

Berkhamsted Town Council
Annual Town Meeting
Thursday 26 April 2018
Items 6 The Council Year 2017 - 18
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.

In the year 2018 -19 in order to protect spending on the town and to protect against higher costs and inflation whilst maintaining adequate levels of reserves, the Council has increased its precept to £191,843, £22.72 for a Band D property, a 3% increase. (From £186,255 and £22.16 the previous year.)

Accounts and Audit Reports for 2016/17

The Town Council's financial accounts and return is audited each year by an independent external auditor appointed by the Audit Commission. The report for the year ending 31 March 2017 concluded that 'the Town Council's annual return is in accordance with proper practice and no matters came to their attention that gave cause for concern' with one exception. Namely, the risk register and assessment, which had been reviewed throughout the year, was not formally approved until May ie after the financial year end.

The annual return and accompanying reports for 2016/17 are available for public inspection in the Town Council offices and on the Town Council website.

Income and Expenditure for 2017/2018

The Town Council accounts for 2017/18 are being finalised at present ready for internal audit in May and Town Council approval in June 2018. The accounts will then be available for public inspection. A new external Auditor has been appointed, PKF Littlejohn LLP, and the completed Annual Governance and Accountability Return has to be made to the company by 12 June 2018.

The unaudited year end figures indicate that the Town Council income for the year will be around £283,472 against expenditure of £239,473. It should be noted that income has been boosted significantly by Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) receipts which can only be spent on infrastructure projects supporting development

in the town. My colleague Sue Beardshaw will pick up this subject when she refers to the work of the CIL working Group.

Youth Centre and Projects

Funding of the Swan Youth project continues and has been increased from £12,500 to £15,000 in the current year. You have heard already from one of the Trustees, Nick Sharpe, about the challenges facing the group.

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.

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 2017/18, the Town Council has made grants to

- The Royal British Legion;
- The 1066 Club for the Blind and Partially Sighted;
- Berkhamsted Cycling Club – towards the Festival on 24 June 2018;
- Berkofest;
- Event Berkhamsted;
- Happy Wanderers Club – Broadening Horizons Project;
- Lions Club – Summer Fete
- Northchurch United Charities;
- Upstairs Gallery/Way Inn – Open Door Berkhamsted.

Budget 2018/19

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

The budget for 2018/19 agreed by the Town Council is as follows.

INCOME

Precept/Tax Base Adjustment	£191,843
Concurrent Services/Town Warden	£21,615
Festival of Light	£6,500

Allotments	£9,220	
Lagley Meadow Youth Centre	£12,200	
Interest	£2,000	
Parish Paths Partnership	£1,000	
CIL	£ 22,000	
TOTAL INCOME		<u>£266,378</u>

EXPENDITURE		
Support services	£121,460	
Office and Administration	£42,175	
Projects	£40,713	
Youth Centre	£29,700	
Allotments	£13,890	
Civic, Environmental & Gardens	£15,125	
Grants / Financial Support	£23,500	
TOTAL EXPENDITURE		<u>£286,563</u>

POLICY

Festival of Light

The Festival of Light was held on Sunday 26 November 2017, with funds raised for local charities, schools and other organisations. The Town Council passes on its thanks to the Lions and Rotary Clubs, 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. 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 is will be on Sunday 25 November 2018.

General Data Protection Regulations

The Town Council is currently working towards compliance with these regulations in conjunction with a professional adviser sourced through the Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils. We are working with other Town Councils to reduce costs.

Councillor Barbara Newton
Chair, Finance and Policy Committee

TRANSPORT AND ENVIRONMENT COMMITTEE – COUNCILLOR SUE BEARDSHAW

Transport

Parking Forum

Throughout 2017/2018, the Parking Forum has overseen the progression of the plans involved in the multi storey car park, meeting with senior members of the Dacorum Borough Council's (DBC) project team. The contract for the car park has now been awarded to Huber, a highly experienced contractor within the field of car park construction. Work is expected to commence in September 2018 with completion mid-2019. The Forum pressed DBC to increase the size of car park bays and to provide provision for battery charged vehicles to accommodate electrically driven cars of the future. Car park drawings have been provided with the contractor's working documents to be made available to the Town Council.

Provision for supplementary parking during construction is being considered and will be in place before construction begins in September. Additional parking space is likely to be made available by the creation of temporary parking at The Moor. This is currently being discussed with Herts County Council pending an anticipated planning application.

Shootersway & Kingshill Way Road Junctions

Work was finally completed on the improvements to this junction at the end of 2017. It was with disappointment to note that unforeseen corrective works needed to take place at the junction of Shootersway and Kings Road. The contractor took responsibility for the works at no cost to Herts County Council. The majority of delays experienced, however, were caused by UK Power Networks. Work has now finally been completed with the resultant traffic flow greatly improved and enhanced safety features for school children now in place.

20 MPH Speed Zones

As mentioned at last year's meeting the introduction of 20mph speed zones has been discussed, with a motion supported by the Town Council to endorse further 20mph zones within the Town Centre, roughly bounded by Ellesmere Road, Bank Mill, High Street and Station Road. At its 25 September 2017 meeting the Town Council agreed to contribute £6,440 which will pay for the public consultation phase of the project.

Parking in Bridgewater Road

Following representations from residents and the observation of serious traffic problems in the area arising from commuter parking, the motion to extend current commuter parking restrictions further along the length of Bridgewater Road has been

supported by the Town Council. The ban would extend beyond Springfield Road. At its meeting on 25 September 2018 the Town Council agreed to contribute £2,350 towards the public engagement phase of the project

Parking in Disabled Bays

The markets in Berkhamsted continue to thrive and bring a commercial vitality and vibrancy to the town. There have been complaints from concerned and affected residents about the parking in disabled bays by market traders. As a result, meetings with the market chairman and market manager together with members of the Town Council to discuss this matter, have resulted in an improvement in the availability of the disabled bays. The situation continues to be monitored by the Town Council with the support of the market officials.

ENVIRONMENT

Play Area at Normandy Drive/Dellfield

The installation of the new play area and equipment at Normandy Drive has now been agreed. A site meeting with a member of DBC's Neighbourhood Action & Children's Services Team was held in March. It was reported that the DBC officer had confirmed the aim to have the project completed in time for the start of the school summer holidays. Further meetings will be held as the project progresses to ensure this timeline is met. The total cost will be in the region of £20,000 and the Town Council has agreed to contribute £5,000 from its CIL receipts.

Requirement for Fencing around The Moor Play area

The lack of fencing around The Moor Play area has provoked numerous complaints from parents with young children. A fence would protect the area from dog fouling problems and other safety concerns such as the aged fencing to the river Bulbourne at the rear, and the use of the playground by older children and teenagers. A risk assessment was undertaken by DBC and the Town Council was disappointed that the need for the provision of perimeter fencing around the play area due to safety reasons had not been identified as a risk. Further discussions are now being taken to overturn this decision, particularly in light of the supplementary parking which may involve The Moor area. This highlights the need to ensure safety to the play area is of high priority with the fence being installed.

Replacement of Trees in the High Street

The replacement of trees continues to be a concern due to the lack of planting undertaken by DBC for many years. Despite earlier assurances from DBC that it wished to see planting in the current planting season, planting has only now been started with funding support from Cllr Reay's Localities budget to secure three tree pits. Further costs, utility searches, planting arrangements and on-going care are

being paid for and co-ordinated by DBC. Planting of three trees has now taken place with two other sites being investigated.

DBC Sports Centres, Athletic & Community Sports Services Contract

The contract has now been awarded to Sports and Leisure Management Ltd. DBC believes the decision to award this contract is to enhance and improve the leisure provision across Dacorum. To ensure there will be no risk to the existing facilities in Berkhamsted, assurances were sought and given that facilities would continue to be made publicly accessible and the community activities currently undertaken be maintained.

Berkhamsted Castle

The Castle Site Working Group has been involved with discussions concerning the transfer of land at the Castle from Mallinckrodt to mark the donation of the land to the newly founded charity Berkhamsted Castle Trust. An event to celebrate the transfer of the land to Berkhamsted Castle Trust, together with the financial contribution, is to take place on 11 May 2018. The Charity's Trustee board would replicate membership of the Castle Liaison Group. A Trustee profile is being drawn up to ensure those nominated have a deep interest in the Castle, support for the Charity's objectives and are able to contribute to the day to day work of the charity.

Events at the Castle are being encouraged with appropriate consultation with English Heritage as it is wished that the Castle is used for the benefit of Berkhamsted residents. The cycle race event around the Castle which took place in 2016 is to be repeated in June and a performance of the Pirates of Penzance by the Illyria Outdoor Theatre Company will take place on 18 August 2018. Ideas for further events may be submitted to the Town Council and English Heritage, to assess their viability.

Japanese Knotweed

Concern has been expressed about the prevalence of Japanese Knotweed at various sites throughout the town. It was confirmed that the responsibility for treatment on affected land where planning applications are applied for, is with the land owner. Failure to comply with Environment Agency/Defra guidelines carries heavy fines and possible imprisonment. To ensure advice is available, current guidance for land/property owners is now on the Council website and from the Town Council office.

Defibrillator in the Civic Centre

Thanks to the kind donation from the Lions Club, a public defibrillator is now installed in Berkhamsted outside the Civic Centre. Training for the operation of a defibrillator was recently undertaken with a number of Town Council members and residents attending a familiarisation session on 10 April at the Civic Centre led by the Chair of

the Community Heartbeat Trust. We are waiting for the defibrillator to be registered with the ambulance service. A further familiarisation session may be arranged in due course to take place in the evening. However, the appliance can be used by anyone, whether they have attended such a session or not.

Community Infrastructure Levy (CIL) Working Group

To-date the Town Council has received four instalments of payments totalling £67,000. 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:

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

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. The decisions of the Town Planning Committee are forwarded to the Planning authority so that they may be considered and taken into consideration within the broader context by planning officers.

The decision reached by the Committee after debate, with regard to each application, takes three forms. Either it is **No Objection, Concern or Object**. The decisions are made on material planning grounds which are based on national (eg the National Planning Framework) and local policy (eg the Dacorum Core Strategy). If the decision is **Object** and this is at variance with the planning officer who is dealing with the application then the case will be referred to the Development Management Committee of the DBC, which meets in The Forum, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead, for the final decision. In such instances and depending on the strength of our case, taking into account public feeling etc, a member of the Committee would attend to argue our point. Often the DMC will support our view. Examples in the past year are Station Road and The Crown. 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 this instance the Committee may write a representation in support of our case for consideration by the Planning Inspector and even meet the Inspector on site when he is making a site visit.

Over the year 2017 the Committee has considered 441 applications. These can be broadly categorised as follows:

1. Alterations to existing properties such as loft conversions, where the foot print is left unchanged
2. More significant alterations eg extensions which involves enlargement of the footprint
3. Demolition of existing properties to be replaced by new build developments. Often this comprises demolition of a property, say a house with a large garden, and new build at a greater density eg Appledore, Kingshill Way
4. Significant new build developments eg the MSCP
5. Change of Use eg office to residential

Of the Standing Committees of BTC 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. It is encouraging that many people affected by schemes, whether positively or negatively, do so. Consideration is given to these comments and they are taken into account as part of the decision-making process. So effectively the considerations and deliberations of the Committee represent the ‘local voice’. Planning officers pay strong regard to the local opinion.

Of significance has been the consultation with regard to the new Local Plan commonly known as the Issues and Options Consultation, which took place at the end of 2017. Over 15,000 responses were received borough-wide. Dacorum Borough Council will release a formal consultation report in due course which summarises the key issues and provides a response to these issues. This should happen later this year. I would like to express appreciation for the significant input to the Town Council’s response from amongst others Berkhamsted Residents’ Action Group (BRAG), Berkhamsted Citizens’ and Councillors past and present.

Finally, I would like to thank members of the Committee for their time and diligence in the 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. These comprise Dellfield, Sunnyside (Old and New) and Butts Meadow. 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.

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. In total there are 447 plots including 20 which are vacant. There are also 29 unlettable plots.

Allotment Management

Overall responsibility for the management and administration of the allotments rests with the Town Council, and in particular with the Allotment Management Team which comprises Councillors and representatives of each site including the Sunnyside Rural Trust. 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 remained unchanged for 2017/18 at £12.50 (rent) and £7.50 (water) for half a plot and £25 and £15 respectively for a full plot. A review of rents will take place for 2018/19 and will be considered at the next Allotment Management Team meeting.

Income and Expenditure

The allotment income for 2017/18 is £8,900 (subject to audit) against expenditure of £7,994. Allotment reserves stand at £15,012.

The Management Team, which meets quarterly, reviews income and expenditure and discusses improvements and projects. Over the last year improvements have included strengthening and levelling of roadways and drainage work. A new gate, replacement gate posts and timber steps have also been installed at various sites. There has been a spate of water leaks which can be costly although the Town Council did receive a substantial allowance back from Affinity Water during the year.

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. In recent years a computerised allotment management system has been used. Town Council staff and I attended a two day training course in August 2017 in the council chamber run by the computer software company, MCPC.

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, Finance Officer 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.

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

During the last year, perhaps the most fruitful time has been spent walking the length of the Canal within the boundaries of the civic Parish of Berkhamsted, with a representative of the Canal & Riverside Trust, pointing out matters that require attention, for example, graffiti. Subsequent remedial action was put in hand.

Also, during the last year funding has been secured from the Citizens Association, Berkhamsted Community Partnership and the Town Council toward refurbishment of signage on the Canal, and this is in progress.

Councillor Anthony Armytage
Canal and Riverside Partnership
