



**Berkhamsted Town Council
Annual Town Meeting
Thursday 17 March 2022
The Council Year 2021-22
Reports from Chairs and Convenors of Committees**

INTRODUCTION

The composition of Berkhamsted Town Council (the Town Council) consists of ten Liberal Democrats, three Conservatives and two Green Party councillors.

The Council has a number of Committees which focus on major aspects of business to oversee our Town's priorities, including making sure the Council make wise use of our taxes and assets; taking forward various initiatives to improve our town; and of course, commenting on the huge number of householder and developer planning applications made each year.

Our Committees are made up of councillors who work together for the good of the Town. Meetings are held in public and supported by our Town Clerk or Deputy Town Clerk, whose main role at those meetings is to advise and ensure the proper conduct of the meetings so that decisions made comply with the laws covering parish and town councils. The meeting dates schedule, agenda and minutes are published on the Town Council's website, Facebook and Twitter.

Agendas are posted on the Town Council notice boards around a week before the meeting. This process, like many others, within the operation of the Town Council, has been disrupted because of the challenging Covid-19 conditions all residents have found themselves in for most of 2021/22. The Covid -19 pandemic influenced the way the Town Council meetings were held during the first few months of the year, with Zoom remote video conferencing until June 2021. The Town Council welcomed the move back to physical meetings at the Civic Centre from June 2021 and continues to the current date. Residents have still been able to attend all Council and Committee meetings.

The reports below from each of the Committees summarise the main activities undertaken over the year. Rather than duplicate the detail of each report, Chairs intend to highlight key aspects and welcome questions from residents.

FINANCE AND POLICY - Councillor Rick Freedman

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 2022-23 was set at Full Council on 10 January 2022 and will be £294,099 for the year. This being a reduction in real terms on the previous year, 2021-22, also set at £294,099.

Your precept is being used to: enhance the environment of the Town; invest in our young people at the Swan Youth Project; provide grant support for a number of our local charities and community groups supporting Berkhamsted residents during the Covid-19 pandemic; and continuing support for projects targeting the Climate Emergency.

Accounts and Audit Reports for 2020 - 21

The Town Council's financial accounts and Annual Governance and Accountability Return (AGAR) are audited each year by an independent external auditor, PKF Littlejohn. The report for the year ending 31 March 2021 concluded that the Town Council's AGAR was in accordance with proper practice and no matters came to the auditors' attention that gave cause for concern.

Income and Expenditure for 2021 - 22

The Town Council accounts for 2021-22 will be finalised following the conclusion of our current financial year, which runs from 1 April 2021 to 31 March 2022. These will be ready for inspection by our internal auditor in May and for Town Council approval hopefully by early July 2022, together with the AGAR referred to already. The AGAR and accompanying reports for 2021-22 will be available for public inspection on the Town Council website when they are finalised.

Income is boosted by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts which can only be spent on infrastructure projects supporting development in the Town.

Youth Centre and Projects

Funding of the Swan Youth Project continues. The Project provides a much valued and important service to our young people. In early 2020, the Council wanted to enhance its support of the project against the backdrop of a very difficult funding climate for youth services. The funding support to the Swan Youth Project in 2022-23 will continue to be £30,000 (the same as in 2020-21 and 2021-22).

The Town Council continues to let Lagley Meadow Youth Centre to Happy Days Pre-School, as the main tenant at the Youth Centre.

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 contract of flower beds at Gateway Gardens, London Road, Durrants Lane/Coombe Gardens and a small border in Cowper Road.

Maintenance of The Rectory Lane Cemetery is undertaken by Friends of Rectory Lane.

Grant Awards

The Town Council operates a grant awards scheme to provide financial support 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”. The Town Council continued to award grants from the Covid-19 grant scheme, specifically aimed at local charities supporting residents during what was a challenging period.

In 2021-22 the Town Council made grants to:

Swan Youth Project

PCSO Funding Contribution

Open Door

Friends of St Peters (Rectory Lane Cemetery Project)

Age UK Dacorum

BerkoFest

Westfield School Playground

Paul Strickland Scanner Centre

West Hearts Healthy Hearts

Applications are considered at each Finance and Policy Committee meeting throughout the year.

Budget 2022/23

The Finance and Policy Committee considered budget proposals for the coming financial year and made recommendations to Full Council.

The budget for 2022/23 agreed by the Town Council is as follows:

	2021/22	2022/23
Precept and Interest	295,536	294,845
Salaries	74,965	106,248
Employer NI	6,999	11,856
Employers Superannuation	17,821	27,806

Training Costs		345		500
Staff Travel Expenses		300		100
Rent/Rates		30,525		37,000
Cleaning		1,200		1,300
Catering Costs		0		0
Misc. Establishment Costs		204		0
Telephone/Fax		720		500
Postage		204		300
Stationery		756		1,000
Subscriptions/ Land registry searches		3,003		2,965
Insurance		3,000		3,500
Photocopier Costs		580		700
Recruitment Advertising		0		0
Website		230		285
Property Maintenance		0		0
Maintenance Contracts		991		5000
Bank Charges		300		450
Legal Expenses		0		800
External Audit Fees		600		400
Internal Audit Fees		860		800
Accountancy Fees		1,250		1,375
Payroll Processing Fees		1,000		1,000
Software Support		689		400
IT/Computer Costs		12,000		12,000
GDPR Compliance Services DPO		35		35
IT upgrade for the office hardware				
IT upgrade Installation costs March 2021				
		158,577		216,320
Civic				
Training Costs		300		500
Publicity/Noticeboards		1,200		1,200
Newsletter		1,800		0
Mayoral Expenses		100		200
Councillors Expenses		0		0
Mayors Civic Functions		3,500		2,000
Elections		3,000		10,000
		9,900		13,900
Town Warden				
DBC Grants Received		16,155		16,815
Salaries		19,450		20,500
Employer NI		1,700		2,000
Employers Superannuation		4,650		4,850
Staff Travel Expenses		996		1000
Misc Staff Costs		48		150

		26,844		28,500
DBC Delegated Functions				
DBC Grants Received		3,870		3,870
Maintenance Contracts		3,000		3,065
		3,000		3,065
Lagley Meadow Youth Centre				
Rental Income		9,750		12,000
Salaries		4,550		4,800
Employer NI		400		480
Employers Superannuation		1,100		1,200
Rent/Rates		5,438		6,000
Electric/Gas		2,100		5,000
Property Maintenance		1,500		3,000
Maintenance Contracts		206		0
		15,294		20,480
Festival of Light				
DBC Grants Received		6,000		6,000
Event Costs		22,000		30,000
		22,000		30,000
Allotments				
Water Recharges		1,908		2,200
Rental Income		7,200		10,500
Sundry Income				
Allotments: - Income		9,108		12,700
Water		1,500		2,500
Grounds Maintenance		10,008		6,000
Software Support		1,500		600
Salaries		4,620		4,620
Employer NI		240		240
Employers Superannuation		1,044		1,044
Sunnyside allotment upgrade		4,000		4,000
Allotments: - Indirect Expenditure		22,912		19,004
Grants				
Swan Youth Project		30,000.00		30,000.00
Others		50,000.00		39,000.00
Total Grants		80,000.00		69,000.00
Environmental Projects		14,504.00		21,260.00
Climate Emergency Project Work		78,000.00		54,500.00
High Street pedestrianisation		87,500.00		0
Visitor Experience/Bridge Painting		0		30,000

Project Officer		30,000.00		0
Capital Items (Totem Pole/Benches)		0		42,000
Total cost of grants and projects		290,004		216,760
Total Income		340,419		346,231
Total Costs		-548,531		-548,029
Use of reserves		208,112		201,798
Surplus/(Deficit) for year		0		0

POLICY

Festival of Light

Berkhamsted's traditional Festival of Light was held on the 28 November 2021. The event is the largest Town Council sponsored event in Berkhamsted and is only made possible because of the tremendous support of many local voluntary organisations. This includes, Community Action Dacorum, Rotary Club, Berkhamsted Citizens Association, Berkhamsted Neighbourhood Police the 'Elves' and many local volunteers.

The event is already being planned for 2023 and this will include new Christmas lights and an extended display along the High Street.

Staffing

Our Town Clerk, Tony Noakes has been with us for almost two years and continues to ensure the Town Council meets its obligations and delivers the Councillors 'agenda'.

Our Deputy Town Clerk, Joanna Harley welcomed her second child in November 2021 and is currently on maternity leave. Danielle McGlynn joined us as the interim Deputy Town Clerk to support the Town Clerk in all aspects of administration of the Town Council's services.

John Bushby is our experienced Town Warden who performs a wide variety of tasks, including reporting of issues, dealing with contractors and site inspections.

Dori Beecroft is our Finance and Allotment Officer role and continues to manage and monitors the Town Council's budgets, income and expenditure and administers the Town Council's 427 allotment plots on 3 different sites.

Jemima French joined us in July 2021, filling the Project Officer role. Jemima is working to deliver the Town Council's projects with a focus on the Climate Emergency declared by the Town Council.

The council staff are combining working from home and working from the office. The Town Council office is staffed Mondays to Fridays inclusive from 9:30 to 16:00.

Councillor Rick Freedman
Chair Finance and Policy Committee

TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – Councillor Wendy Conian

Over the year the Committee has addressed and commented on many issues and some of the more significant items covered are highlighted below. The Covid-19 pandemic did impact the delivery of a number of projects. The 2022-23 budget includes a very ambitious plan for T&E project delivery.

Transport

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

Residents had raised a number of concerns about the phasing of the lights at this junction since the new 'smart' traffic lights system was introduced in June 2020. This matter has been the subject of ongoing discussions between the Town Council and Hertfordshire County Council. The phasing of the lights was changed as a result, during the second half of 2021. The situation continues to be monitored.

Parking in Bridgewater Road:

New restrictions with associated yellow lining were introduced on Bridgewater Road in 2019. As is normally the case after a change to parking on major roads, a survey was planned for 2020/21, to understand more about the impact of the changes on the road, its congestion and the local community. This survey is now delayed until late 2022/23, due to the Covid-19 impact on traffic volumes and railway commuting.

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. The multi storey car park (MSCP) project continued to be the Forum's key area of interest during 2021/22. The multi-million-pound investment by the Borough Council, the MSCP finally opened in August 2020. The parking forum has been involved in feeding back essential 'snagging items' since the launch.

The focus of the Parking Forum into 2022/23 will be the targeting of continuing issues about 'street parking' around Town and the shortage of EV charging facilities. Councillors are working with DBC and HCC to improve the 'car park' and 'street' EV charging facilities across Berkhamsted during the next few years.

Canal Fields Footpath

The Town Council approved £8,000 to renew the foot path between Park Street and the Canal Fields play area which has significantly enhanced the walking route which had previously become waterlogged.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group

Since 2017 the Town Council has received payments of just over £100,000. So far £5,000 has been spent on the contribution to the Normandy Drive play area and a further £10,000 on the Station Road upgrade. 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 has been formulated based on proposals put forward by members of the public, town councillors, Berkhamsted Citizens and the Chamber of Commerce.

Climate Action Steering Group and Working Parties

A number of working groups, supported by much valued, knowledgeable and enthusiastic members of the public, have been established. These groups report through the Climate Action Steering Group to the Transport and Environment Committee and the titles and remits of the three working groups are:

- (i) Travel Working Group (Chair Cllr P White):
 - To develop and implement ideas for reducing carbon emissions and pollution from sources related to travel (cars, motor bikes, and others).
 - To build support for lower carbon, carbon-free and lower pollutant transport across Berkhamsted and surrounding area.
 - To liaise with and support existing groups interested in improving travel facilities across Berkhamsted.
 - To propose schemes of work and special projects which seek to reduce carbon emissions across Berkhamsted and surrounding areas, which can be submitted to the Town Council for approval and action.
- (ii) Energy Working Group (Chair Cllr P de Hoest)

- To identify and engage with local business, community groups, public bodies etc so as to deliver a plan that aims for a reduction in CO2 emissions from domestic and commercial energy use to as close to zero as possible by 2030.
- To understand the current level and composition of CO2 emissions in Berkhamsted.
- To identify and propose the most effective ways of reducing CO2 emissions contributions within Berkhamsted based on evidence from existing literature and peer experience.
- To lead initiatives to deliver local carbon reductions.
- To publicise relevant national and local information on CO2 usage and reduction.
- To monitor progress on carbon reduction against agreed targets and milestones in Berkhamsted.

(iii) Habitats Working Group (Chair Cllr M Hardinge)

- To identify and engage with local business, community groups, public bodies etc so as to develop and implement strategies to reduce/offset GHG emissions by enhancing the natural habitat, encouraging greater localisation and by minimising waste.
- Enhance the natural landscape through:
- Developing and implementing a tree planting and maintenance plan for Berkhamsted.
- Developing and implementing a plan for improving the biodiversity of common areas through measures such as flower planting and re-wilding.
- To identify and implement strategies to encourage local businesses and residents to increase their own biodiversity within domestic homes, gardens and office spaces as well as further reducing their own landfill waste impacts.
- To enhance local food resilience through identification and encouragement of local food production and distribution.
- To encourage the reduction in generation of avoidable waste (such as single use plastics) and increase in reuse/recycling of all waste including food waste.
- Develop an overarching mitigation and monitoring plan that includes targets and milestones to achieve these objectives.

(iv) Climate Action Berkhamsted Working Group (Chair to be appointed)

- The partnership arm on the efforts on the Climate Emergency
- Established in 2021 for the Berkhamsted Great Big Green Week
- To support, educate and encourage the local people who live and/ or work in Berkhamsted, Northchurch and surrounding villages to make

positive environmental changes in their everyday lives in the local area.

Community Bus Project

Following research and a survey seeking the views of members of the public, the Town Council included in its budget for 2021-22 a study (to be completed by an external consultant) to investigate the various operating models to run a community bus service in Berkhamsted. Any resulting pilot as a result of the study, would be initiated during 2022-23.

Air Quality

We have been investigating the possibility of augmenting air quality monitoring which is currently undertaken by DBC. The Covid -19 pandemic has delayed the introduction of a pilot using mobile air quality monitoring due to the greatly reduced traffic volumes. It is expected that the pilot will be introduced during 2022 using local partnerships and locations monitored will include roads near schools and main busy road junctions.

Moor Playground Upgrade

A new Wildwood playground on the Moor was opened in the Summer of 2021. This was funded by the Town Council. It has a natural play trail made of wood and a bespoke simulation of an old water mill to make the historic connection to the old mill.

Berkhamsted Great Big Green Week

The Climate Action Berkhamsted umbrella group facilitated the Berkhamsted Great Big Green Week that took place in September 2021. There was an Eco Fayre comprising of 11 stalls and three evening events in the Civic Centre: and, 20 organisations, community groups, and charities hosting over 54 community events in and around Berkhamsted.

Thermal Imaging Camera

In December 2021 the Energy Working Group acquired a thermal imaging camera as a Town Council asset. The aim is to use thermal imagery to identify heat loss, to lower emissions and energy bills for Berkhamsted Residents. To date the volunteers for the Energy Working Group have reviewed thermal images of four residences in Berkhamsted.

Community Energy

In February 2022 the Town Council applied for £40,000 funding from the Rural Community Energy Fund to undertake a feasibility study of seven community energy clusters identified in Berkhamsted. Watch this space to find out if the Town Council have been successful in securing funding.

Councillor Wendy Conian
Chairman, Transport and Environment Committee

TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE – Councillor Peter White

The Town Planning Committee of Berkhamsted Town Council is a consultee in the planning process. Its 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: 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 [e.g., 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 for the final decision. In such instances and taking into account the strength of the case, taking into account public feeling etc, a member of the Committee would attend to argue the Committee's point of view. Often the Development Management Committee will support our view. 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.

During the Council year 2021/22 the Planning Committee considered 446 applications. These can be broadly categorised as follows:

- Alterations to existing properties, such as loft conversions, where the footprint 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
- Significant new build development.
- Change of use.

Of the Standing Committees of Berkhamsted Town Council the Planning Committee meets most frequently; every third week and normally on a Monday evening. 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.

The Town Council submitted its response to Dacorum’s Draft Local Plan (to 2038) in early 2021. The response was put together by a working group of the Council and members of the public.

This Council’s key comment on the Draft Plan was that it represents an excessive increase in the population and number of houses to be built over the Plan period 2020 -2038, and this increase does not tally with the ONS projections. If the Draft Plan was to be adopted by the Borough, it would result in substantial incursions into the Green Belt, including sites on the edges of Berkhamsted, with adverse impact on parts of the AONB.

The numerous responses to Dacorum’s Draft Local Plan (to 2038) and the challenges made by responders, resulted in DBC deciding to restart the process and open a new consultation during 2023. This delay being a direct result of the Town Council’s Planning Committee, local community groups and Berkhamsted residents’ feedback and responses to the consultation process.

Local input works!

Councillor Peter White
Chairman, Town Planning Committee

ALLOTMENT WORKING GROUP – Councillor Garrick Stevens

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 vary from site to site. Contact the Town Council on 01442 800146 or look at our website for further information and an application form. Allotment plots are very

much in demand and the current waiting includes over 100 Berkhamsted residents waiting for an allotment plot.

Allotment Management

Overall responsibility for the management and administration of the allotment's rests with the Town Council, and in particular with the Allotment Working Group 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. They do so on a completely voluntary basis.

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 £20 (rent) and £7.50 (water) for half a plot and £40 and £15 respectively for a full plot.

Income and Expenditure

The Working Group, which meets quarterly, reviews income and expenditure and discusses improvements and projects. This year we have seen vital tree work being completed and also improvements to the water supply and storage on all allotment sites.

Allotment Administration

The Allotment Working Group works to improve allotment administration over the year. Tenants with water licences are asked to water plots sensibly and not excessively. We employ a Finance and Allotment officer as part of the Town Council staffing complement.

Allotment Risk Management

The Allotment Working Group, 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 Garrick Stevens
Allotment Management Team

CANAL AND RIVERSIDE PARTNERSHIP (CARP) – Councillor Nigel Taylor

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 waterways, their facilities, heritage, flora and fauna.

The membership is made up of a wide variety of experts from Canal and River Trust; Affinity Water; DBC; the Environment Agency; the Inland Waterways; Groundworks; HCC; Berkhamsted Citizens; the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust and fellow councillors.

The Covid -19 emergency impacted group meetings during 2021/22 and the plans for 2022/23 and a relaunch of the group will be communicated in April 2022.

Councillor Nigel Taylor
Canal and Riverside Partnership
