

**Berkhamsted Town Council
Annual Town Meeting
Thursday 19 March 2020
Items 6 The Council Year 2019-20
Reports from Chairs and Convenors of Committees**

INTRODUCTION

At the Town Council elections in May 2019, the composition of the Town Council changed. It now consists of ten Liberal Democrats, three Conservatives and, for the first time, two Green Party councillors. Of these fifteen only 4 have previously been Berkhamsted Town 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 and twitter. Agendas are also posted on the Town Council notice boards. Residents are welcome to attend all Council and committee meetings. Matters are generally on a Monday at 7.30 pm in the council chamber which is located on the second floor of the Civic Centre at 161 High Street.

Climate change is a grave concern globally, nationally and locally. The Town Council, in common with many across the country, has passed a motion to declare a Climate Emergency. A number of initiatives are under way to enable residents to make a contribution to the challenge of reducing our Town's carbon emissions and improve our environment in the process. Our work is supported by members of the public through their membership of various Town Council working parties.

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 Garrick Stevens

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 2020-21 was set at Full Council on 13 January 2020 and will be £294,069 for the year. This represents an increase of 48.49% to DBC. (The precept for 2019-20 being £197,165)

The increase per annum to a band D equivalent household will be £11.10 or 47.91%, with an annual total of £34.27 (65.72p per week).

Your precept is being used to enhance the environment of the Town, invest in our young people at the Swan Youth Project and bring about some additional activities that will help us address 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 2019 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 2019 - 20

The Town Council accounts for 2019/20 will be finalised following the conclusion of our current financial year, which runs from 1 April 2019 to 31 March 2020. These will be ready for inspection by our internal auditor in May and for Town Council approval hopefully by early June 2020, together with the AGAR referred to already. The AGAR and accompanying reports for 2019 - 20 will be available for public inspection in the Town Council offices and on the Town Council website when they are finalised. This year the Government has extended the approval and completion of accounts until the early autumn because of the likely impact of coronavirus on meeting deadlines.

Income is boosted significantly by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts which can only be spent on infrastructure projects supporting development in the Town. A Working Party is developing projects for CIL spending.

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 the Council wanted to enhance its support of the project against the backdrop of a very difficult funding climate for youth services. Therefore the funding support to the Swan Youth Project in 2020-21 will increase from £15,000 to £30,000.

I am also pleased to report that the Town Council continues to let Lagley Meadow Youth Centre to Happy Days Pre School, as the main tenant at the Youth Centre. The astro-turf area behind Lagley Meadow was restored to grass during the 2019 Easter holidays following years of repeated and significant vandalism. The grass seed has taken well and this flat, grassy area will be a welcome resource for the pre-school and is also open to the public of course.

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 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 2019-20 the Town Council made grants to:

The Happy Wanderers
21c Hospital Solutions
Berkhamsted and Hemel Hockey Club
Open Door Berkhamsted
Keech BraveHerts
Friends of St Peters (Rectory Lane Project)
Northchurch United Charities
Berkhamsted Castle Trust
Berkofest Book Festival
Berkhamsted Castle Trust
Hospice of St Francis
Rotary Club of Berkhamsted – Veterans visit to the National Memorial Arboretum.

Further applications will have been considered at the Finance and Policy Committee scheduled for 16 March 2020.

Finance Computer Software

In September 2019 the Town Council changed its finance software package provider and migrated from Sage to Rialtas Omega. Omega is a bespoke package designed for Local Councils and in addition to being user friendly and supported by an excellent help line, also represents good value for money. The Council will be considering whether to move to the Rialtas Allotments Software package during the coming year

Budget 2020/21

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

The budget for 2020/21 agreed by the Town Council is as follows:

INCOME 2020-21

Description	£ (2019-20 in brackets)	
Precept	294,069	(197,165)
Council Tax support Grant	2,682	(2,682)
Concurrent Services	3,870	(4,870)
Town Warden Grant	16,155	(15,761)
Lagley Meadow Youth Centre Rental Income	12,500	(12,000)
Grants		(2,000)
Festival of Light	6,000	(7,000)
Allotment income	9,000	(9,020)
Interest	1,390	(2,000)
Total Income*	345,666	(252,498)

EXPENDITURE 2020-21

Description	£ (2019-20 in brackets)	
Administration	163,250	(151,851)
Town Warden Costs	26,650	(25,702)
Civic Costs	12,200	(25,615)
Delegated Functions	3,000	(2,685)
Grants	7,500	(7,500)
Footpaths	-	(1,000)
Lagley Meadow Youth Centre Costs	15,921	(15,258)
Environmental Projects (includes planters, hanging baskets, PCSO and Swan Youth Project)	51,825	(34,980)
Festival of Light	22,000	(22,000)
Allotments	6,720	(6,270)
Energy Working Group	4,600	-
Travel Working Group (includes £19,000 for Community Bus trial)	26,000	-

Habitat Working Group	6,000	-
Total Expenditure*	345,666	(292,861)

*Does not include income from CIL on advice of the National Association of Local Council's Financial Adviser. Budgets will be set from CIL reserves as projects are agreed. CIL reserves are currently £106,000. In 2019-20 CIL income was budgeted at £10,000 which is not shown above for ease of comparison.

POLICY

Festival of Light

The Festival of Light was held on Sunday 24 November 2019 with funds raised for local charities, schools and other organisations. The Town Council passes on its thanks to Berkhamsted 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 again 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 Lockers Park School and of course, the Hertfordshire Constabulary Neighbourhood Team for their invaluable help, courtesy and efficiency on the day. Our former rector, Tim Pilkington has recently retired and we wish him all the very best and thank him for his help with the Festival over the years

This year's event will be on Sunday 6 December 2020.

Staffing

Our Town Clerk for the past four years, Janet Mason, will be leaving on 31 May 2020. We will miss her wise counsel and hope she will have an enjoyable retirement. After much searching, we have been fortunate to have appointed a local resident, Tony Noakes, who has wide experience of industry and public service and joins us in April so there will be a hand over period with Janet. Joanna Harley joined as Deputy Town Clerk in November 2018 and has taken to the role admirably. John Bushby is our Town Warden who handles with customary good grace many of the enquiries and complaints from residents. He deals with a wide variety of tasks from reporting litter, pot holes and fly tipping to dealing with contractors, site inspections and liaison with allotment representatives. The Finance and Allotment officer role is currently vacant and we hope to fill this post soon.

Councillor Garrick Stevens
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:

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. We expect to have new hardware installed later this year which will offer some improvement. The junction is running to capacity and longer term improvements will be subject to future discussions with the County Council in the context of a wider transport strategy for the Town.

Parking in Bridgewater Road:

As a result of the consultation process in 2018 year the proposed commuter parking restrictions were slightly reduced. Following a further consultation, new restrictions with associated yellow lining have been introduced. The impact of displaced vehicles will be assessed which may result in a further review.

Road Safety Improvements in the Vicinity of Ashlyns School:

At last year's meeting reference was made to the petition by members of Berkhamsted Youth Town Council in support of 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. We will make sure this is not forgotten.

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. To avoid the Christmas period of 2018, the construction start date was revised and began in February 2019, however, further delays with gas diversion and other utility issues meant that we had a disrupted Christmas in 2019. The most recent Parking Forum meeting was on 18 February when the DBC's Project Manager gave an update and answered questions from Forum members. As part of the project and following pressure by the Town

Council there will be new waiting restrictions in Lower Kings Road and a mini roundabout to facilitate traffic flow arising from the construction of the car park.

During the construction of the new Car Park temporary parking has been provided at The Moor. This has not been without its issues – with heavy rainfall resulting in frequent closure of the area. The Borough will begin the restoration of The Moor and the area will be restored to grass once the multi storey car park can be opened. However, it is unlikely the reseeded area will be ready for use by the public until later in 2020. Following representation by the Town Council, the Borough will also be installing a fence around the children’s play space. We have also asked to be involved in the detailed planning of The Moor’s reinstatement and hope to encourage wildlife and other more imaginative planting, aimed at improving the sites natural diversity and value.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group

Since 2017 the Town Council has received payments of just over £106,000. 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 has been formulated based on proposals put forward by members of the public, town councillors, Berkhamsted Citizens and the Chamber of Commerce. These have been ranked and one of the projects that is being investigated is improvements to the road, pavements, appearance and accessibility of the area outside the station and along Station Road. This area is the gateway to Berkhamsted and is, admittedly, a little shabby. The Victorian railings outside the station, adjacent to the canal, are in need of repair and repainting and gardening groups are already working with the railway to improve planting. The costs of such projects are expensive and we hope to work in partnership with other groups and organisations and look at additional funding opportunities to supplement CIL spending. Herts County Council will also be contributing to the highways elements of the project.

Climate Emergency Action Group and Working Parties

The Town Mayor has already mentioned the importance of the Town Council’s declaration of a climate emergency in his introduction on page 1 above. As a result 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 ensures 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.

Progress will be reported at Council and T & E Committee meetings and working group members will be available after the break this evening to discuss their work with you.

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 2020-21 a provision to run a trial bus service, which would have the objective of reducing individual car journeys at peak times. Various options are being explored further and it is hoped that a trial will commence in the first half of the new financial year, subject to the appropriate tendering process and approval.

Air Quality

We have been investigating the possibility of augmenting air quality monitoring which is currently undertaken by the Borough Council. No firm proposals have been agreed as yet but they could perhaps include the use of hand held monitoring devices at “hot spots” and at a lower height to assess the impact of emissions inhalation by children. Another option would be to undertake monitoring close to schools. We will keep members of the public updated on progress.

TOWN PLANNING COMMITTEE – COUNCILLOR GARRICK STEVENS

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 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 19/20 the Planning Committee considered 400 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 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 which will be released for discussion later this year. Since the consultation in 2017, the Government has obliged Councils to make plans for even larger numbers of dwellings. This will have far reaching impacts on all areas of the Borough – and the region. The Council has a working group that includes members of the public to assess and prepare representation to such plans.

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

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 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. This job has been vacant for over a year and is being covered the current Town Clerk. We hope to interview for a new Finance and Allotment officer in April.

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

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.

It has been difficult to arrange meetings over the last eighteen months or so due a variety of reasons including a reorganisation at the Canal and River Trust. The Town Council was very keen to re-energise CARP to focus on projects that would improve the enjoyment of and accessibility to the River Bulbourne and the Grand Union Canal. As a result and following extensive discussions with partner organisations, the first meeting of the refocussed group took place on 26 February 2020 under revised terms of reference. I was delighted to be appointed Chair of the group and it was a pleasure to meet so many experts around the table 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 of course my fellow councillors. Everyone present was fully engaged with the

Town Council's desire to see the group's work being moved into the spotlight and look forward to developing a raft of projects that will improve and enhance the enjoyment and use of our waterways.

Councillor Nigel Taylor
Canal and Riverside Partnership

JEM 13-03-20