

## MINUTES

## CABINET

15 MARCH 2022

**Present:**

**Members:**

**Councillors:** Williams (Leader)  
Griffiths (Deputy  
Leader)  
Elliot  
Banks  
Barrett

<b>Officers:</b>	James Doe	Assistant Director - Planning, Development and Regeneration
	Nigel Howcutt	Chief Finance Officer (S151)
	Farida Hussain	Group Manager (Legal & Corporate Services)
	Alex Robinson	Interim Group Manager - Planning and Development

**Also Attendance:**

The meeting began at 7.30 pm

**CA/17/21 MINUTES**

The minutes of the meeting held on 15 February were agreed by Members present and signed by the Chair.

**CA/18/21 APOLOGIES FOR ABSENCE**

Apologies were received from Cllr Anderson.

**CA/19/21 DECLARATIONS OF INTEREST**

None

**CA/20/21 PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

None

**CA/21/21 REFERRALS TO CABINET**

**CA/22/21     CABINET FORWARD PLAN**

The Forward Plan was noted.

**CA/23/21     COMMERCIAL STRATEGY UPDATE**

**Decision**

That Cabinet notes the update.

**Corporate Objectives**

1. A clean, safe and enjoyable environment.
2. Building strong and vibrant communities.
3. Ensuring economic growth and prosperity.
4. Providing good quality affordable homes.
5. Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery.
6. Meeting the challenges of the climate emergency

**Statutory Officer Comments:**

**Monitoring Officer:**

There are no legal issues arising directly from this report and any implications arising from each IBC will be considered as the business cases are developed.

**Deputy S.151 Officer:**

The Council's Commercial Strategy will support the delivery of the Medium Term Financial Strategy. Further development of IBCs and any associated financial implications will be reflected in the update of the Medium Term Financial Strategy during 2022-23

**Advice**

Cllr Elliot introduced the report and said that Dacorum Borough Council needs to become self-funding, they have bought in Costain and Commercial Gov to help them identify and develop commercial initiatives and this report is an update on where they are with that.

Cllr Barratt asked in regards to the early properties and the retrofitting of commercial vehicles with electric motors and solar panels. He wanted to understand a bit more on that. He could see where that could save money however; he could not see what the commercial opportunity was with that.

NHowcutt responded that this was kind of two fold, the commercial strategy was aiming to create new income streams and expand stream that they have. It was also looking a taking a commercial approach to how they run their services and running them as efficiently as possible. Some of these schemes will reduce the costs of running those services. What they will have in the medium term is the opportunity to expand into other markets as well, so for instance if they were to go down the retro fitting of vehicles, it maybe that by upskilling our service and their maintenance teams that they could offer that service to other businesses or to other residents going forward. With the solar power or smart parking schemes, if they were to become specialist on the local area they could look to expand that into other areas and deliver that in more of a commercial frame. Therefore, it was a double edged around saving efficiencies initially but also potentially opening up to new markets.

Cllr Barrett said that it mentioned online that other authorities have received grants from the government to convert vehicles.

NHowcutt said that there were large ranges of grants for climate change, everything from decarbonisation of building to retro fitting cars as well. They apply for them when they become open and available. Most of these grants have a very short application time and excessive amounts of applicants. He said that the last decarbonisation scheme was around 1billion had around 3billion pounds worth of applicants so it's about them being ready for those schemes and that what they are trying to do at the moment.

### **Recommendation agreed**

Cabinet noted the report

## **CA/24/21 LITTLE GADDESSEN CONSERVATION AREA CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

### **Decision**

1. To delegate to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure to consider any further comments from Members on the Little Gaddesden Conservation Area: Character Appraisal received before 5pm on 21 March 2022.
2. To delegate authority to the Strategic Director (Place) to make any final minor editorial revisions to the document received in line with Recommendation 1 above and any minor typographical revisions required.
3. To delegate the approval of the Little Gaddesden Conservation Area: Character Appraisal final document to the Portfolio Holder for Planning and Infrastructure.

### **Corporate Objectives**

**A clean, safe and enjoyable environment**

The appraisal highlights the important character of the conservation area in particular in relation to design and layout which will inform any new development to ensure that the environment is protected or enhanced.

**Building strong and vibrant communities** Joint working with the parish council to produce the document has ensured community support for the proposal which in part seeks to protect the vitality of the village.

**Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery**

Provides a clear framework upon which planning decisions can be made.

**Statutory Officer Comments:**

**Deputy Monitoring Officer:**

Pursuant to section 69(2) of the Listed Buildings and Conservation Areas Act 1990 the Council is required to carry out reviews 'from time to time' to determine whether any parts or further parts of its area should be designated as conservation areas, and if it so determines, that part (s) shall be designated as such. Although there is no statutory requirement for consultation, it is considered appropriate that the proposal to designate an area with Conservation Area status is subject to public consultation given the effect that such designation may have on future development proposals within the designated area.

**Deputy S.151 Officer**

No further comments to add.

**Advice**

A Robinson introduced the report, he said that the Little Gaddesden Character Appraisal was the latest in a number of conservation area appraisals that they had undertaken over the years and that this report was produced entirely by the Parish Council working with officers over the last year. The proposal is to extend the area to the east as set out on page 7. The conservation area appraisal was consulted on last year in November & December and was received positively from a whole range of residents and organisations. Historic England were very complimentary about the levels of details in the report and because of that, they will probably be using this model to update further conservation area appraisals in the future.

The original recommendation was for Cabinet to note however due to a late appendix it is recommended that the authority be delegated to the portfolio holder following a period of consultation with members.

Cllr Douris said he was the local Cllr for this area and he echoes and supports the report and the comments of Historic England. He thought that the appendix was excellent, the people from Little Gaddesden enjoyed doing this, its large piece of work that they have done with great care as it represents how they feel about the village.

Cllr Douris asked in regards to a note about speed limits although speed is not for Dacorum Borough Council, he is aware that this area is included in the speed strategy for evaluation by Herts County Council and there would be some recognition of that depending on how that develops. He wanted to thank the Parish Councils for their work and noted the comment about this being referred to officer. He asked if he could be kept in the loop and appraised of the situation if the portfolio holder was comfortable with that as it progresses. He was not looking to make changes but just by involvement as a local member.

Cllr Douris referred to questions 9 to 15 which refers to land on the south eastern side of Church Lane, there were no responses from officers on those and asked if ARobinson could explain why there were no responses to those and what the implication of that might be or not be.

ARobinson apologised again that the appendix in the report is not clear in explaining how officers have taken those comments forward. He assured members that those comments had been considered. This specific area in question, the land to the southeast of Church lane. There has been some suggestions that the conservation area should extend into that area however, it was felt with the Parish that the conservation area should not extend into that land. What they would do as part of the confirmation of the conservation area is they will update the table to make it very clear exactly what the recommendation was following the consultation.

### **Recommendations agreed**

Delegate to PH holder until close of play Monday 21st to allow for members comments

### **CA/25/21 GARAGE STRATEGY**

#### **Decision**

1. To recommend to Council to approve additional 21/22 supplementary funding of £110k revenue for project costs, to be funded from the Dacorum Development reserve.
2. To approve additional 21/22 supplementary funding of £300k capital.
3. To approve the proposed Operational Plans for 2022/23 and recommend to Council the approval of a one off £550k draw down from reserves, £425k funding for 22/23 and £125k funding for 23/24, funded from the Dacorum Development Reserve.

4. To approve the transfer of the Garages Service to primary oversight by the Finance and Resources Scrutiny Committee. Cabinet [www.dacorum.gov.uk](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk)
5. To recommend to Council to approve a supplementary capital budget for 2022/23 garage investment of £500k. The specific investment decisions to be delegated to the Strategic Director (Corporate and Commercial) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources and s.151 Officer.
6. To approve the disposal of £500k of underutilised garages to finance the additional garage investment and garage conversion proposals. To delegate specific disposal decisions to the Strategic Director (Corporate and Commercial) in consultation with the Portfolio Holder for Finance and Resources and s.151 Officer, and in line with current financial regulations.

### **Corporate Objectives**

A clean, safe and enjoyable environment  
Ensuring economic growth and prosperity  
Providing good quality affordable homes, in particular for those most in need  
Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery

### **Statutory Officer Comments:**

#### **Deputy Monitoring Officer:**

No comments to add to the report.

#### **S.151 Officer**

Garages represent a significant income stream to the Council. The report sets out proposed oneoff investment in Garages over a three- year period to support and further develop this income stream and the quality of the service provided to customers. Proposed revenue costs would be funded from the Dacorum Development reserve. Capital costs would be funded from a combination of capital receipts arising from garage sales, alongside other sources of capital financing.

### **Advice**

Cllr Elliot said that they have a lack of data about the condition of the garages, they do need investment and they need to look at how these are to be refurbished going forward. It could be that they put in business units; there are a lack of workshops in the area, so that is one aspect to be considered that could be considered as a result of the condition survey. The survey will be around £150,000 and hopefully that would give them the information that they need on the garages they have and the condition that they are in. They will have to invest more in these garages as they have not invested much over the past decades. They will be ring fencing £500,000 from the sale of some of the garage sites and put that into the general fund rather than a separate fund. The garages will be removed from under the Housing service and moved into the general fund. There will be a focus on letting out these garages.

Cllr Griffiths said that she was delighted to see this report before them and it being moved on. Members will know she had complained for a few years about the fact they were not investing in their Council stock of garages and therefore each site had got slowly worse and that then means less people were renting them due to the area itself was getting worse. She agreed that they need the investment which would bring more of the garages back into use, it was more of an invest to save in many ways as the more that were in use the more income the council would get. She was more than happy for it to come out of the Housing Scrutiny and into the finance as it has not really been a housing function for a long time; She welcomed and fully supported the report.

Cllr Barratt also welcomes the report; he thought it was a tremendous commercial opportunity. He asked how many garages the £500k would refurbish/repurpose. He also asked where they might be turned into commercial units, would planning permission be required to do that.

NHowcutt said that in relation to the second question, as it would be a change of use there would be planning permission required which they may have a problem with in the 1<sup>st</sup> few quarters of next financial year however they would deal with that when it comes. In terms of the £500k of investment, this all depends on what you would be doing with the garage. Part of the work will look at supply and demand, what the end user wants, making sure that the garages are fit for purpose and for the medium term bring a commercial return. In terms of how they fund that and what they get from the sales, each site is worth very different amounts depending on their location and the quality of the asset that they are selling.

Cllr Douris wanted to confirm that they were only talking about the garages within the housing stock and not the commercial stock.

Cllr Griffiths confirmed that the ex-council stock was transferred to the general fund some time ago.

Cllr Tindall asked that where commercial use was considered the closeness of residents be taken into account in the type of business that is let too. He asks that they try to avoid nuisance such as fumes or noise. So perhaps the use of which the garages are put is a factor when determining their future use.

Cllr Elliot confirmed that he could confirm that. The residents would be paramount and they are there to ensure the residents have a reasonable way of life.

Cllr Williams said that the majority of garages are in residential areas and industrial type businesses would not be encouraged. They would be looking at more of lock up and storage type businesses.

### **Recommendation agreed**

**CA/26/21      BUSINESS RATES RELIEF**

### **Decision**

That Cabinet reviews and approves the proposed policy for awarding Covid-19 Additional Relief to businesses.

## **Corporate Objectives:**

Ensuring economic growth and prosperity

## **Statutory Officer Comments**

### **Monitoring Officer**

The proposed policy is consistent with Government guidance in respect of the funding provided and powers under the Local Government Finance Act 1988.

### **S151 Officer**

The comments of the S151 officer are included in the body of this report.

## **Advice**

Cllr Elliot introduced the report and explained that this was about 3.8 million pound that has been given by central government to be given to businesses that have not been given any rates relief since the pandemic started. It about business that have fallen through the cracks with previous rates relief. They felt it might be difficult for business to meet the criteria to qualify so it maybe that they have to hand the funding back to central government.

Cllr Barratt said that there were some 1500 businesses that could apply, were they going to be proactively promoting this directly to those businesses in order to not just have one or two.

NHowcutt said that they would use their usual mechanisms of direct email and social media which has worked exceedingly well with business grants and business rates relief. They were targeting a very small group of businesses with this and they would have to provide a lot more information than previously and information to show Covid has affected them and that they did not qualify for previous grants that have been awarded. They will do an advertising campaign. Other authorities who have had this a bit earlier than us have not seen a great return as they have seen with other schemes.

Cllr Barratt asked if they would have to hand the money back if they do not use it and presumably, there is a cap on the amount the business can have.

NHowcutt explained that this was classed as a discretionary scheme, there were a much smaller group of people that they can target for this and it's very hard to allocate it. The Council had fully utilised all other schemes and not had to return any. Where there has been schemes where there has been no discretion they have returned fund, as have almost every local authority in the country as they had to do it in line with strict conditions and eligibility criteria.

Cllr Tindall said that they only group of businesses that had contacted him at the beginning of the pandemic were those that didn't actually pay business rates direct, they were tenants or charities, where they paid rent and then the owner of the building paid the rates. They could not demonstrate that they paid rates so were ineligible for quite a lot of the support. He know that the finance team did try to help

them, however he wondered if there were any discretion in being able to capture those micro business people.

NHowcutt said that they did target those subletting business at the earliest opportunity with their own discretionary grants, they were able to support a lot of those businesses, those that they could not support were given a lot of information and guidance on how they could approach their landlords for support. The eligibility for this grant is entirely for ratepayers. It's could be that the government look at assessing this over the next few months if they are not able to allocate it however this one is solely for rate payer.

Cllr Williams asked if they were, ate payers in receipt of 100% discretionary small business rate relief, could they still apply for this.

NHowcutt said in theory they can but as they are in receipt of the 100% discretion it probably means that, they would not meet some of the other parts of the criteria. There may be some businesses out there that maybe able too.

Cllr Griffiths asked if there were people that had applied to us in the past and that although have paid their business rates and did not qualify for the grant; she asked if they were going through that list to see if they would qualify for this one.

NHowcutt said that people who have applied for grants in the past go onto different lists and when they start to advertise and publicise this list they will send the same information out to those on the various lists. The various business that applied and had not got a grant they managed to change the scope of various grants. The ARG is now in phase 3 and each time they enter a new phase they will try to target those businesses that were unable to achieve relief in previous phase. Effectively this phase 4 with more eligibility criteria restrictions is why local authorities are finding it difficult to find those niche amounts of businesses. Many of those 1500 businesses that they have outlined as potentially being able to get this are large organisations that for government subsidy reasons will not be able to accept these reliefs. He would like to be more optimistic on their ability to get this money out the door and they have been extremely good to date however this maybe a policy too far in terms of the eligibility criteria. They will put all of their energy's to that once they start in April and will report to members what options and opportunities they have between now and September to make these payments.

Cllr Griffiths asked when the 6 weeks starts.

NHowcutt said they would update members with the specific dates, they are estimating to start mid-April, which is when the 6-week period would start. The reason for that is that it has to be administered after all of the other reliefs and grants have been awarded to businesses in 2021/2022, it has to be the final one. They are waiting until everything has been finalised and approved and then they will roll it out. Equally, there has been a resource issue at the moment at this time of year with billing, council tax and the new reliefs that have come in for next year and closing the old ones. It makes sense to put energy into this one when they can during April and May. At that point, they will report to members in terms of how they are being received by businesses and what kind of information they were feeding back, also, weather new opportunities or new criteria from the government mean they can change, they will be a flexible as they can.

**Recommendation agreed**

**CA/27/21    GREAT GADDESSEN CHARACTER APPRAISAL**

The Meeting ended at 7.55 pm