

**Berkhamsted Town Council
Annual Town Meeting
Thursday 14 March 2019
Items 7 The Council Year 2018 - 19
Reports from Chairs and Convenors of Committees**

FINANCE AND POLICY - COUNCILLOR BARBARA NEWTON

FINANCE

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 the coming financial year, 2019 – 20, was set in January at £197,165. This represents an increase of 1.98% to a band D council tax payer (£23.17) and an actual increase in demand to DBC of 2.8%. (£191,843 and £22.72 in the current year.)

Accounts and Audit Reports for 2017/18

The Town Council's financial accounts and annual return is audited each year by an independent external auditor. This year was the first under newly appointed external auditor, PKF Littlejohn. The report for the year ending 31 March 2018 concluded that the Town Council's Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) was in accordance with proper practice and no matters came to the auditors' attention that gave cause for concern.

The annual return and accompanying reports for 2017/18 are available for public inspection in the Town Council offices and on the Town Council website.

Income and Expenditure for 2018/2019

The Town Council accounts for 2018/19 will be finalised following the conclusion to the current financial year. These will be ready for inspection by our internal auditor in May and Town Council approval by early June 2019 together with the AGAR referred to already. The accounts will then be available for public inspection.

This year we have had to hold the Town Meeting a little earlier than normal because of elections coming up in May. The year end figures have not yet been prepared as we are still in March. Income is boosted significantly by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts which can only be spent on infrastructure projects supporting development in the town. My colleague Tom Ritchie will pick up this subject when he refers to the work of the CIL Working Group.

Youth Centre and Projects

Funding of the Swan Youth project continues and you may recall that funding was increased this year to £15,000. The Group carries out a much valued and important service.

I am also pleased to report that the Town Council continues to let Lagley Meadow to Happy Days Pre School, as the main tenant at the Youth Centre. The area behind Lagley Meadow is to be restored during the Easter holidays following years of repeated vandalism.

Grounds Maintenance

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

Grant Awards

The Town Council 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.'

In 2018/19, the Town Council made grants to:

The Royal British Legion;
Berkofest Kids Zone;
Chamber of Commerce;
Berkhamsted Junior Park Run;
The Open-Door Project; and
Sunnyside Rural Trust.

On Monday of this week the Committee considered and granted applications from The Hospice of St Francis, Chiltern Open Air Museum, Northchurch United Charities and Berkofest (Book Festival).

Budget 2019/20

The Finance and Policy Committee considered budget proposals for the new (current) financial year and made recommendations to Full Council.

The budget for 2019/20 agreed by the Town Council is as follows.

INCOME

Precept/Tax Base Adjustment	£197,165
Concurrent Services/Town Warden	£22,313
Festival of Light	£7,000
Allotments	£9,020
Lagley Meadow Youth Centre	£12,000

Interest	£2,000
Parish Paths Partnership/HCC grants	£3,000
CIL	£10,000

TOTAL INCOME **£262,498**

EXPENDITURE

Support services	£130,233
Office and Administration	£48,100
Projects	£45,000
Youth Centre	£30,028
Allotments	£7,270
Civic, Environmental & Gardens	£15,231
Grants	£10,999
Elections	£18,000

TOTAL EXPENDITURE **£304,861**

POLICY

Festival of Light

The Festival of Light was held on Sunday 25 November 2018, with funds raised for local charities, schools and other organisations. The Town Council passes on its thanks to the Rotary Club, the Chamber of Commerce, Berkhamsted Citizens, Community Action Dacorum, all other volunteers who gave their time to the event and to everyone in the town for attending the Festival in such large numbers. Many thanks to parents from Westfield School and members of Rotary who stepped in to ensure that Santa was able to visit on the day and that the Elves Posting House was fully staffed by suitably qualified elf personnel. Special thanks must also go to The Faith Works Trust, who kindly sponsored the London Community Gospel Choir, and of course, the Hertfordshire Constabulary Neighbourhood Team for their invaluable help, courtesy and efficiency on the day.

This year's event will be on Sunday 24 November 2019.

Staffing

During the year we have said goodbye to two members of staff. Ann McHugh retired at the end of May after nearly 19 years' service with the Town Council. Last month, our Finance and Allotment Officer Christine Jerram chose the same route. We wish them all the best for a very happy future. Joanna Harley joined as Deputy Town Clerk in November 2018 and is settling in very well. We will be advertising for Christine's replacement in the near future once an appraisal of the duties has been completed by the Town Clerk and Support Services Group.

TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – COUNCILLOR TOM RITCHIE

Over the year the Committee has addressed and commented on many issues and some of the more significant items covered are highlighted below:

Transport

Traffic Lights at Junction with High Street, Kings Road and Lower Kings Road

The phasing of the lights at this junction has been the subject of ongoing discussion between the Town Council and Hertfordshire County Council. The sequencing does not reflect the flow of traffic throughout the day with tail backs in rush hour and long waits between changes during quieter times. A site meeting is being arranged with HCC officers to discuss this and other associated matters.

Parking in Bridgewater Road

As a result of the consultation process last year the proposed commuter parking restrictions were slightly reduced. Cllr Reay has advised that it is proposed to undertake a second consultation following the monitoring of displacement parking. In the meantime, as indicated, the yellow lining arising from the original consultation would be limited to between Murray Road and Delahay Rise. The Town Council will consider whether to contribute to this second consultation.

Road Safety Improvements in the Vicinity of Ashlyns School

At the committee's 12 November meeting members of Berkhamsted Youth Town Council presented a petition and letters of support for the implementation and installation of the following provisions:

- zebra crossing at Hilltop Road & Chesham Road junction;
- safe bus stop on opposite side of Chesham Road from Ashlyns School; and
- speed limit reduction to 20 or 30 mph from the roundabout at the top of Chesham Road.

Herts County Council officers have been notified and more detailed discussions will be arranged to discuss the feasibility of the work proposed.

Speed Activated Device High Street Gossoms End

The Town Council funded the installation of a sign to warn drivers to keep to the speed limit. This measure arose from residents' concerns about speeding which were substantiated by a speed and volume survey undertaken by the County Council but paid for by the Town Council.

Parking Forum

The key aim of the Parking Forum, which is attended by members of the public and town councillors, is to develop and propose solutions and recommendations relating to parking and traffic flow in the town. Over recent years the multi storey car park project has been one of the Forum's key areas of interest. This time last year we were anticipating a project start date of September 2018 with completion mid-2019. However, the project start date was revised and work began in February of this year. The most recent Parking Forum meeting was on 12 March and was attended by DBC's Project Manager who gave an update and answered questions from Forum members. The Town Council is also pressing for the changes to the waiting restrictions in Lower Kings Road and the proposed mini roundabout to be installed as soon as possible to facilitate traffic flow arising from the construction of the car park.

Supplementary parking during construction has been provided at The Moor. This has not been without its issues. The original planning application required removal of some ancient trees at the entry point. Following representations by the Town Council and members of the public the planning application was amended and trees saved. When the site opened for parking earlier this year, there were problems with surface water and extremely muddy conditions underfoot. DBC had to temporarily close the car park to attend to the problems and install a different surface. I would like to confirm that the area will be restored to grass once the multi storey car park can be opened.

Parking is disabled bays on market days

The Town Council has been pressing the Market Fund to stop stall holders from parking in disabled bays apart from when setting up or packing up at the start and finish of their day.

ENVIRONMENT

Play Area at Normandy Drive/Dellfield

The new play equipment at Normandy Drive was installed over the summer holidays to the delight of children and parents alike. The Town Council pressed hard for this project to be undertaken and contributed £5,000 from CIL receipts towards the overall cost of £25,000. Dacorum Borough Council owns and operates the site and has not ruled out the possibility of an additional set of swings.

Berkhamsted Castle

At last year's meeting the transfer of land at the Castle from Mallinckrodt to the newly founded charity Berkhamsted Castle Trust was about to take place. Almost a year on, there has been good progress with the Trusts as you will have heard earlier at tonight's meeting. The Town Council nominated Trustee is Cllr P Matthews who has a deep interest in the Castle and reflects the Town Council's support for the Charity's objectives.

English Heritage will be undertaking a Conservation Management Plan this year and this will inform the future maintenance strategy of the Castle and facilitate plans for

more local management of the site as a whole. Such plans are in their infancy and of course subject to discussion and development through dialogue with partner organisations. The outcome will impact on the role of the Town Council's Castle Liaison Group and Castle Site Working Party and these groups will be subject to review as events progress.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group

To-date the Town Council has received five instalments of payments of just under £73,000. So far £5,000 has been spent on the contribution to the Normandy Drive play area. As reported last year a Working Party has been established with representation from the Berkhamsted Citizens to formulate project proposals. CIL regulations state that a local council spends CIL receipts by funding:

- The provision, improvement, replacement, operation or maintenance of infrastructure; or
- Anything else concerned with addressing the demands that development places on an area.

A list of projects will be formulated and resident's views will be sought.

Plastic Free Berko Group

Following last year's meeting it was agreed that the Plastic Free Berko group could use the Council chamber for their monthly meetings. Cllr B Newton also attends these meetings.

Trees

The Committee has had a number of representations from residents about tree removal (arising from, for example, work by the landowner or a planning application) and shares the view that if trees are removed then whenever possible replacements should be planted. We will be reenergising our efforts this area in the coming months to encourage DBC to plant more trees in the Town.

Play streets

In our November newsletter we included an article on whether play streets should be introduced into Berkhamsted. This received favourable responses from members of the public and the practicalities will be investigated in further detail.

TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE – COUNCILLOR ANTHONY ARMYTAGE

The Town Planning Committee of Berkhamsted Town Council is a consultee in the planning process. Our purview is to scrutinise all planning applications in the civil parish of Berkhamsted. The planning authority is Dacorum Borough Council and more specifically the Development Management Committee of the Borough Council. The decisions of the Town Planning Committee are forwarded to the planning authority so they may be taken into consideration within the broader context by the planning officer allocated the case.

The decision reached by the Committee after debate, with regard to each application, can be in one of three forms. Either it is No Objection, Concern or Object. The decisions are made on material planning grounds which are based on national policy [e.g. the National Planning Policy Framework] and local policy [eg the Dacorum Core Strategy]. If the decision is Object and this is at variance with the planning officer who has been allocated the case then the application will be referred to the Development Management Committee of Dacorum Borough Council, which meets at The Forum, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead for the final decision. In such instances and taking into account the strength of our case, taking into account public feeling etc, a member of the Committee would attend to argue point of view. Often the Development Management Committee will support our view. A recent example was the proposed change of use, from veterinary practice to residential of the premises at 320A High Street. The final stage in the planning process is where an application objected to by the planning authority is appealed to the Planning Inspectorate, based in Bristol. In such instances the Committee's view are on record for consideration by the Planning Inspector.

Over the year 2018 the Committee considered 492 applications. This is an increase of 51 applications over the previous year. These can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Alterations to existing properties, such as loft conversions, where the foot print is left unchanged;
- More significant alterations e.g. extensions where the footprint is enlarged;
- Demolition of existing properties to be replaced by new build at greater density e.g.;
- Significant new build development e.g. Phase 2 of Bearroc Park; and
- Change of use e.g. veterinary practice to residential at 320A High Street.

Of the Standing Committees of Berkhamsted Town Council the Planning Committee meets most frequently every third week and normally on a Monday evening in the Council Chamber at the Civic Centre. The meetings are held in public but are not public meetings. The public are invited to attend and are given the opportunity to make a representation to the Committee and it is encouraging that many people affected by planning applications, whether positively or negatively, do so. Consideration is given to these representations, whether they be in writing or verbally, and they are taken into account in the decision-making process. So effectively the considerations and deliberations of the Committee represent the "local voice". Planning officers pay strong regard to local opinion.

Of considerable public interest is the emerging Local Plan. Currently the Strategic and Regeneration section of the Dacorum Planning Department advise that they should have completed the analysis, by the end of this month, of the responses received in the Issues and Options consultation. The evidence base arising will be developed with a number of studies being carried out. Reports on that work will be available as part of the consultation on the draft pre-submission Local Plan that is intended to be held in Autumn this year. Berkhamsted Town Council will be involved in the consultation.

I would like to thank the Town Clerk and Deputy Town Clerk for their efficient and professional support. And, finally, I would like to thank the members of the Planning Committee for their time and diligence in their discharge of this important function of the lowest tier of local government.

Councillor Anthony Armytage
Chairman, Town Planning Committee

ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM – COUNCILLOR BARBARA NEWTON

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. The Town Council currently has 427 tenanted plots, with 65 at Butts Meadow, 70 at Dellfield, 186 at Sunnyside Old and 106 at Sunnyside New. These sites are an invaluable enhancement to the ecology of Berkhamsted providing green havens close to the centre of town. Sunnyside Old site boast a butterfly and bee garden. Allotment gardening is good exercise and the sense of community at the sites enhances a sense of well-being. Please do consider applying for an allotment; the waiting lists are short at present. Contact the Town Council on 01442 800146 or look at our web-site for further information and an application form.

Allotment Management

Overall responsibility for the management and administration of the allotment's 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. The Allotment Representatives do a fantastic job communicating with plot holders and reporting issues to the Town Council.

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. Allotment rents and water rates are £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, reviews income and expenditure and discusses improvements and projects. We are about to undertake an extension to the water supply system at Sunnyside New Allotments together with two new water tanks and hose connection points.

Allotment Administration

The Allotment Management Team works to improve allotment administration over the year. Tenants with water licences are asked to water plots sensibly and not excessively.

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 any issues are dealt with promptly.

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

Councillor Barbara Newton
Allotment Management Team

CANAL AND RIVERSIDE PARTNERSHIP (CARP) – CONCILLOR ANTHONY ARMYTAGE

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 and Berkhamsted Citizens.

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

Unfortunately, this year it has been difficult to arrange meetings due to staffing issues at the Canal and River Trust. It is the Town Council’s wish that regular meetings throughout the year resume so that the valuable work of the group can continue. To conclude on better news, the signs removed from over the canal for repainting, are to be reinstalled in the near future.

Councillor Anthony Armytage
Canal and Riverside Partnership
