

Proposed by Cllr Lara Pringle

1. This council recognises the significant changes of circumstances following the launch of the consultation on the Local Plan in November 2020, namely that Dacorum escalated quickly to tier 4 and then national lockdown meaning that:

a. residents have been severely impeded from engaging in the consultation process, or comprehending the implications of the proposals, due to distractions caused by the dramatic rise in coronavirus cases, hospitalisations and bereavements across Dacorum that was unforeseen at the time this Council voted to proceed with the consultation in November 2020

b. opportunities to publicise the local plan through volunteer leafleting, public meetings and question and answer sessions that would normally be an essential element of any such consultation have not been available

c, due to the national lockdown, those who cannot access the consultation documents through the DBC portal, because of lack of an appropriate device or skills, have effectively been excluded in any meaningful way from participating in the consultation

d. that this excluded cohort of residents is likely to contain a high proportion of elderly and vulnerable people and that encouraging such residents to travel to public libraries, in breach of the government's guidance on essential journeys to view the consultation documents presents a risk to public health during the current emergency,

e. making a journey to a public library in order to view consultation documents on the local plan is not an essential journey according to government guidelines, it is unlawful — and therefore irrational — for Dacorum Borough Council to have encouraged residents to travel to public libraries during lockdown to view documents as an element of the consultation process

f. that there is evidence of a high proportion of residents who have not been informed of the local plan through official DBC communications whatsoever and many residents remain unaware of the consultation

g. that the published communications that have managed to reach a proportion of the public, suggest that only responses by email or via the portal are acceptable, meaning that those who can only respond by post have effectively been excluded

2. In addition some weeks into the public consultation, on 16th December 2020, the government published its response to the local housing need proposals on the

consultation on changes to the current planning system, setting out important changes to the standard method, which clearly stated, amongst other things, that meeting housing needs is never a reason to cause unacceptable harm to protected landscapes and the Green Belt. The council acknowledges that the publication of the new guidelines:

a. has confused many residents, some of whom believed on hearing these government proposals, that the consultation would be suspended and will have decided not to respond

b. has altered the method of calculation and therefore the fundamental premise upon which the consultation was originally based, effectively changing the goal posts such that responses submitted at the beginning of the process are now based on an out-of- date premise

c. there is such confusion around the process that it is unreasonable to expect residents to now understand the basis of the formula and therefore evaluate the proposal or to be able to meaningfully respond

3. This council recognises that in view of these material changes of circumstances since the consultation was launched in November 2020, it would not be advisable to proceed with this consultation as it will leave any Local Plan based on such a consultation vulnerable to legal challenge and will lead to a loss of public confidence in the outcome of the consultation and undermine public confidence in Dacorum Borough Council should it choose to proceed under all of these circumstances

4. Therefore this council resolves to withdraw the consultation, revise the proposals and consult the public at a time and in a manner when the consultation can be fully inclusive, accessible and fair to all of our residents.