

**HIGHBARNES PUBLIC MEETING**  
**20 JANUARY 2009**  
**DACORUM ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE – 6.00 PM**

**PRESENT:**

**Dacorum Borough Council & Nash Mills Parish Council:**

John Clarke, Head of Public Protection (Dacorum Borough Council)

Louise Manders, Senior Manager, Corporate Communications (Dacorum Borough Council)

Councillor Lucy Foster, (DBC Councillor Nash Mills Ward Councillor and Nash Mills Parish Councillor)

Councillor Terry Douris, (Nash Mills Parish Councillor and DBC Councillor)

Theresa Chalkwright, Member Support Officer (Dacorum Borough Council – Minutes)

**Residents:**

Richard and Jennifer Taylor, George and Pam Harrison, Carly Savage, Tracey Gill, (Highbarnes), Rodney and Michelle Berkeley (Pond Close)

**1. WELCOME, INTRODUCTIONS AND PURPOSE AND OBJECTIVES OF THE GROUP**

John Clarke welcomed everyone to the meeting and everyone introduced themselves. JC then outlined the purposes and objectives of the group and explained the agenda for the evening which was circulated. He went on to say that he thought the public meeting had been well attended and that he was pleased to see that this smaller group had been formed to enable information to be filtered back through the Parish Council and from the group of residents attending. He explained that the group had been set up to represent the people who have been worst affected by the situation.

He highlighted the issues that would be dealt with at the meeting:

- ◆ Update on the current position
- ◆ Communications Strategy
- ◆ Highway Issues
- ◆ Valuation of Properties
- ◆ Any other Issues that are causing concern

JC gave an update on the current position saying that a preliminary funding application had been submitted to English Partnerships under the Land Stabilisation Programme to help pay for the works needed in the area. We should know by the end of January whether funding will be granted and then a further detailed application will need to be made which should give a clearer indication about how the funding will operate. This is a slow bureaucratic process which we have to go through. The Council is also going through a tender procedure to appoint a contractor to manage the chalk mine project. Reports will be discussed at the Council's Cabinet meetings and residents will be kept up to date with progress on both the funding application and the tender process.

Mr Harrison asked about the extent of future survey work in the area.

JC replied that he does not anticipate it to spread further than 100 metres, but will need to take the experts advice and take it step by step and see what is found, we can only go on the evidence that we have.

Mr Berkeley asked whether it would be an intrusive survey.

JC replied that we are looking at a comprehensive survey to establish the number of voids/depth and the stability of the ground in the area. He is confident that the funding will come from English Partnership and it is vital that local residents be kept up to date with progress.

Councillor Foster asked how quickly work will be carried out, especially the work that has already been identified.

JC replied there are still legal implications around this and about who is responsible. The Council has funded works that have taken place and the Council's solicitor is in contact with other authorities that have experienced this kind of problem to discuss the funding issues. He is conscious that residents' want the work to move forward quickly but we need to get it right and have to follow the processes that are in place.

Mrs Harrison asked were there any surveys done when the houses were first built.

JC answered that the houses were built in the 1950's and there were no reasons to expect that there would be these sort of problems, also during the 50's and 60's there was not the expertise to carry out extensive surveys. The processes that are carried out today are very different, more thorough and there are more experts who know about contaminated land issues to carry out extensive surveys.

Carly Savage asked about the road where the voids have been found as she is concerned that cars and lorries are driving over the voids and there is concern that the road could cave in

JC said he would come back to this under Highway Issues but also English Partnership need to find out who is responsible for the road. Technically Hertfordshire County Council claim to be only responsible for the first two layers and maintain that the Borough Council is responsible for anything under them. He reiterated he is confident that the funding will be granted and work will be carried out whatever happens but he pointed out that as the Borough Council is the custodian of public money we have to follow the correct procedures.

Councillor Foster asked if the funding is delayed, is there a point where the Council will start the work anyway.

JC replied that once we hear about the preliminary funding from English Partnerships everything should start moving forward quickly.

Mr Berkeley asked JC to confirm that works would start to be carried out once preliminary funding was granted and not have to wait for the more fully detailed application to be approved.

JC said we are getting ourselves in a position to proceed forward once we get the initial agreement.

## 2. COMMUNICATIONS STRATEGY

Louise Manders gave an update on the Communications Strategy that is being put into place. She said that one newsletter had been produced and was sent out to all residents in the 100 m radius and another newsletter is being produced and will be sent out by the end of this week. She asked if the residents thought that the 100 metre radius was enough or should the newsletter be sent to a wider range of properties.

The residents agreed that they would like it sent to a wider range of people as there were people outside of the 100 metre radius who would like to know exactly what is going on and they all agreed that the more people affected who know would be a better option.

Tracey Gill and Carly Savage asked about whether there was a way to encourage local people who know the history of the area to come forward and share their information.

LM responded that she would rather keep people involved by links to the website where there is a question and answer page and also minutes of the public meetings that have taken place. Minutes from this meeting would also be available on the web site which might encourage people to then come forward with any relevant information. The link to the website is [www.dacorum.gov.uk/highbarns](http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/highbarns)

LM agreed that she would widen distribution of the newsletter.

**ACTION: LM**

Mr Berkeley suggested that there needs to be a strong communications strategy put in place which keeps everyone updated on what is happening, he said it needs to focus on the people living in the affected area. He also said he would like to see a positive spin put on communications, as the report in the press was very negative and disheartening. He asked that press releases if any should not be all doom and gloom but should show the positives.

Councillor Douris said that Nash Mills Parish Council produce a Parish Council magazine and suggested that up to date news could be put into this.

LM is to put contact names/telephone numbers into the next newsletter. The representatives will include:

Mr Rodney Berkeley, Mrs Michelle Berkeley, Mr Richard Taylor, Carly Savage, Tracey Gill, Councillors Foster and Douris and Councillor Geoff Doole (Nash Mills Parish Council).

The first newsletter was well received and the residents group said it was very informative.

Tracey Gill also asked if it would be possible to invite a representative from Herts Highways to the next meeting.

LM to email Mark Goodyear from Herts Highways re this.

**ACTION: LM**

### 3. HIGHWAYS ISSUES

John Clarke asked about whether any of the Highways issues that had come out of the public meeting had been resolved.

The residents responded that none of the issues had been dealt with. They listed the following:

- ◆ Road closures are evoking anti-social behaviour
- ◆ Driving over grass verges
- ◆ Road signs still being blown all over the road or being stolen/moved.
- ◆ Lamp posts have been replaced but lights not working and the area is very dark
- ◆ Broken pavements not being fixed
- ◆ Lorries causing damage to verges
- ◆ Drivers are not adhering to the diversion routes but are driving across greens. This is worrying as people take their children to school across the greens.

They also voiced concern about the proposed road closure on 10 February, temporary barriers are not enough, there needs to be something more permanent in place as this could last up to 2 years. The question of security was brought up as there have been break-ins and cars stolen.

Carly Savage and Tracey Gill asked if there could be representation from Herts Highways at these meetings or at some of the meetings that are held with officers at Dacorum.

John Clarke said that he would contact Vince Gilbert, Head of Highways at Herts County Council to follow up on undertakings given at the public meeting. He added that he would pass on residents' feelings and frustration about these issues. He also said that he would invite Mark Goodyear to either the next residents meeting or to the next high level meeting at Dacorum. He added that Highways need to be included in these meetings to be made accountable and he will ensure there is some representation.

**ACTION: JC**

Councillor Douris will send an email to Stuart Pile, Portfolio Holder for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs at Herts County Council to highlight residents concerns, particularly about safety implications, and ask him to intervene in this matter. **ACTION: COUNCILLOR DOURIS**

LM reported that Herts County Council would be sending out a letter to residents this week with formal notification of the road closures and this should include reference to more robust barriers and methods of signage.

Mrs Harrison asked if it would be possible to fence off the amenity green?

JC replied that he would have to check to see who owns the land first and he would follow this up.

**ACTION: JC**

### 4. VALUATION OFFICE

David Martin, Head of Resources is dealing with any queries relating to Council Tax and JC suggested that one resident could present a test case to the Valuation Office to look at reducing the Council Tax Banding on affected properties as a form of relief during remedial works.

Mr Berkeley said he was prepared to do the test case but was a little bit concerned that if the Council Tax Banding was reduced it would have an effect on the value of his property and he would rather push for temporary relief than an actual reduction.

JC responded that it was essential for him to discuss this with David Martin as he is the expert in this field and he will advise the best way forward.

It was agreed that Mr Berkeley will contact David Martin, contact details are shown below:

David Martin – Head of Resources  
Dacorum Borough Council  
Civic Centre, Marlowes  
Hemel Hempstead, Herts HP1 1HH  
Telephone: 01442 228364  
email: [david.martin@dacorum.gov.uk](mailto:david.martin@dacorum.gov.uk)

## **5. OTHER ISSUES**

JC will contact the Chief Inspector of Police regarding security measures to see what can be put in place to reduce the anti-social behaviour and crime in the area. **ACTION: JC**

A further public meeting will be arranged. This will be after a Project Manager is in place following the tender process that is taking place at present.

JC asked the group if they were happy with the representation at present or if they wanted any further representation. The group said they were happy to continue to attend the resident group meetings but felt that maybe a couple more representatives could be on the group especially someone from Meadow Road.

Councillor Foster will invite further representatives to join the group in particular a resident from Meadow Road. **ACTION: COUNCILLOR FOSTER**

## **6. ANY OTHER BUSINESS**

Carly Savage asked about English Partnerships as it has been 2 months since the public meeting and still no confirmation.

JC responded that the application had to be thoroughly checked before submission and that it is a very bureaucratic process. He assured Carly that funds have been set aside but things do not happen overnight but this will be progressed as quickly as possible. He added that 2 months is not a long time in this type of process.

Mrs Harrison said herself and Mr Harrison although not within the 100 m radius would like to continue to attend the residents meetings so that they can pass on up to date information to others that may be affected.

### **Items for next Residents Group Meeting:**

Security Measures  
Highways

A representative from the Police and Highways to be invited.

**ACTION JC**

JC summed up by saying he thought the meeting had gone well and that the Highway Issues would be taken up and he said that if we can get some of these resolved quickly it would help to put residents minds at rest knowing that things are being done. He thanked everyone for their time and input into the meeting.

**7. DATE OF NEXT MEETING**

Wednesday 11 February 2009 at 6.00 pm in the Dacorum Room, Civic Centre, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead

The meeting ended at 7.40 pm