

**Berkhamsted Town Council**  
**Annual Town Meeting**  
**Thursday 5 May 2016**  
**Items 5 and 6**  
**Reports from Chairs/ Convenors of Committees**

## **1 FINANCE AND POLICY - COUNCILLOR DAVID COLLINS**

### **Precept**

A key role of the Finance and Policy Committee is to assess the Town Council's income and expenditure and to recommend the annual level of precept for Berkhamsted, as part of Council Tax levied by Dacorum Borough Council, and to deliver a balanced budget.

The precept for Band D properties in 2015/16 remained at £19.18, the eighth successive year without an increase. In order to protect spending on the town and to prepare for likely adjustments to funding from other parties the Council has increased its precept to £177,354, £21.42 for a Band D property, less than 42p per week.

### **Accounts and Audit Reports for 2014/15**

The Town Council's financial accounts and return is audited each year by an independent external auditor appointed by the Audit Commission. The report for the year ending 31 March 2015, 'the Town Council's annual return is in accordance with proper practice and no matters came to their attention that gave cause for concern.'

The annual return and audit reports for 2014/15 are available for public inspection in the Town Council offices and on the Town Council website.

### **Income and Expenditure for 2015/2016**

The Town Council accounts for 2015/16 will be finalised at the end of the financial year and made ready for audit and Town Council approval in June 2016. The accounts will then be available for public inspection.

The latest budget forecasts indicate that the Town Council income for the year will be around £212,000 against expenditure of £242,000, providing a deficit of £30,000, which will be drawn from the General Reserve as planned.

Funding of the **Swan Youth project** continues.

### **Lagley Meadow Youth and Community Centre**

I am pleased to report that the Town Council has continues to let Lagley Meadow to Happy Days Pre-School, as the main tenant at the Centre.

The Centre is now fully booked for term-time but is available for hire in the evenings and at weekends. Please contact the Town Clerk or Town Warden for details.

### **Grounds Maintenance**

The Town Council continues to manage maintenance contracts for grass and hedge cutting at the allotment sites and for some hanging baskets on the High Street and to Sunnyside Rural Trust for maintenance of flower beds at Gateway Gardens, London Road and Durrants Lane/Coombe Gardens.

### **Grant Awards**

At the beginning of the year, the Town Council agreed a revised grant award policy and operates a grant awards scheme to provide financial support of up to £1,000 to voluntary groups and community organisations working ‘in the interests of the town, for the benefit of residents, to improve the range of services and activities in the town, or for the residents of the town.’

For 2015/16, the Town Council has made grants to

- The Royal British Legion for band expenses associated with Remembrance Sunday
- Herts Air Ambulance
- 1066 Club for the Blind & Partially sighted
- Rush Judo

### **Budget 2015/16**

The Finance and Policy Committee considered budget proposals for the next financial year and made recommendations to Full Council. The Town Council’s decision was to increase the precept for 2016/17 and not to draw from reserves to balance the budget.

The budget for 2016/17 agreed by the Town Council is as follows.

### **INCOME**

Precept/Tax Base Adjustment	£177,805	
Concurrent Services/Town Warden	£21,643	
Festival of Light	£6,200	
Allotments	£9,200	
Lagley Meadow Youth Centre	£14,900	
Community Infrastructure Levy	£2,500	
Interest	£3,000	
Parish Paths Partnership	£1,000	
<b>TOTAL INCOME</b>		<b><u>£236,248</u></b>

### EXPENDITURE

Support services	£107,700	
Office Administration/Elections	£36,600	
Projects	£21,500	
Youth Centre	£14,450	
Allotments	£6,400	
Civic, Environmental & Gardens	£35,700	
Grants, Financial	£9,700	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		<b><u>£232,050</u></b>
Contribution to Reserves	<b><u>(£4,198)</u></b>	

### **POLICY**

#### **Castle Events**

The Town Council works closely with English Heritage to encourage and promote the Castle to be used for events that are in keeping with the heritage and fabric of the Castle and in August 2015 the Rotary Club held a production by Illyria Open Air Theatre Group. This was a well-attended event and raised a substantial sum for the Rotary Club's donations to local, national and international causes. This year they will hold an event on 9<sup>th</sup> July.

#### **Festival of Light**

A very successful Festival of Light was held on Sunday 27 November 2015, with funds raised for local charities, schools and organisations. The Town Council passes on its thanks to the Lions and Rotary Clubs, Community Action Dacorum and all other volunteers who gave their time to event, to everyone in the town for attending the Festival in such large numbers; and to local businesses, particularly Berkhamsted and District Chamber of Commerce for their donations to the Festival of Light.

This year's event is again on Sunday 27<sup>th</sup> November 2016.

Councillor David Collins  
Chair, Finance and Policy Committee

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## **2 TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE – COUNCILLOR JULIAN ASHBOURN**

The Planning Committee continues to be vigilant in the scrutiny of all planning applications that affect Berkhamsted. The past year has been particularly busy in this respect and this trend will no doubt continue in the foreseeable future as the demand for new housing continues while existing properties continue to be developed within a buoyant market place.

The planning applications considered within this period may be loosely categorised as follows;

1. Alterations to existing properties, such as loft conversions and general cosmetic improvements.
2. Major extensions to existing properties which significantly alter both their footprint and overall character.
3. Demolitions of existing properties, to be replaced with new build developments of a similar type.
4. Demolitions of existing properties to be replaced with new build developments of an entirely different nature ~ for example, apartment blocks replacing single dwellings or commercial properties.
5. Significant new build developments on previously undeveloped land, such as new housing estates.

All of the above have featured within the broader portfolio of planning applications that have been received for the Berkhamsted area. It should be noted that these applications are made to, and ultimately decided by, Dacorum Borough Council. The role of the Town Council Planning Committee is to scrutinise and advise on all applications affecting the town, feeding back its responses to Dacorum Borough Council in order that they may be taken into consideration within the broader process.

In order to appreciate the scale of development and the number of planning applications being received for Berkhamsted alone, the following statistics are provided, both for 2015 and for 2016 to date.

In 2015, the breakdown of the Town Council Planning Committee's response to applications is as follows;

- There were 479 applications considered overall.
- There were 98 applications that were objected to on various grounds.
- There were 29 applications where serious concerns were raised.
- There were 84 applications that were noted as permissible.
- There were 268 applications for which no objections were raised.

Occasionally, even when both Town and Borough Councils agree that an application should not be allowed, the applicants appeal against the decision. Among the Berkhamsted applications there were 14 known appeals in 2015.

In 2016 the statistics to date are as follows;

- There have been 93 applications considered overall.
- There were 14 applications that were objected to on various grounds.
- There were 7 applications where serious concerns were raised.
- There were 17 applications that were noted as permissible.
- There were 55 applications for which no objections were raised.

Consequently, it looks like being another busy year for the Planning Committee, which meets every three weeks to consider outstanding planning applications.

Residents are of course welcome to attend the Town Council Planning Committee meetings and to address the committee with respect to specific planning applications. There were many instances throughout 2015 when this

occurred and, indeed, it is encouraging to see that Berkhamsted residents are interested in planning and the effect it has upon our town. In addition to the large number of single residence applications, there are of course larger scale developments such as the site of the former Police Station, the housing development at Durrants Lane, the proposed Multi Storey Car Park in Lower Kings Road, the Lidl supermarket development and others where public interest remains high. And of course, it is not just the proposed structures themselves that are of interest, but their effect upon the infrastructure and general wellbeing of our town. The Town Council Planning Committee take all such views into consideration when deliberating upon specific applications and shall of course continue to do so.

In summary, it has been a busy year with respect to planning applications for Berkhamsted and this trend looks likely to continue for the foreseeable future.

Julian Ashbourn  
Chairman Town Planning Committee

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### **3 TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – COUNCILLOR PETER MATTHEWS**

It has been a varied and busy year for Transport and Environment. It has also been a frustrating year with a number of topics still not resolved. As a committee we have been trying to get the cadence of meetings right, this year we have had, in my view, too few meetings with several months between them, making it difficult to have timely discussions on some areas.

The meeting of 2<sup>nd</sup> of November 2015 the committee had a presentation from the Dacorum tourist officer who delivered a presentation on plans for increasing tourism in Dacorum and Berkhamsted. There is now a destination plan with Berkhamsted details. Collaborations between businesses are encouraged to add value to the plan. There are still a number of gaps in the documentation but we are working on this.

In the lead in to 2016 there were a number of suggestions and discussions on the significance of 2016 in Berkhamsted history. 2016 is the 950<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Norman invasion and the small, but significant part Berkhamsted played in those events. Several suggestions ranging from statues to re-enactments have been tabled over the last year. One of the more concrete plans is the

display of the Alderney Bayeux Tapestry in Berkhamsted, supported by the local history society. There are however problems with the venue and insurance. We hope that we can resolve these issues and see the missing last panels for ourselves.

The events committee, a working group of the Transport and Environment Committee, meets as needed to discuss potential events that the Council would support with advice, contacts and assistance. At the last meeting it was agreed to support the (now) annual Gilbert and Sullivan performance and picnic in the Castle managed by the Rotary Club. This is continuing in its popularity, raises money for charity, and puts the Castle back on the map as a town resource. To add to this, Berkhamsted Cycling Club are running a Cycling festival based around the Castle with races for all ages and skills. This looks likely to be a big event with 3000 spectators and competitors from around the county and South East. Berkhamsted Revolutions Cycling Festival will be on Sunday 10<sup>th</sup> July.

The Castle Liaison Working Group met to discuss all aspects of the Castle, its maintenance, use and tourism. This group meets once a year and includes English Heritage and Duchy of Cornwall staff as well as local history, archaeology and council members. The meeting was to understand the effect that changes in the structure of English Heritage may have on the Castle. The changes seem to be minimal in effect although there was a long discussion on maintenance, focussed on the moat or lack thereof. English Heritage came under some pressure to increase the maintenance and agreed to take another look at their stewardship.

An area of concern that has not been resolved is the closure of the NHS Care wards in Gossoms End. This closure was intended to be temporary to overcome a staff shortage, but there is no sign of the wards re-opening. Concerns expressed when the closures were announced that the wards would never be reopened, would seem to be valid. We are trying to escalate and resolve this but in the light of other closures it is difficult to see what can be done.

On the transport front, the cycle racks that have been under discussion from 2013 have now been installed. There is uneven use of the racks at the moment, with the majority of use on the High Street between Kings Road and Castle Street. There is one area to review in the coming months after hearing

of a number of complaints of poor security and vandalism of bikes at the station.

One of the on-going themes under discussion has been the junction of Shootersway, Kingshill Way and Kings Road. Concerns about this junction go back at least 5 years. There have been a number of suggestions, including a pedestrian bridge and one experiment, with no current resolution. As a committee and council we are lobbying hard to achieve a significant reduction to this level of congestion and the serious concerns about safety, before there is an injury or the Durrants Lane development is complete.

The multi-storey car park (MSCP) proposal provides one of those Marmite moments in a council's life. There have been interesting discussions regarding the need to build a new car park in Berkhamsted. There seem to be as many residents who want it to be built as those who don't. At the recent AGM of the Berkhamsted Chamber of Commerce there was unanimous support for the car park. Earlier the Gazette carried a report of a survey that had less than 300 respondents out of a population of more than 16,000 who were "overwhelmingly" against a car park. It would have been better to hold the survey in 1307 when the population was 2,000. It is no secret that parking is a problem in Berkhamsted. Reducing the number of vehicles in the town is not viable; it goes against personal choice. However, the vehicles have to go somewhere. The excellent and well-argued analysis of the MSCP from the Parking Forum indicates that design, access and emission considerations are the main issues with the current design. This Forum consists of representatives from residents, business, transition town and Berkhamsted Citizens Association together with a few councillors. As a committee and a council we will continue to discuss and refine plans for a new car park. There is a consultation meeting later in May to consider the unresolved points.

The latest initiative from this committee is based on the anecdotal evidence of residents who "feel there is an increasing number of heavy good vehicles in the town". These vehicles are obstructing the roads and damaging the infrastructure of the town. To this end the council is in the investigating the feasibility of a study to establish the validity of residents statements. We wish to emphasise that this is not a 12 wheels bad, 6 wheels good argument. Waitrose and Tesco's have sensible sized vehicles and they are sensitive to the



rush hour and school run, but there are a number of other transport organisations who are causing problems by using consumer grade GPS systems rather than transport grade. Once we add this to the increase in heavy delivery vehicles for Lidl and other construction traffic we may need more work on roads and junctions than is currently the case. We urge you to lobby your MP to make the use of consumer GPS systems illegal in HGVs.

Councillor Peter Matthews  
Chairman, Transport and Environment Committee

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#### **4 ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM – COUNCILLOR ANTHONY ARMYTAGE**

##### **Allotment Sites**

Berkhamsted Town Council fulfils its duty as a responsible Allotment Authority by providing residents with the opportunity to keep an allotment at any of the three allotment sites in the town. These comprise Dellfield, Sunnyside (Old and New) and Butts Meadow.

The Town Council currently has 432 tenanted plots, with 66 at Butts Meadow, 71 at Dellfield, 192 at Sunnyside Old and 103 at Sunnyside New. In total there are 480 plots including those which are vacant and unlettable.

##### **Allotment Management**

Overall responsibility for the management and administration of the allotments rests with the Town Council and in particular with the Allotment Management Team which comprises Councillors and representatives of each site including the Sunnyside Rural Trust.

##### **Allotment Rents**

The Town Council requires the allotment holders to pay a rent, to abide by the allotment rules and guidelines and to maintain their plot properly. I am pleased to report that allotment rents and water rates remained unchanged for 2015/16 at £12.50 (rent) and £7.50 (water) for half a plot and £25 and £15 respectively for a full plot.

##### **Income and Expenditure**

The Management Team, which meets quarterly, keeps the allotment income

and expenditure under review at every meeting and ensures that the allotments are financially self-standing. Through careful management of funds and without increasing rents there are sufficient available funds in the allotment reserve to cover any unexpected maintenance or other costs without having to ask the Town Council for funding from reserves.

The estimated allotment income for 2015/16 is £9,746 (subject to audit) against expenditure of £6,799 with the surplus going into the allotment reserve which now stands at £12,133

### **Allotment Administration**

The Allotment Management Team works to improve allotment administration over the year, striving to keep allotment rents and water rates as low as possible.

In this regard the tenants with water licences are asked to water plots sensibly and not excessively. In recent years a computerised allotment management system and non cash payment of rents and rates have been introduced. Further, allotment rules have been simplified.

### **Allotment Risk Management**

The Allotment Management Team, with the assistance of the Town Warden assesses potential risks at the allotment sites on a regular basis and are dealt with promptly on an 'as and when' basis.

The allotments continue to be well run and I thank the allotment representatives, the Finance Officer and the Town Warden for all their hard work and the allotment tenants for ensuring that their allotments are well tended.

Councillor Anthony Armytage  
Allotment Management Team

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## **5 CANAL AND RIVERSIDE PARTNERSHIP (CARP) – COUNCILLOR DAVID COLLINS**

### **Role of Carp**

CARP is a partnership between the Town Council, the Canal and River Trust (formerly British Waterways), Dacorum Borough Council, the Inland Waterways Association, Chiltern Chalk Streams, Berkhamsted Community Partnership and Berkhamsted Citizens Association.

CARP's role is to promote and protect the Grand Union Canal and the Bulbourne chalk stream that run through the town, so that everyone – residents, visitors, walkers, cyclists and boaters – can enjoy the waterway, its heritage, flowers and wildlife.

CARP also works to encourage waterway users to stop and enjoy the other benefits Berkhamsted has to offer our historic built environment, the literary links within our market town and the shops, cafes, restaurants, pubs and nightlife that make such a vibrant town centre.

### **Canal and Towpath Repairs and Upgrades**

Following on from the work to improve the towpath from Castle Street to Canal Fields Bridge, I am delighted to report that in 2015 this programme was continued up to Billet Lane and included widening the path from 1.2 metres to 1.75 metres over a length of 1.1 kilometres. The Town Council would like to thank Herts County Council, Dacorum Borough Council and Cycle Chilterns for their support.

### **Additional Mooring Rings**

Thanks to support from Berkhamsted Citizens Association and Berkhamsted Community Partnership together with the Inland Waterways Association an additional ten mooring rings have been installed. Other work has included extra rubbish bins and renewal of ramps at Billet Lane.

We have identified issues relating to the culvert at Stag Lane and the River Bulbourne. A programme of action is being drawn up.

### **National and Regional Mooring Strategy**

CARP has contributed to the national and regional strategy and has requested a two day and seven day option but this is still under review.

Councillor David Collins  
Canal and Riverside Partnership

