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**DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL**

**MEETING OF THE COUNCIL**

**14 APRIL 2021**

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Present -

**MEMBERS:**

Douris (Mayor), Adeleke, Allen, Anderson, Arslan, Banks, Barrett, Barry, Bassadone, Beauchamp, Bhinder, Birnie, Chapman, Claughton, 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, Woolner and Wyatt-Lowe (49)

**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), S Donaldson (Communications and Consultation Lead Officer), C O’Neil (Corporate and Democratic Support Team Leader) and T Angel (Minutes).

The meeting began at 6.30 pm.

The Mayor advised that we were in the mourning period following the passing of HRH The Prince Philip, Duke of Edinburgh.

The Mayor invited Councillor Tindall and Councillor Williams to say a few words in remembrance.

Councillor Tindall felt it was only right that they recognise the loyal service to the country that the Duke of Edinburgh performed over so many years 73 he believed and the constant strength and guidance he provided to the Queen.

He wanted to pick up on something that had affected them more locally that being the establishment of the Duke of Edinburgh awards scheme in 1956, to encourage young people to become involved in their communities in outdoor activities. This was a particular benefit to those children that were disadvantaged. With Councillor Tindall’s long association with the Dacorum Educational Support Centre they have done some marvellous work with the Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme and the Prince’s Trust, it’s fantastic to see how these schemes help to develop young people who were initially excluded and since regained self-confidence and ability to make something of their lives and for that he said the Prince should always be remembered as being an institution and a supporter of young people and for that he needs to be remembered.

Councillor Williams said that there has been as you would expect a lot of reflection on the life of Prince Philip over the last few days, Councillor Tindall is correct in that they should reflect upon that and as a parent whose children have benefited by taking part in the Duke of Edinburgh scheme. Although the scheme was challenging it was also enjoyable, he joked that even if he did get some moaning at the time about the amount of effort it took, it's been a significant benefit to many young people. He also reflected upon his dedication to supporting the Queens in her over 70 year reign, always being there to give wise council and support to the country, for someone who wasn't born in this country his support and dedication to the betterment of the United Kingdom is something which you know is unsurpassed and he felt it was correct at this occasion to reflect upon that.

The Mayor invited the Council to join him for a 2 minutes silence to remember HRH The Prince Phillip.

The Mayor said it was his solemn and sad duty to report the passing of Councillor Graham Sutton on the 27<sup>th</sup> February 2021.

The Mayor invited Councillor Williams to lead tributes for Councillor Graham Sutton.

Councillor Williams shared how he feels it's important to reflect on the national figure as they just did, it's also very important that they reflect on those they lose locally that have made such a significant contribution to the local community, Graham was one of those people who made that significant contribution. He believes and clearly since his passing in February many tributes have been paid to Graham almost universally across the board for not only his dedication to his work as a councillor but the way in which he carried out those duties and the nature in which he encompassed friendship across the political spectrum, he conducted himself in a truly gentlemanly way in all business he carried out.

Graham moved to Hemel Hempstead when he was 3 years old, he worked for many many years for John Dickenson and he knew from conversations with him outside of his political activities that there wasn't anything he didn't know about envelopes, envelope manufacture, sizing and everything to do with that side of the business and that is something which he had carried on doing right up until the end.

It was his political activities that he really enjoyed so much, he knew having moved to Leverstock Green in 1977 with his wife Rosie he was delighted to get the opportunity in 2003 to be elected as a councillor to represent Leverstock Green on this council, an area which he was particularly proud and particularly active within the community, to be able to represent them here at Council Level and in his time here he had chaired the planning committee, took on other duties and then rose up to be Cabinet member for planning and regeneration and then planning and infrastructure, it was something that he threw himself into wholeheartedly and dedicated many hours to the council work, and the role that he took upon himself. It gave him a great deal of fulfilment and his presence here at the Forum and his personal support, kind words and his occasional text when perhaps they weren't having the best of days are going to be sorely missed and he was sure that for many colleagues here his support will be sorely missed, he sent sympathies to Rosie who was there as she comes to terms with life without Graham and certainly for them at the Council he has left a big gap and in his role and a friend and a councillor he was going to miss him terribly.

Councillor Tindall wholeheartedly agreed with what Councillor Williams said, he would also like to link Rosie with Graham in what they were saying because they came as a set, they worked very hard for Hemel and his sympathies and condolences go to Rosie.

He said he'd always respected Graham and they had quite a good relationship off the political stage and they often had telephone conversations from time to time on issues that affected the borough and on occasions they'd drifted off into other things, such as sometimes I can remember 1 a few years ago when they were discussing the standard of television programmes and he pointed me to talking pictures which for those that don't know is something that plays programmes from the 60's 70's and 80's which was their era so very much in tune with both of them. He said he would be sadly missed and there was going to be a huge hole to fill, he sent his sympathy to Grahams family and all who knew him.

The Mayor invited Councillor Rosie Sutton to say a few words.

Councillor Rosie Sutton thanked Councillor Williams and Councillor Tindall, she said that Graham would have loved to have heard that. She said they had taken a lot of the words she was going to say but she wanted to say how much she loved his council work, he was very passionate about it along with his community work and Leverstock Green, it was in his first thoughts in the morning and all day, she commented she got quite jealous sometimes because all he would ever talk about was his council work and what he had to do and what meetings he had, that was his life and he loved it. She would miss Sunday afternoon as they would talk about their week at the Council. Councillor Rosie Sutton found it too difficult to continue with her speech. The Mayor thanked Councillor Rosie Sutton and said that the councillors would appreciate what she had said.

Councillor Griffiths said she missed Graham too and she would like to pay tribute to Graham as a fellow ward councillor in Leverstock Green, he was great fun, he was a gentleman, she used to love the emails he used to send as they would always have some wit, he always made her laugh even on a bad day, when you opened an email from Graham there was always something in there that would take the sting out of any day. It's fair to say Graham had several loves probably in the order of Rosie first and then what he called his children, the dogs; Molly and Joseph, although Rosie may question if Molly and Joseph came first or she did but she thinks it's fair to say Rosie did, and then the community, the more local community of Leverstock Green and the wider community of Dacorum, he cared passionately about the area. He was a larger than life character and anyone who knew him and got to know him, loved him, he will be very sorely missed, especially by her.

The Mayor thanked Councillor Griffiths and admitted that he never quite knew what Graham would come out with, he would always say "Hello Terry, you alright" and then there would be some barb about Watford Football club or the colour of his jumper or something but it was always meant in a warm and friendly spirit and he joked he didn't think he was a supporter of Watford Football Club either.

Councillor Anderson said he would have given his all to have been presenting the environment portfolio later this evening however it was not to be, it's difficult to find the words to express ones feelings when losing a friend and colleague, but the situation demands it. Graham was a good friend, a true gentleman, as others have said a very calming, and he had a big calming influence which he particularly valued. He would never be able to thank him

enough for the help he gave me some years ago when he was politically targeted in unfortunate circumstances. In picking up Grahams council role he hoped to carry out his work including paying attention to the development of new facilities which changes manner, which to him as a former John Dickenson employee was close to his heart. Graham was a long standing fellow, local too which came in handy with the mayor quiz questions he would set about local landmarks of yesteryear. He thanked Graham or reminding him that the rose's facility at Boxmoor Wharf, this was one question that nearly caught him out until he remembered it. In summary he said he was grateful that he got the chance to know and work with Graham and he hoped that Rosie can take some comfort from the happy memories and the love they have for both of them.

Councillor Guest said Graham Sutton, as a predecessor of Development Management and Health committee was an example of a role model and mentor to her. As deputy mayor consort he accompanied Rosie to the switch on of the Christmas lights at Warners end shops, he had to be told *no he could not sit on the wicker reindeer* which the butchers had outside their shop. He will be sorely missed.

## **1. MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 24 February 2021 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**

None.

## **4. ANNOUNCEMENTS**

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

The Mayor reminded members that they were required to complete and return their DBC Related Party Transaction Declaration if they hadn't already done so.

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

C Hamilton advised that the following Elections will take place on 6<sup>th</sup> May 2021:  
Leverstock Green Ward  
Tring Central Ward  
Hertfordshire County Council  
Police and Crime Commissioner

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

Councillor Tindall gave apologies on behalf of Councillors Hollinghurst, McDowell, Pringle and Uttley.

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

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

The Leader presented his update as follows:

Following the sad loss of Councillor Graham Sutton, a couple of changes have been made to the Cabinet; Councillor Anderson is the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure and Councillor Barrett is the Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services.

There were no questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

### **FINANCIAL SERVICES**

The Financial Services teams focus has switched during March and April on the preparation and closure of the 2020/21 financial accounts and the completion of the 20/21 financial statements.

Initial discussions took place in March with the auditors of the financial statements, and these discussion were very positive with the service expecting to deliver fully signed off audited accounts by the end of September, well within the required deadlines.

The finance service as expected is continuing to lead on the financial reporting and monitoring requirements early on in the new financial year and as part of this process will report on any financial issues that arise and the direct financial impact of the ongoing pandemic.

As businesses and industries are starting to reopen the role of the accounts receivable service in working with council partners and creditors will become more challenging and the need to work hard with these partners to find short and medium term solutions that support the local business economy will be essential.

### **COMMERCIAL ASSETS AND PROPERTY DEVELOPMENT**

Despite the unprecedented challenges presented by the pandemic, the Estates, Building Services & Bereavement Teams continue to deliver effective services to customers, operational buildings and commercial partners in a difficult period.

During March the Commercial Assets team have been able to complete on the sale of the Maylands Gateway site, which has resulted in the Council receiving its largest capital receipt. In a period of uncertainty to complete on this deal at a price agreed prior to pandemic levels is a great achievement for the service and these funds will assist in financing the wider Council Strategies.

The Building services team are continuing to liaise with Health partners and the County Council to support the Covid testing and vaccination programme in regards to assets and locations available for vaccination and testing as required.

### **BUNKERS PARK CEMETERY – NEW POPPY FIELDS CEMETERY**

The construction project was completed in 2020 and the building is now being fitted out with appropriate signs, furniture and IT to enable the site to be fully operational as required in 2021/22.

## **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. As part of the annual 21/22 business rates billing the service has worked extremely hard since the early March budget announcements to ensure the business rates bills were issued on time and inclusive of all the latest government reliefs, support and advice.

The service has also been busy preparing for the release of the latest government guidance in regards to the Government's Restart business grants to roll out in mid-April. Once this guidance is finalised and published the service will be ready to start the process of distributing up to £6m of additional business grants.

### Questions:

Councillor Guest noted there were vacant workshops at the rear of Chaulden shops. She asked if the council had any plans for them.

The Portfolio Holder advised they were working on various plans for the units; they will probably be refurbished and let out as workshops. It is most likely they will be used for start-up businesses as we have a lot of demand for these in the borough.

Councillor Guest asked how much it would cost to refurbish the units.

The Portfolio Holder replied it would be around £50k to refurbish all the units. We would expect to rent out each unit at £8k per annum which would be considered reasonable for that size unit.

Councillor Beauchamp asked how the Maylands Business Centre had been impacted by the pandemic.

The Portfolio Holder advised the Maylands Business Centre wasn't within his remit, however he was aware they had 23 units and 16 offices; of these 5 tenants are on payment plans. We're trying to balance the impact of the pandemic with our social and economic balance with the borough so we're being sympathetic and trying to work with them.

Councillor Beauchamp asked what the Portfolio Holders thoughts were on the demand for any vacant units in the Maylands Business Centre.

The Portfolio Holder replied there were no vacant units at the moment. He advised they had to build a 'version 2' of the Maylands Business Centre due to the demand and they had received unprecedented demand on other units within the borough. He felt reasonably confident about the economic position within the borough at present.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

## TENANT AND LEASEHOLDER SERVICES

- We are very pleased to end the financial year with only 3.90% of the rent outstanding. This is a big achievement considering the financial pressures tenants have been experiencing this year. While the total rent arrears are increased from last year, this is lower than we forecast and is positive for our tenants and DBC. The level of support tenants require to sustain tenancies has increased during Covid but we will be adopting any new processes to embed these new ways of working.
- The Supported Housing team continue to contact tenants on a regular basis to check and provide the required support. In March they made over 5900 calls. The 5 year community alarm upgrade programme will continue this month starting with Evelyn Sharpe House to ensure a new digital system is installed and further protects our tenants living in supported housing.
- We have also purchased new soft furnishings and furniture for several communal lounges – once complete it is hoped that the upgrade of the communal lounges will encourage tenants (when it is safe to do so) to engage in a social setting and help build confidence for those taking first steps back to normality.
- The Improvement and Engagement team have introduced a couple of new initiatives. We have launched Tenant Involvement Grant which enables tenants to apply for small grants to improve their communal areas or immediate neighbourhoods. This saves DBC tenants from needing to access the Community Grant freeing those funds for other residents. This month the grant meant that Kylna court could set up their own growing club on the roof garden, bringing together families in the blocks to grow flowers and vegetables to share. Another new scheme launching this month is Block Champions. This will empower tenants and leaseholders to complete their own estate inspections, and report any repairs or health and safety issues to us. Providing us with direct feedback from tenants in blocks and allow us to improve communal areas, monitor communal repairs and make sure our blocks are safe, clean and pleasant places to be.
- Some excellent collaborative work has taken place between the ASB officers in Housing, the Community Safety team and the police to tackle a number of on-going issues. A 2 year Injunction was recently granted against a tenant to ensure an improvement in their behaviour continued and to reassure local residents. A number of legal cases are also progressing with court hearing dates obtained to take appropriate enforcement and tenancy action.

## STRATEGIC HOUSING

- Additional funding bid submitted and approved via Covid Health Protection Board for Homeless Trainee & Homeless Pathways Officer;
- Providing help and support to those who continue to be affected by homelessness 178 households in temporary accommodation (as at 31/3/2021), 16 of which are in B&B;
- Attendance & engagement in the Vaccine Equality Group – resulting in DBC at risk clients receiving 1<sup>st</sup> Covid vaccine (including Elms residents) – 2<sup>nd</sup> vaccine scheduled end April 2021;
- Positive response to consultation on the Housing Allocations Policy with over 300 survey responses.

## PROPERTY AND PLACE

- Gas servicing compliance statistics remain high during these difficult times, last week of March was 100%.
- The cladding to the staircase and lift enclosure at Fennycroft road flats, is being removed, following receipt of the fire safety engineers report on the EWS1 (external wall systems) report. The cladding is not the same as that on Grenfell, but is one of the products that is no longer permitted on the exterior of buildings over 18m.

Residents were informed and a waking watch is in progress to provide residents with additional reassurance. Work to remove the panels has started on site this week.

- Key to key times have started to see an improvement in March with a decrease in the average time on general needs from 42 days to 28. There are still a number of sheltered scheme properties that are difficult to re-let, with some ongoing nervousness from older tenants to move.

## HOUSING DEVELOPMENT

St Margaret's Way	Stage 2 architectural design complete and now progressing to Stage 3. Further intrusive site survey works planned for the end of April. Virtual resident event being prepared for May.
Mountbatten View (Paradise Fields)	Planning Application approved. Overage payment to Homes England is complete. Expression of Interest assessed and 4 contractors will receive the Invitation to Tender via the Catalyst Housing Framework.
Bingham Mews	Final account agreed, the project is completed and in the defects liability period.
Eastwick Row	Mobilising project to start in May. Awaiting approval from HCC Highways for the construction traffic haul road for construction traffic. Brick Shed relocation legal work with leaseholders progressing. The 2 houses have had to be removed from the project as no longer viable due to very expensive works required to divert Thames Water mains sewer. Looking at replacing with new garage blocks.
Coniston Road	Project has started on site.
Wilstone	Planning Application submitted. Cabinet approved land appropriation from the General Fund to the HRA.
Bulbourne	Stage 2 architectural design progressing.
LA1	Stage 2 architectural design progressing. Tendering for contractor via Pre Service Contract Agreement.
Cherry Bounce	Stage 1 architectural design underway.
Paradise Depot	Design progressing and looking to address a right of light issue due to a neighbouring planning application for an office block to residential conversion.
Garage Sites Project A29	6 No Planning applications submitted. Housewood End, Dione Road, Beechfield and Sempill Road have now been approved. The applications are going through planning committee over a 3 month period.
Randall's Ride	Planning Application submitted. Cabinet approved land appropriation.
Stoneycroft	Outline work on feasibility and purchase back of the leasehold unit underway
Varney Road	Project Initiation Document been completed and feasibility work due to commence shortly

Questions:



Councillor Elliot said he had seen several beggars and individuals that appear homeless in the town centre. He queried if the individuals were actually homeless or if they were professional beggars, and also what action was being taken to resolve the matter as he had received complaints from residents about being approached by those individuals in an aggressive manner.

The Portfolio Holder explained the team were working really hard with everyone that had identified as homeless but there was a wide range of issues here; some are professional beggars and were taking advantage of the desperate situation, but many others are genuinely homeless. Action is being taken but she didn't want to disclose too much information as it hadn't yet been approved. She advised of a situation that members may already be aware of, involving individuals camping between the town and the water gardens car park. Work was ongoing with the Police, community support and outreach workers to assist these individuals.

Councillor Hearn asked how the negotiations were going between Tring Town Council and DBC in relation to providing council housing in Tring. She felt it was a good opportunity to provide council houses for the residents of Tring and in her opinion it can't happen fast enough.

The Portfolio Holder advised they had made some good progress recently and there had been positive feedback from the planning department on the designs. She understood that they intended to submit a planning application around August/September 2021.

Councillor England queried what evidence there was to suggest some individuals in the town centre were professional beggars.

The Portfolio Holder didn't want to expand too much on the information they had as she didn't want to disclose any personal details but they did have evidence of professional beggars and the Police had been involved. She said they were working hard to find schemes that were fit for all individuals.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

Preparations for the upcoming elections are in full swing but the arrangements will be different this year due to the pandemic. Additional safety measures will be in place to ensure enhanced protection for staff and members of the public.

The first batch of postal votes will be distributed directly from the printers on Monday 19 April and postal vote opening sessions will commence from Wednesday 21 April at the Forum. Election Agents and Candidates are able to observe the postal vote opening process by appointment only.

This year the verification of all elections and the Hertfordshire County Council count will be held on Saturday 8 May. The counts for the Police and Crime Commissioner and Borough by elections will be held on Monday 10 May.

Councillor Allen questioned if it was normal practice for the Council Tax communications to residents to be accompanied by a glossy leaflet from the PCC.

The Portfolio Holder advised it was a regular occurrence for the PCC to include a leaflet within the Council Tax bills to explain the background to the budget.

Questions:

There were no questions for the Portfolio Holder.

**Councillor Barrett, Portfolio Holder for Environmental Services**

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

**ENVIRONMENTAL SERVICES**

**Transport:**

7 new vehicles received which have been wrapped with COVID messaging on one side and recycling messages on the other. There are 7 more vehicles still to come.

**Environmental Projects:**

Participated in the first ever Food Waste Action Week in March. We shared tips for reducing food waste and asked residents to do the same for a competition, with three prizes for residents who shared their top tips.

Garden waste collections restarted and we have been promoting the Additional Garden Waste Subscription Service with 992 sticker's issues so far.

Taken over management of the Street Champions programme and are planning a relaunch.

Preparing for the Great British Spring Clean (May and June) and compost giveaway (9 May).

Working with WasteAware on launch of new reusable nappy scheme, promoting Real Nappy Week and on St Albans Sustfest where we are running 3 out of the 7 events during the two week festival. (23 May to 6 June).

**Trees & Woodlands:**

Finished off the last of the scheduled tree planting.

Continued scheduled pruning programme and our contractors completed winter safety work programme in our woodlands.

**Waste services:**

Welcomed back 6 clinically vulnerable staff members.

Successful Health and Safety audits on COVID restrictions undertaken in the depot to ensure we are maintaining a safe, secure, working environment.

**Clean, Safe and Green:**

Currently recruiting for summer temps and full time staff and have successfully recruited for Dog Bin role.

Pre height-of-season deep litter cleans completed including A41, A5, remote lanes, Leighton Buzzard Road, traffic islands and Hemel Hempstead town centre as well as joint fly tipping deep cleans with Enforcement.

Berkhamsted Moor - refurbishing temporary carpark area (due to finish May – June).

Football pitches –started verti drain works with new equipment as part of the football improvement works (Verti Quake – Over seeder).

Asbestos Awareness Training completed.

#### Questions:

Councillor Birnie queried how many members of staff were included in the vulnerable category and therefore had to isolate at home.

The Portfolio Holder replied there were 6 members of staff.

Councillor Birnie asked how long those staff members had to isolate and be off work for.

The Portfolio Holder advised he would provide a written response to that question.

Councillor England noted that the compost giveaway would now have to be filled in bags by residents. He asked, what was the thinking behind this new method and what was the saving to the council by doing it this way?

The Portfolio Holder said he would provide a written response to those questions.

There were no further questions.

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

The Portfolio Holder presented her update as follows:

Members, as you are more than aware the Country is currently working through the Governments Road Map to release the Covid 19 Restrictions. New continues to be positive from both Dacorum and the wider Hertfordshire area in terms of both Infection levels and Vaccination figures. As of the 9<sup>th</sup> April the infection rate in Dacorum was 29 per 100,000 a 30% reduction on the previous 7 days. 55% of adults have been vaccinated in the Dacorum area. With between 82 and 95% of cohorts 1-9 being vaccinated within the wider County area. .

The Environmental Health Team, working in close partnership with the Local Resilience Forum Partners continue to advise businesses, inspect for COVID secure compliance, enforce and responding to residents' queries throughout the pandemic. The majority of businesses continue to be compliant. The Environmental Health team have concentrated resources on Warehousing and distribution and take away sectors this month.

During March, the Team investigated 24 positive cases in the community that the National and County Track and Trace scheme could not reach. Throughout March the District also took part in self-isolation action day, targeting all those self-isolating with support from Herts

Help. 96 people were visited and offered support. Two cases were referred to Hertfordshire Police who were found not to be self-isolating.

Dacorum Borough Council has 6 Covid Advisors approved for funding from HCC. During March 879 interventions were carried out by the team. The team have been well received and positive feedback has been received from both the business community and other partner organisations. The aim of these advisors is support residents and the community in complying with the ever changing Covid regulations. If they come across significant non-compliance these cases will be referred to the Environmental Health Team or the Police as appropriate. The advisors are here to help and support with compliance.

The Corporate Health & Safety Team continue to support departments with Covid to provide COVID advice and guidance to safe guard our own employees. Ranging from risk assessments, advice to staff with positive COVID tests and associated contacts with self-isolation. Furthermore, the team is the conduit for emergency planning and resilience within the Authority and linking into our Incident Management Team. Feedback from the District response have been integrated into the Councils Business Continuity Plans which are currently under review. They are currently supporting the elections team with ensuring the Borough has a Covid –safe election. Funding from the HCC contain fund was received to recruit an additional safety advisor to support the service.

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

#### Questions:

Councillor Birnie questioned how the refurbishment of netball courts were financed.

The Portfolio Holder advised it was s106 monies that funded the resurfacing and remarking of the existing tennis courts, and now includes two netball courts in the same footprint.

Councillor Birnie asked for an idea of how much those works cost.

The Portfolio Holder said she would have to provide a written response.

Councillor Beauchamp asked if there were any planned activities for the Old Town Hall when it reopens.

The Portfolio Holder explained they had updated the Old Town Hall website in the last couple of days to indicate that staff will be returning to the building soon and they hope to offer an outdoor programme of events this summer. A full indoor programme of performances will be launched in September as usual, but this will be dependent on government guidance on whether theatres can operate or not. In the meantime we have been working alongside Environmental Health teams in relation to safety advice on the Old Town Hall being used as a film location and a production based for two separate TV shows which are due to start filming next month. This will not only test our Covid-19 safety measures but it will also allow us to start generating some income for the service.

There were no further questions.

#### **Councillor Anderson, Portfolio Holder for Planning & Infrastructure**

The Portfolio Holder presented his update as follows:

## **SUPPORTING OUR HIGH STREETS FOR SAFE AND SUCCESSFUL RE-OPENING**

The Economic Development team has been working to ensure our high streets are ready to reopen and to encourage footfall to safely return across Hemel Hempstead TC, Tring, Berkhamsted and the Old Town. Measures implemented include new signage and sanitisers promoting safe and local shopping, a free 12 week business support programme, business support packs and a radio campaign.

The team has also developed a video to promote our highstreets, showcase local businesses and reiterate the importance of supporting your local economy. This will be played on the main Hemel town centre screen and shared across both the councils and our strategic partners various channels.

We have also procured a new 'place based loyalty app', Loyal Free. The app is available across the whole of Dacorum for both the High Streets and our tourism and hospitality sectors. It enables residents to benefit from promotions for local businesses and assists our efforts to get the economic activity going again. The app is available to download now through App Store and Google Play, where you will be able to view the full functionality including offers, local trails and events.

## **RECORD YEAR FOR PLANNING APPLICATIONS**

In 2020/21, we ended up receiving one of the highest numbers of planning and related applications despite the adverse conditions due to the Covid19 pandemic, closing at 2921 applications – this is up over 17% on the workload received in 2019/20 (2480 applications).

## **CIL COLLECTION SUCCESS**

The CIL and S106 team has continued to work hard during the past 12 months to ensure there will be funding to meet the infrastructure requirements in the future alongside the development of the Local Plan.

Headline figures:

- Total amount of CIL received 2020/21 £4,720,840.43
- that is £1,740,068.17 more than the previous year – up by over 58%
- We've collected £27,832.24 in surcharges and
- Successfully defended 5 appeals equalling £566,852.67.
- £710,566.55 has been added to the neighbourhood pots for use in the communities directly affected by new developments.
- This brings the grand total of CIL collected by DBC (since 2015) to £11,410,456.06

## **PROPOSALS TO DEAL WITH THE RISE IN PLANNING ENFORCEMENT CASES**

From April 1<sup>st</sup> the Enforcement team has commenced a focused and highly structured way to reduce live caseloads to manageable and sustainable levels.

The objective is to reduce live caseload from its current 620 enforcement cases to 400 by the end of this financial year (2021/22).

This includes a new way of dealing with historic cases – changing from a geographic focus to a case type focus, as well as new processes for investigating new cases. The overall

intention is to spend the least amount of time possible of the cases causes no or very little harm, allowing more time to deal with the most harmful breaches.

The addition of the one-year Enforcement Officer post will greatly assist in this project.

#### Questions:

Councillor Symington asked the Portfolio Holder if he agreed it was unacceptable that there are residents within her ward that are unable to use their downstairs toilet due to the sewage running at capacity and the treatment plant at Bourne End being overwhelmed.

The Portfolio Holder said it was clearly unacceptable but he would need to investigate the ins and outs of the situation before he could comment any further.

The Mayor suggested it would be helpful for the Portfolio Holder if Councillor Symington emailed him with more detail on the matter.

Councillor Symington asked if there was any action the Portfolio Holder could take to work with Thames Water to solve the sewage capacity constraints, and in particular before we build another 16-18,000 homes in Dacorum.

The Portfolio Holder replied he would be looking into this particular issue. He advised that he has said the same thing for many years whenever people complain about water or sewage in respect to new developments; it's maddening when the reality of the system is we are required to plan the housing first and tell the water and sewage authorities after. There is no mechanism by which we can hold up housing because they're not able to provide the facilities for it. He advised we had the two companies attending an overview and scrutiny committee later this month so questions like Councillor Symington's would be best directed there.

## **5. QUESTIONS**

### **Question 1 from Councillor Symington to Councillor Anderson:**

In the Dacorum Local Plan (2020-2038) Emerging Strategy for Growth Interim Sustainability Appraisal Report (November 2020) produced by TRL Limited (TRL) under a contract with Dacorum Borough Council, the Urban Capacity Option is outlined. This equates to a level of development of 608 dwellings per annum and requires no further land to be released from the Green Belt. [[https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/dacorum-local-plan-interim-sustainability-appraisal-report-november-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=53bf0c9e\\_6](https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/dacorum-local-plan-interim-sustainability-appraisal-report-november-2020.pdf?sfvrsn=53bf0c9e_6), p32]

In his response to Councillor Williams' letter of 30 November 2020, Rt Hon Christopher Pincher MP, stated that 'Authorities should make a realistic assessment of the number of homes their communities need as the starting point of the process'.

Dacorum's local needs are assessed at 355 dwellings per annum.

In a meeting with the Conservative Friends of India, reported in the Sunday Times 28 March 2021 <https://www.thetimes.co.uk/article/2e76273a-8f23-11eb-af74-aabf762d9542?shareToken=5a987233be0e66a19d70aabc3465446f> the Minister for Housing, Communities and Local Government, Rt Hon Robert Jenrick MP, stressed that the government wanted to "build on brownfield sites first".

Would the portfolio holder give the reason for the Council rejecting the TRL Urban Capacity Option in favour of a huge 750-hectare Green Belt grab to meet the government's excessive minimum housing figures?

**Response from Councillor Anderson:** I have already provided Councillor Symington with a full and detailed answer and copied in all members. The first draft of the local plan involved considering options and the urban capacity option couldn't be chosen as it was considerably below the governments required figure. The idea of the first consultation was to show the impact of meeting the full figure and how it would look in the borough. The administration is opposed the full figure and we will need robust evidence including, but not only, the consultation results. If we're going to challenge it, as opposed to choosing hollow options, stand no chance whatsoever of succeeding. When it comes to the excessive figure and the impact it would have on the Greenbelt, we've had these questions for a while now and I'm afraid I have to ask the questioner to explain why the Liberal Democrats generally and Councillor Symington personally, stood for Election in support of it at the last General Election.

**Question 2 from Councillor Symington:** Thank you for the written response which I've read. Can you clarify; are you saying that the Council will use the urban capacity sites in the TRL report before using Greenbelt sites? As implied but not clarified in item 4.

**Response from Councillor Anderson:** The full version of the response you received made it quite clear that the Council will do everything it can to use Brownfield site before any Greenfield development is used. I can't put it any stronger than that.

**Question 3 from Councillor Symington:** Notwithstanding the answer, which was unclear, do you agree that all the communities housing needs, by which I mean the actual local need assessed at 355 per annum, not the government imposed minimum quota of 1023, could be met by the urban capacity plan?

**Response from Councillor Anderson:** The 355 figure as far as I'm aware concerned was purely urban capacity which is different from talking about the total numbers that has to be produced annually, so I think that's being confused here. I'm happy that I've explained that the urban capacity option was one we couldn't follow because it wasn't robust and ultimately when we produce whatever happens down the track when we go to the planning inspectorate, whatever we have in the local plan will have to be robust. It will have to stand up to scrutiny and we will need our evidence. We are grateful to the public because they have given us a lot of feedback from the local plan first consultation but other homework will be required to actually stand any chance of getting our plan through.

**Question 4 from Councillor Symington:** Insofar as you're proposing to build on Greenbelt land, could you explain why you're proposing to build an average of 10 dwellings per hectare? That's 400 dwellings times 18 years divided by 350 hectares when you could be building at densities of between 20 and 30 dwellings perhaps to which would save between 375 and 500 hectares of Greenbelt across Dacorum.

**Response from Councillor Anderson:** I'd say we aren't because the low figure includes open space.

**Question 1 from Councillor Claughton to Councillor Elliot:**

The Government Restart Grant scheme, announced as available from 1st April, is intended to support businesses in the non-essential retail, hospitality, leisure, personal care and

accommodation sectors with a one-off grant to support them in reopening safely, as Covid-19 restrictions are lifted.

Will the portfolio holder say how many Dacorum businesses permitted to reopen on 12th April have been given Restart grants by the Council?

**Response from Councillor Elliot:** The Council estimates that it will pay about 700 restart grants to Dacorum businesses and expects that the vast majority of these will be made before the end of April. The Council is making these payments on behalf of the government and so it must follow guidance which is issued to us by the Department for Business, Enterprise and Industrial Strategy (BEIS). The guidance so far received makes clear that even where we have already paid the previous grant to a local business we must carry out further assurance checks before we can pay the restart grant. BEIS has carried out a number of streamed events to answer local authority questions, the last of which was held on the 25th March and ended with the opportunity for councils across the country to ask questions. Officers are waiting for responses to these questions before getting in touch with businesses to offer them the grants. This is necessary in order to make sure we can get any additional confirmation from businesses which is required. BEIS has told the Council that those responses will be available this week so the team hopes to be able to email the eligible businesses by the weekend.

**Question 2 from Councillor Claughton:**

How are businesses supposed to reopen safely when the grant to support this isn't paid until after they've opened?

**Response from Councillor Elliot:** We have to wait on government giving us the details before we can pay out, which we assume is £6million and we hope to be able to email the eligible businesses by the end of the weekend and get cash out by the end of April.

**Question 3 from Councillor Claughton:** I understand one of the things holding up the payment of grants is the need for the borough to validate the bank accounts of the applicants to whom they are paying grants. Given that they've already paid these businesses local restriction support grants, why haven't the bank accounts previously been validated?

**Response from Councillor Elliot:** I feel that we have taken as much precaution as we can and we have to check because of fraud. We really do have to validate the bank accounts as part of the process.

**Question 4 from Councillor Claughton:** Since the Portfolio Holder has laid the blame firmly at central government, can I ask if he thinks that the present government's scandalous level of ineptitude in dealing with these grants can get any worse?

**Response from Councillor Elliot:** I don't think they are scandalous. This government has supported the British Economy throughout this pandemic and we have poured money into local businesses to help them get through the pandemic and helping them to restart. I totally refute any suggestion that any ineptitude by central government has stepped up to the plate to get this country back on its feet again.

**Question 1 from Councillor Stevens to Councillor Williams:**

The consultation on the Local Plan has caused a huge amount of controversy.

This was unsurprising given the scale and location of sites intended to be pre-designated for Growth when released from their current Green Belt designation.



What was surprising was the fact that so many of the Parish and Town Councils came together and sent a joint letter to the Leader of the Council asking that the Borough withdraw the proposals.

The Borough has a Parish Charter which appears to have fallen by the wayside; this included an undertaking that correspondence from a Parish will be answered within 5 days.

At the time of writing, the parishes have not been graced with even an acknowledgement.

I am sure our respective Parish and Town Councils would like to know when might they receive a reply to the letter?

**Response from Councillor Williams:** I apologise to those that may have been expecting a reply because I interpreted this letter which is dated 22nd February and just about precedes the discussion we had at the last full council meeting and the close of the consultation at the end of February that I saw the correspondence from the Parish Councils, amongst the many that were received, as representations upon the local plan and not a letter that was requiring an individual response. The purpose of the letter was to ask the Council to withdraw the consultation and set out some of the reasons why. I saw this as a general correspondence on the local plan process and it was filed as a comment on the local plan. In relation to withdrawing the current consultation that was answered by the decision of full council on 24th February.

**Question 2 from Councillor Stevens:** When can the Parishes expect a reply on the more substantive issues raised by the letter?

**Response from Councillor Williams:** I have taken the time to re-read the letter and it just makes the points that are being made generally within the consultation on the local plan and sets out the reasons why they feel the plan should have been withdrawn. I think that question has been answered. There is one question towards the end of the letter which may be regarded a specific question but I don't think its within my remit to give a clear answer to that as I think it rests within a decision to be taken by the Council.

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

None.

## **7. CABINET REFERRALS**

**Resolved:**

That the following be approved:

**16 March 2021**

### **7.1 CA/026/21 HRA BUSINESS PLAN**

**Decision**

That Council approve the updated Housing Revenue Account Business Plan 2021/24  
That Council to approve the revised development programme budgets as set out in Section 9.3.

A vote was held:

26 For,  
0 Against,  
12 Abstain (including the Mayor),

Therefore the decision was agreed.

### **16 March 2021**

#### **7.2 CA/027/21 INDEPENDENT REMUNERATION PANEL 2020**

##### **Decision**

That Council approves the changes to the Members' Allowances Scheme as recommended by the Independent Remuneration Panel in its report.

A vote was held:

34 For,  
0 Against,  
5 Abstain (including the Mayor),

Therefore the decision was agreed.

#### **8. OVERVIEW & SCRUTINY ANNUAL REPORTS**

The Chairman of the Finance and Resources Overview and Scrutiny Committee, Councillor Suqlain Mahmood, introduced the Annual Reports of the Overview and Scrutiny groups to the Council and highlighted certain aspects of the work carried out by the individual committees.

#### **9. CHANGES TO COMMITTEE MEMBERSHIP**

None.

#### **10. CHANGES IN COMMITTEE DATES**

None.

#### **11. CALL-IN AND URGENCY PROCEDURE**

The Council noted the following urgent Portfolio Holder Decision:

PH/008/21 - Business Rates Relief 2021/22

The meeting ended at 8.24 pm.