

**Berkhamsted Town Council  
Annual Town Meeting  
Thursday 18 March 2021  
The Council Year 2020-21  
Reports from Chairs and Convenors of Committees**

**INTRODUCTION**

The composition of Berkhamsted 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, making sure we 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 from all parties 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 Council's website, Facebook and Twitter.

Agendas are usually 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 conditions all residents have found themselves in during 2020/21. The Covid -19 pandemic influenced the way Town Council meetings were held during the year. The move from physical meetings at the Civic Centre to Zoom remote video conferencing happened in early April 2020 and continues to the current date. Residents have still been able to attend all Council and Committee meetings, via Zoom and over 100 did so, during the current year.

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.

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## **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 2021-22 was set at Full Council on 11 January 2021 and will be £294,099 for the year. The precept for 2020-21 was £294,069.

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

### **Accounts and Audit Reports for 2019 - 20**

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 2020 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 2020 - 21**

The Town Council accounts for 2020-21 will be finalised following the conclusion of our current financial year, which runs from 1 April 2020 to 31 March 2021. These will be ready for inspection by our internal auditor in May and for Town Council approval hopefully by early July 2021, together with the AGAR referred to already. The AGAR and accompanying reports for 2020-21 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 and 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 2021-22 will continue to be £30,000 (the same as in 2020-21).

The Town Council continues to let Lagley Meadow Youth Centre to Happy Days Pre School, as the main tenant at the Youth Centre. The Town Council gave Happy Days a rent holiday for most of 2020 because of the disruption to their operating model caused by the Covid-19 pandemic.

### 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 also introduced a Covid-19 grant scheme specifically aimed at local charities supporting residents during this challenging period.

In 2020-21 the Town Council made grants to:

Open Door Berkhamsted  
 Friends of St Peters (Rectory Lane Project)  
 Northchurch United Charities  
 Age UK Dacorum  
 Sunnyside Rural Trust Community Project  
 SE Craft for causes  
 CAD Sheddars project

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

### Budget 2021/22

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

The budget for 2021/22 agreed by the Town Council is as follows:

	2020/21	2021/22
Precept and Interest	297,004	295,536
Salaries	77,078	74,965
Employer NI	7,329	6,999
Employers Superannuation	17,072	17,821

Training Costs		227		<b>345</b>
Staff Travel Expenses		250		<b>300</b>
Rent/Rates		20,860		<b>30,525</b>
Cleaning		1,026		<b>1,200</b>
Catering Costs		0		<b>0</b>
Misc. Establishment Costs		191		<b>204</b>
Telephone/Fax		665		<b>720</b>
Postage		195		<b>204</b>
Stationery		712		<b>756</b>
Subscriptions/ Land registry searches		2,989		<b>3,003</b>
Insurance		2,880		<b>3,000</b>
Photocopier Costs		540		<b>580</b>
Recruitment Advertising		1,475		<b>0</b>
Website		230		<b>230</b>
Property Maintenance		0		<b>0</b>
Maintenance Contracts		2,266		<b>991</b>
Bank Charges		77		<b>300</b>
Legal Expenses		0		<b>0</b>
External Audit Fees		600		<b>600</b>
Internal Audit Fees		800		<b>860</b>
Accountancy Fees		7,164		<b>1,250</b>
Payroll Processing Fees		915		<b>1,000</b>
Software Support		1,634		<b>689</b>
IT/Computer Costs		11,140		<b>12,000</b>
GDPR Compliance Services DPO		35		<b>35</b>
IT upgrade for the office hardware		3,500		
IT upgrade Installation costs March 2021		4,100		
		<b>165,950</b>		<b>158,577</b>
<b>Civic</b>				
Training Costs		0		<b>300</b>
Publicity/Noticeboards		0		<b>1,200</b>
Newsletter		0		<b>1,800</b>
Mayoral Expenses		100		<b>100</b>
Councillors Expenses		70		<b>0</b>
Mayors Civic Functions		0		<b>3,500</b>
Elections		0		<b>3,000</b>
		<b>170</b>		<b>9,900</b>
<b>Town Warden</b>				
DBC Grants Received		16,155		<b>16,155</b>
Salaries		18,710		<b>19,450</b>
Employer NI		1,630		<b>1,700</b>
Employers Superannuation		4,140		<b>4,650</b>
Staff Travel Expenses		765		<b>996</b>
Misc Staff Costs		36		<b>48</b>

		25,281		26,844
<b>DBC Delegated Functions</b>				
DBC Grants Received		3,870		3,870
Maintenance Contracts		3,000		3,000
		3,000		3,000
<b>Lagley Meadow Youth Centre</b>				
Rental Income		3,000		9,750
Salaries		4,356		4,550
Employer NI		380		400
Employers Superannuation		966		1,100
Rent/Rates		5,241		5,438
Electric/Gas		2,033		2,100
Property Maintenance		1,389		1,500
Maintenance Contracts		0		206
		14,365		15,294
<b>Festival of Light</b>				
DBC Grants Received		6,000		6,000
Event Costs		15330		22,000
		15,330		22,000
<b>Allotments</b>				
Water Recharges		1,910		1,908
Rental Income		7,150		7,200
Sundry Income		900		
Allotments :- Income		9,960		9,108
Water		1,453		1,500
Grounds Maintenance		4,950		10,008
Software Support		498		1,500
Salaries				4,620
Employer NI				240
Employers Superannuation				1,044
Sunnyside allotment upgrade		4000		4,000
Allotments :- Indirect Expenditure		10,901		22,912
<b>Grants</b>				
Swan Youth Project		30,000.00		30,000.00
Others		20,300.00		50,000.00
<b>Total Grants</b>		<b>50,300.00</b>		<b>80,000.00</b>
<b>Environmental Projects</b>		<b>11,600.00</b>		<b>14,504.00</b>
<b>Climate Emergency Project Work</b>		<b>3,000.00</b>		<b>78,000.00</b>
<b>High Street pedestrianisation</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>87,500.00</b>
<b>Project Officer</b>		<b>0</b>		<b>30,000.00</b>

Total cost of grants and projects		64,900			<b>290,004</b>
Total Income		335,989			340,419
Total Costs		-299,897			-548,531
Use of reserves		30,100			208,112
<b>Surplus/(Deficit) for year</b>		<b>66,192</b>			<b>0</b>

## POLICY

### Festival of Light

Unfortunately, due to COVID-19 restrictions, we were unable to hold the traditional Festival of Light.

We did ensure that the Christmas lights and tree were lit-up as usual and hope this helped to spread some festive cheer.

We are unable to currently plan whether we may be able to hold the Festival of Light in 2021 and await Government advice.

### Staffing

Our 'new' Town Clerk, Tony Noakes joined in April 2020, bringing with him experience of roles within the private and public sector. He had a 2-month induction period during the first national Covid-19 lockdown. He has been a Berkhamsted resident for over 20 years.

Our Deputy Town Clerk, Joanna Harley, has been with us since November 2018 and recently passed the Certificate in Local Council Administration.

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

We are pleased to announce that Dori Beecroft joined us in September 2020, filling the Finance and Allotment officer role. Dori is a qualified accountant and a very welcome addition to the team.

The council staff are combining working from home and working from the office. Although the Civic Centre is closed to residents and the general public, the Town Council office is staffed most Mondays to Fridays inclusive.

Councillor Rick Freedman  
Chair Finance and Policy Committee

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## **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 current Covid-19 pandemic has impacted the delivery of a number of projects. The 2021-22 budget includes the most ambitious plan for T&E project delivery in the Town Council's history.

### **Transport**

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

The phasing of the lights at this junction had been the subject of ongoing discussion between the Town Council and Hertfordshire County Council. The sequencing did not allow for the most efficient flow of traffic during peak times. The issue was fixed with the introduction of a new 'smart' traffic lights system in June 2020.

#### *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 to understand more about the impact of the changes on the road, its congestion and the local community. This is delayed until late 2021 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 has been one of the Forum's key areas of interest. A multi-million pound investment by the Borough Council, the MSCP was finally opened in August 2020 with a 'soft launch'. The parking forum has been involved in feeding back essential 'snagging items' since the launch. The current national restrictions have had a significant impact on the usage of the car park to date. Even allowing for this disruption, all of the annual business season tickets for parking on the top 2 floors have been sold.

The Moor reinstatement has begun with reseeding of the area used for temporary parking. This area will remain fenced off until late Spring 2021, until the new grass has had 3 cuts. When open, the Moor will become once again, one of the most used open space amenities in central Berkhamsted.

### *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.

2021-22 projects include:

- Repaint Victorian railings opposite the Railway Station.
- Canal Fields pathway.
- Rework/update 4 main entrances to Berkhamsted.
- High Street parking changes to improve footfall.

### *Climate Emergency Action 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 Emergency 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.

*Community Bus Project Group*

Following research and a survey seeking the views of members of the public, the Town Council has 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 when traffic volumes are expected to return to normal.

### *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 in late 2021 and locations monitored will include roads near schools and main busy road junctions.

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## **TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE – Councillor Garrick Stevens**

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 20/21 the Planning Committee considered 308 applications. 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

- 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 February 2021. The response 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.

As well as responding to the draft plan, the Council has recently given their support to a joint response to Cllr Williams at Dacorum Borough Council from 12 Town and Parish Councils in Dacorum requesting the draft local plan be withdrawn as it does not reflect the need to retain Green Belt and nor does it meet the housing needs, especially for affordable or housing at social rents, in the Borough.

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 first tier of local government.

Councillor Garrick Stevens  
Chairman, Town Planning Committee

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## **ALLOTMENT MANAGEMENT TEAM – 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 web-site for further information and an application form. Allotment plots are very much in demand and the current waiting includes over 140 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 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. 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 £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. This year we have seen extensions and improvements to the water supply and tanks at Sunnyside and tree inspections at all sites together with associated tree work.

### *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. We employ a Finance and Allotment officer as part of the Town Council staffing complement.

*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 Garrick Stevens  
Allotment Management Team

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**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 of CARP was successfully reorganised and the first meeting of the refocussed group took place on 26 February 2020 under revised terms of reference. 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 group has met virtually several more times since this initial meeting for discussions about potential projects to improve and enhance the enjoyment of our waterways. Although progress of projects has been hindered by the Pandemic, but it is very much hoped that 2021 will enable the group to proceed with these.

Councillor Nigel Taylor  
Canal and Riverside Partnership

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