



Council Briefing Note 17 April 2024

PLACE PORTFOLIO – COUNCILLOR SHERON WILKIE

Planning Services

Significant service achievements since last Council meeting:

- Development Management have commenced a series of Planning Officer sessions to focus on planning applications that are 'out of time' as part of the work associated with the £63,412 funding received from DLUHC (the Planning Skills Delivery Fund). A training programme is also being developed with Three Rivers District Council that will deliver landscape, design and ecology training to Planning Officers.
- The appeal against the Council's decision to refuse the development of 1,400 houses (and associated development) on Land East of Tring was dismissed. The Secretary of State went against the recommendation of the Planning Inspector in concluding that the harms to the Green Belt and the other harms (character and appearance of area, setting of AONB, heritage and loss of best and most valuable agricultural land) were not clearly outweighed by the very special circumstances (such as delivery of much needed market housing, affordable housing and extra care units, provision of self and custom build plots, recreational and community facilities, and enhancements to ecology and sustainable transport)
- The HCC team are analysing responses to the Local Cycle Walking Infrastructure Plan consultation that closed at the end of February. They will be carrying out route audits in April before a prioritisation exercise takes place to inform the draft plan. An update will be provided to SPAE OSC on this work after the pre-election period.
- The Strategic Planning Team are continuing to analyse responses to the Local Plan consultation and are working on finalising the evidence base required to demonstrate to the Planning Inspector that the final version is the best strategy for Dacorum. The Task and Finish Group has been set up and had two meetings before Easter, they will continue to meet approximately every two weeks up to June. The Duty to Co-operate meetings have started with our neighbouring local authorities and the team are working with statutory consultees on our Infrastructure Delivery Plan which will support the Local Plan.
- Officers are working on the next areas of SANG in particular looking at Margret Lloyd Park which is related to an adjacent housing delivery site and a new planning application is expected from Homes England within the next 9-12 months once they have a SANG solution.
- The Planning department have been successful in bidding for £80k for a design code. The Council has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with DLUHC and the work is likely to focus on Two Waters and Aspley, over the next 12 months.
- 5 Enforcement Notices have been served so far this year. It should be noted that the Planning Inspectorate are currently taking up to a year to deal with appeals against Enforcement Notices. This is evidenced in Dacorum by 6 out of our longest-running appeals relate to Enforcement Notice appeals. As at 18 March 2024 there are 328 live planning enforcement cases. Outstanding first site visits are now down to 5, meaning effectively that all new enforcement cases are being visited within the reported timescales.

Strategic or significant operational matters which your service would like full Council to be aware of:

- The Strategic Planning Team are supporting with next steps on Bovingdon Neighbourhood Plan. The plan has been considered for fact checking by the Planning Inspector, which Bovingdon Parish Council is now considering.
- The Strategic Planning Team are also supporting Great Gaddesden and Berkhamsted Neighbourhood Plans.
- The Development Management Team will be presenting the Markyate Conservation Area Character Appraisal to SPAES OSC, Cabinet and Council after purdah for adoption.
- The Affordable Housing Supplementary Planning Document was supported by SPAE OSC on 6 March and will be presented to Cabinet and Council after the pre-election period before opening a four-week consultation period.

Place and Enterprise

Significant service achievements since last Council meeting:

- Following the success of Dacorum's Den 2023, preparations are now being made for the 2024 round of the initiative.
- UK Shared Prosperity Fund – Hemel Imaginarium. Officers are working with voluntary sector partners as well as the BID on proposals for meanwhile and activation plans for the Town Centre which will include 'pop up' summer activities. Once finalised a list of activities will be shared with members and communicated to residents through the usual channels. UKSPF spend is progressing according to target and profile.

Strategic or significant operational matters which your service would like full Council to be aware of:

- Health Campus – Officers are continuing to work with health colleagues to develop a Memorandum of Understanding and PID for the next stage of feasibility works
- Maylands Masterplan workstream – a presentation of current outputs was made to Herts IQ Board on 27th March, engagement with stakeholders and businesses commenced following Easter.
- On 7th March Officers hosted a visit from the Director for Housing Markets and Strategy and colleagues at the Department for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities where a presentation was given on the Town Centre Vision, HGC and the Local Plan followed by a town centre walkabout. This was to demonstrate in person the council's ambitions. This was very well received by the DLUHC officers.

Communities and Leisure

Significant service achievements since last Council meeting:

- The Communities and Leisure Team were successful in a bid for £630,000 for the installation of solar panels at Hemel Hempstead Leisure Centre. This has been awarded from the £60m Swimming Pool Support Fund Phase II.
- Following Cabinet approval to a grant based approach to VCS funding, the new service level agreements and outcome measures have been agreed and signed by the partner organisations. The new services have commenced as of 1 April 2024.
- Reithfields and Coronations Fields Tennis Courts refurbishment project – official launch events on Saturday 6th and 13th April at Coronation Fields with a Easter Egg Hunt.
- Dacorum Shared Prosperity Fund, administered by Community Action Dacorum (CAD) and funded through UK Shared Prosperity Fund - Round 1 – 12 local organisations/charities were awarded £70,000 in March 2024.

Strategic or significant operational matters which your service would like full Council to be aware of:

- Household Support Funding – Following the budget statement in March 2024, the fund has been extended for a further six months, DBC are awaiting the details of the extension.

- The Shopmobility contract (delivered by CAD) has been extended for 1 Year to allow the Council to conduct a service review and soft market engagement exercise to ensure that the authority is achieving best value for money.
- Recruitment to two posts is in process – Place Officers for Sport and Physical Activity and Funding and Partnerships. These posts will help to support the delivery of the leisure contract community outreach programme and support the voluntary and community sector commissioning framework.
- Officers have begun scoping work to deliver a new Leisure Strategy

Arts and Culture

Significant service achievements since last Council meeting:

- Dance Relgnite – funded by Arts Council England : Weekly workshops at The Old Town Hall continued until Easter as part of this partnership community dance project benefitting older adults. The performance will tour to ten local settings and culminate in the Relgnite Festival on 4th July at Eric Morecambe Centre in Herts, bringing together participants from five District areas.
- Subways Public Art - Lead Artist Anna Schofield is engaging with local communities including Astley Cooper School to develop designs for painting two subways. The aim is to enhance the appearance and experience of using the Plough Roundabout and Grovehill Subways to encourage pedestrian access. Looking to complete the painting work over the summer months.
- Old Town Hall Theatre – Recruitment is in process for five vacant positions. The Venue & Operation Lead Officer role has been offered and the Marketing & Sales Lead Officer role has been readvertised due to initial lack of suitable candidates.
- Old Town Hall Theatre - Customer satisfaction rating remains high (100% excellent/good in February)

Strategic or significant operational matters which your service would like full Council to be aware of:

- Head of Arts and Culture, Diana Houghton, started on 4th March 2024
- Officers have begun work scoping a new Arts and Culture Strategy.
- Creative Hertfordshire - Discussion on creative evaluation methods is ongoing to better demonstrate the impact of arts on health and wellbeing.
- To mark Mental Health Awareness Week and also Creativity and Wellbeing Week, the Colourful Minds: Art for Wellbeing project will present an exhibition of participant's artwork at The Old Town Hall in May. A Celebration Event will take place on 15 May. Invitations will be circulated after Easter.

Hemel Garden Communities

Significant service achievements since last Council meeting:

- A site visit to Chelmsford Garden Communities took place on 19th March, attended by Officers and Members of the HGC Councillor Review Group. The site is broadly comparable to Hemel Garden Communities, in terms of scale and active and sustainable travel targets, and provides some helpful lessons learnt.
- Following a successful Homes England funding bid confirmed in December 2023 (up to £190k, subject to expenditure during 2023/24), HGC has successfully drawn down the maximum extent of the available funding in support of the development of a series of workstreams addressing transport and the opportunities for active and sustainable travel; land assembly; future stewardship opportunities; and, design.
- Hemel Garden Communities continues to develop evidence to support the Local Plan processes, across both Dacorum and St Albans.

Strategic or significant operational matters which your service would like full Council to be aware of:

- N/A will be reported via wider DBC Local Plan processes.