworks. She felt we should all work together to lead our community and invited others to support the motion.

Councillor Williams said he was sympathetic to the content of the motion but had an issue with motions like this one coming to full council and felt more education was required. He felt that full council wasn't the place to try and amend council policies and it was inappropriate. He agreed there was a need for the government to look at issues around the sale of fireworks and the noise etc. but he wouldn't be supporting this motion.

Councillor England said many residents of Adeyfield West enjoy fireworks and many do not. Over a long period fireworks have become more affordable for more people so it is important to recognise it has the effect of putting more people and pets in closer proximity to more fireworks. There is a problem here, some of these people may be ex-services that would like to see anything done to address this at any level of government. This motion is a way to find some level of accommodation between the extremes of feelings of bouts, a back garden private choice of one household which can be heard, smelt and felt by the whole community and crucially at the level of individual distress. On the demand side this council can assist its residents by promoting good neighbourly behaviour and that is part of what we're here for, and we could call for a 21<sup>st</sup> century reconsideration of how to enjoy celebrations when gardens are getting smaller and the effects on neighbourhoods are better understood. On the supply side, by developing choice on the responsible end of the product range, we would be able to respond locally to demand while community impact is moderated. He accepted that the effects we can achieve may be small, but if you view them at an individual level they are worth having. As a council we can signal this move in many ways and this message would look good on the council website, we can achieve an improvement on quality of life for our ward residents. He hoped many members would support this motion.

Councillor Griffiths said she would be voting against the motion on the basis that full council wasn't the way to develop policy. Full council doesn't give the option for members to scrutinise and have a full debate. She recalled a couple of years ago that we created an information pack for residents that could be found on our website and suggested we could reissue this information again. As a ward councillor for Leverstock Green and the executive of the Leverstock Green Village Association, she said they tried to co-ordinate a firework display every year so that residents can enjoy fireworks in a safe environment and do not need to go and buy fireworks themselves. She was concerned that due to coronavirus and the lack of firework displays this year that people may go and buy their own fireworks but that was unfortunately out of our control.

Councillor Tindall felt that full council was an appropriate place for opposition members to present motions and highlight matters of concern. He referred to Councillor Griffith's point about information packs being made available to residents in previous years and advised that he was unaware of this so he felt that this proved that bringing matters to full council was an appropriate mechanism and had served a purpose.

Councillor Adeleke said he wouldn't be supporting the motion as it should be directed to the government rather than a local council. He felt it served no purpose to residents.

Councillor Uttley explained we were a nation of animal lovers in the UK yet through our own ignorance we often inadvertently cause them harm. This motion wasn't about stopping people doing what they want to do or to seek to take away the joy that people need, it is about education. With education comes change and change starts from the ground up which is why people look to local councillors for support and take interest in the information they provide. This motion was about raising awareness and understanding. She referred to the points about practicalities and suggested that there was time for a discussion and amendment if that was a concern.

Councillor Freedman thanked everyone for their contributions. He said there were many things we can do no matter how small and thanked Councillor Griffiths for sharing the

information on the packs used in previous years as this is what he was asking for. He agreed that major changes would need to be done nationally but that doesn't reduce the need for us to act locally. He advised that the motion didn't ask the council to enforce anything but to actively encourage with an education system through its existing forms of publishing and there would of course be a small cost for this. He finalised by saying this motion was in no way a political move as suggested by Councillor Williams and asked members to overlook political party when considering their vote for this motion.

A vote was held:

17 for,  
26 against,  
2 abstentions,

Therefore the motion failed.

The following Motion was proposed by Councillor Tindall and seconded by Councillor Williams:

The recent changes to planning law made by the Government are causing a stir across the country, removing the right of local people to have a say in the planning process.

In protecting the public's say in the planning process;

A. This Council notes:

1. The publication by Government of the White Paper, 'Planning for the Future' on 6 August 2020, which set out proposals on reforms to the planning process for the future.
2. That the vast majority of planning applications are given the go ahead by local authority planning committees, with permission granted to around 9 out of 10 applications.
3. That research by the Local Government Association has said that there are existing planning permissions for more than one million homes that have not yet been started.

B. This Council is concerned that the proposals seek to:

1. Reduce or remove the right of residents to object to applications near them.
2. Grant automatic rights for developers to build on land identified as 'for growth'.
3. Remove the consultation role of Parish and Town Councils to comment and make recommendations on local planning applications.

C. This Council Further Notes:

1. The Royal Institute for British Architects called the proposals 'shameful and which will do almost nothing to guarantee delivery of affordable, well-designed and sustainable homes'. RIBA also said that proposals could lead to the next generation of slum housing.
2. The reforms are opposed by the all-party Local Government Association, currently led by Conservative Councillors.
3. That the reforms remove section 106 payments for infrastructure and proposes their replacement with a national levy, paid direct to councils and non-negotiable by developers.

D. This Council Believes:

1. That existing planning procedures, as currently administered by our own team in Dacorum Borough Council allow for local democratic control over future development, and provides an opportunity for local people to make contributions regarding planning proposals that affect them.
2. That proposals for automatic rights to build in 'growth' areas, and increased permitted development rights, risk unregulated growth and unsustainable communities.
3. That local communities must be in the driving seat on shaping the future of their communities, and local determination of the planning framework and planning applications play an important part in this process.

E. This Council requests that, when considering the response from Dacorum Borough Council, the Strategic Planning and Environment O&S Committee takes into account the sentiments expressed in this motion.

A vote was held:

42 for,  
0 against,  
0 abstentions,

Therefore the motion was carried.

## **6. QUESTIONS**

1. To Councillor Williams from Councillor Symington:

"The government is keen to promote the roll out of 5G networks and has a target that the majority of the population will be covered by a 5G signal by 2027. As stated in 2017, the government 'wants to provide world class digital connectivity that is gigabit-capable, reliable, long-lasting and widely available across the UK – and to do so at pace.' In July 2020 the government announced it is taking forward proposals to simplify planning rules to speed up 5G rollout and improve rural mobile coverage.

Could the portfolio holder please confirm that Dacorum Borough Council will work with stakeholders to promote and facilitate the roll-out of 5G networks to ensure the residents of Dacorum benefit at the earliest opportunity from the commercial and personal benefits of super-fast broadband connectivity?"

Councillor Williams said the borough had always supported improved broadband facilities, whether it was 5G or fibre cables across the borough, we recognise the importance of both in the commercial and residential sector for maximum possible connectivity to support businesses. He wasn't sure that the borough council had a massive role in this, the planning process for telecommunications providers had always been generous in the permissions that they're able to implement, and if the government is further relaxing that as Councillor Symington has stated it does give flexibility to telecoms providers to install the equipment and improve the network. He said there has to be a small degree of caution on that and there are some public concerns about the installation of some of this equipment and there has to be a role in the process for that. There also has to be a degree of understanding that we expect some sort of consideration from telecoms providers about where and when they install the equipment. He said the amount of power and legislation that supports the objective of delivering 5G and other forms of connectivity across the country is already very much in favour of the telecoms providers to enable them to deliver the standards of communication that Councillor Symington refers to.



Councillor Symington felt Councillor Williams only answered part of her question. She requested that we do follow through with the work we need to do to see this through.

Councillor Williams said the powers that mobile network providers have are quite significant in planning terms, it is very few of the applications that actually come through the planning process in full. He said there were a number of 5G masts that have appeared around Hemel Hempstead over the last six months that were delivered under the powers that the operators have to install these. The vast majority of the installations do not go through a full planning process because the legislation favours the installation of this equipment and favours the fastest possible roll out of it. He said there were very few occasions when they come to a planning committee and when they do it is usually because there is a reason why they effect a particular property or neighbourhood and the process should take place. A vast amount of equipment is installed under delegated authorities or permissions and he felt that the planning process was a positive contribution rather than a hindrance towards the improvement of the system.

2. To Councillor G Sutton from Councillor Tindall:

“Dacorum Borough Council rightly set a high target for the provision of affordable housing in new developments of 40% in its supplementary planning document on affordable housing dated 25/9/2013. Unlike a number of other local authorities, Dacorum Borough Council policies allow that C2 land need not contribute to affordable housing provision. As the definition of ‘extra-care’ is not defined in law, there is scope for developers to bring forward schemes which do not meet the spirit of the exemption to providing affordable housing. Would the portfolio holder consider revising the supplementary planning documents to prevent this happening by bringing Dacorum Borough Council’s policies in line with those of other local authorities?”

Councillor G Sutton said they have been working on a new policy for affordable housing in the new local plan to address current and future issues. He said they were aware that one of the specific issues was over the provision of care facilities and the affordability of care facilities through increasing proportion of our older and less able residents. The delivery of these types of schemes has specific liability issues that may require exemptions to the normal affordable housing policies, however such matters will need careful consideration to ensure that they are genuine community needs for care are secured in perpetuity and not to the detriment of the supply of affordable properties. The local plan policy will set the basis of our approach to affordable housing generally and we will need in due course to add to this through the new affordable housing supplementary planning document to add necessary and appropriate detail.

Councillor Tindall asked if the portfolio holder agreed that as extra care facilities were not envisaged in 2013 that an update on the policy is needed urgently in order that profiteering developers cannot take advantage of this loophole in the law which we unfortunately were unaware of until the first example recently.

Councillor G Sutton agreed that we do need to investigate further as there are issues around this. The current proposals for site LA4 at Hanburys, Shooters Way in Berkhamsted for an extra care residential development. This application is under consideration and will be coming in due course to the development management committee for determination and is expected to be at the meeting on 15 October. Officers are currently addressing the issue of extra care housing on the site against the council’s current policies and advice from Hertfordshire County Council and this will be set out to members in the report to DMC.

Councillor Tindall asked if the portfolio holder agreed that when presenting the report it would be good to include the detail of the various legal actions that councils have taken

successfully in order to prevent this happening elsewhere and to explain why we have the loophole at present.

Councillor G Sutton replied he would raise that with the responsible officers.

3. To Councillor Elliot from Councillor Symington:

“Could the portfolio holder confirm that the total payments made to Everyone Active to date amount to £825k? At the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny committee meeting on 7 July 2020, it was stated: ‘in relation to Everyone Active the only supplier relief they have received at this stage was the management fee being waived for the first five months of the financial year’. However, the report to the F&R OSC meeting on 8 September 2020 states that ‘an initial support payment of £205k was made to allow EA to top up the furlough pay for their staff to 100% of salary in the first 3 months of closure. A second support payment of £320k has been agreed relating to July to September to support reopening of leisure services across Dacorum,’ in addition to the previously reported £300k management fee rebate.”

Councillor Elliot said this question was raised at the finance and resources overview and scrutiny committee on 8 September and was responded to by Mark Brookes. He advised that the information provided was confidential and commercially sensitive and must not be disclosed to any third parties or discussed in any public forum so he was unable to discuss the matter at this meeting.

Councillor Symington thanked Mark Brookes for his email. She said the information she quoted was taken from minutes of the finance and resources overview and scrutiny committee on the council’s website. She highlighted the in-year pressure of £2.5m and the £825k to Everyone Active and then asked if the portfolio holder recognised that is a large percentage of the pressure that we are facing as a council and our current in-year projected deficit.

Councillor Elliot replied that St Albans and Watford had provided the same level of support and possibly at the same percentage as we have to their leisure centres. He said that we needed to provide this support to keep our leisure centres open and had no other option.

Councillor Symington said she wasn’t commenting on what other councils were doing and whether they were right or wrong, she was interested in what we were doing with public money and that is why she was asking this question. She felt as much information as possible should be in the public domain.

Councillor Elliot said he couldn’t answer Councillor Symington’s question following advice from the council’s solicitor.

The Mayor suggested that Councillor Elliot could provide Councillor Symington with a confidential written response. Councillor Elliot agreed.

4. To Councillor Elliot from Councillor Symington:

“The Council is projected to suffer a £5.8m pressure on finances for the current year. In the light of this, does the portfolio holder think they could reconsider their position on turning down grants from the Football Association amounting to £200k which would enable local clubs to upgrade Dacorum Borough Council owned football pitches? “

Councillor Elliot replied we were responsible for football pitches, particularly the health and safety aspect. He said the grant wouldn’t come to us, it would be given to us on a separate

entity who would be looking after the pitches but we would still be responsible for the health and safety. He felt this would be outside of our control. He said he understood from the football association that the grant would be for football pitches only and would preclude it from being an open space for general public and other uses and that is why we were not prepared to go down that route.

Councillor Symington said it was her understanding that other authorities were able to work under this arrangement and asked what differentiates our policies to other councils that prevents us from using these funds.

Councillor Elliot replied he was unaware of any other councils that operated in this way so he was unable to make a comparison. He suggested Councillor Symington could give him some examples and he would come back to her.

5. To Councillor G Sutton from Councillor Symington:

“The land at the top of Durrant’s Lane, on the corner of Shootersway, was part of a S106 agreement with the developer, Taylor Wimpey and with the intention to provide a community facility in the form of football pitches and general amenity space. The land has been transferred to Hertfordshire County Council but has not been delivered up for use by the community, either in the form of amenity space or football pitches. What can the portfolio holder do to ensure that the policies of the planning department and intentions of the Council in terms of providing amenity space to the community are followed through on and that the community has access to the land set aside for its use?”

Councillor G Sutton explained the land referred to has been transferred to Hertfordshire County Council and DBC property officers were liaising with them on this matter. They have passed details over to HCC of a local sports club who were now liaising directly with them with the view of them taking on the space for local use. The delivery and management of other sports pitches and facilities is an important issue for the borough and one we are addressing within the new local plan.

Councillor Symington asked what can we do to facilitate this and how can we actually make it happen to ensure the land is used by the people in the local community.

Councillor G Sutton replied that the arrangements were subject to negotiations and as this was a HCC matter he was unable to make any further comment.

Councillor Symington asked how we could link up the policies to ensure they’re actually carried through. Councillor G Sutton said he would discuss the matter with the officers and let her know.

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

None.

## **8. CABINET REFERRALS**

None.

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

None.

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

None.

## **11. CHANGES TO COMMITTEE DATES**

The following changes to committee dates were agreed:

- Additional Strategic Planning and Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee on 30 September.

## **12. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

The Mayor advised that this will be the last full council meeting with our current Chief Executive Sally Marshall.

The Group Leaders, Councillor Williams and Councillor Tindall, and also the Mayor Councillor Douris, shared words of appreciation and recognition to Sally Marshall and wished her all the best for the future. Sally Marshall shared fond memories of her time at Dacorum and thanked her colleagues for their support and wishes.

The meeting ended at 9.20 pm.