

HIGHBARNES CHALK MINES – RESIDENTS/PARISH COUNCIL/DBC MEETING

20 JULY 2011

GADE ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE

PRESENT

Steven Baker	Chair (DBC Assistant Director: Legal, Democratic & Regulatory)
Mike Penning	Member of Parliament
Andrew Williams	DBC Leader of the Council
Stephen Holmes	DBC Councillor
James Doe	DBC Assistant Director: Planning Development & Regeneration
Mike Jarrett	HCC: Highways
Dave Bowman	HCC Highways (Dacorum Deputy Manager)
Jenny Young	DBC Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator
Mark Skittrall	Consultant (Hyder)
Carly Savage	Resident
Andy Price	Resident
Heidi Cutts	Resident
Richard & Jennifer Taylor	Residents
Michele & Rodney Berkley	Residents
Lisa Bayley	Resident and member of Nash Mills Parish Council
Les Berry	Ex-resident (rents out property in area)
Claire McKnight	DBC Communications
Jim Doyle	Group Manager – Democratic Services

The meeting commenced at 6.30pm.

The meeting was opened by the Chair, Steve Baker and introductions carried out.

CURRENT FUNDING SITUATION

Mike Penning was asked if he could update the meeting on progress with the funding bids for the required remedial works. The government offices concerned are now satisfied that all of the necessary exploratory works had been carried out and the required works identified. He was pleased to say that the funds have been identified and approved. A Statutory Instrument is now necessary to release the identified funds which will cover the works set out in the Map for the Order. This will be the definitive map and the funds will only cover the works stipulated in the award.

The meeting then considered some of the administrative detail, regarding the making of the Order and granting of the funds. The actual Order will take the form of an 'affirmative' Statutory Instrument. This Order does not have to be set down while Parliament is sitting and can be agreed during the Parliamentary Recess. The advantage of this is that the Parliamentary Recess will not hold up progress on implementing the works as the Order is not likely to be opposed. This type of order can only be questioned by the local MP – He assured the residents that he fully supports the Grant.

Mike Penning made it clear to the residents that the priorities here are to 'get the job done' and remove the 'blight on your properties'. Reinstating the value of the properties would also mean that the upward re-banding of Council Tax due on each would be likely.

Carly sought clarification on whether the Order being proposed was a Derelict Land Clearance Order? Mike Penning confirmed this, adding that it is a Statutory Instrument which enables 100% of funding to be paid.

J Doe enquired about any likely time gap between the Order being produced and the money being made available. There is a confirmation period of around 31 days and then the Council will have to meet and formally agree that they will accept the offer. It is proposed that this will be done as quickly as possible and if the matter can be expedited quicker through a Portfolio holder decision this route will be adopted. The possibility of adopting this course of action will be investigated by the Council officers involved.

On completion of the Order, the HCA will issue a grant offer letter to DBC, subject to terms and conditions.

The meeting then considered the scope of the works involved. 100% of the tunnels and mines identified in the preliminary studies are covered by the grant. The grant also covers any further exploratory work required to complete the current job. Any further cavities discovered would have to be the subject of a new application.

The meeting then moved on to the likely timetable for the work to commence and conclude.

The Council is required to approve accepting the offer and this cannot be done until it has had the opportunity to examine the terms of the grant. A commitment was given that this will be done as quickly as possible, depending on the legal advice. A report to Cabinet or Full Council is likely to be required. DBC will then have to prepare contracts, and may have to go out to tender for these. Officers will investigate if there are grounds to use emergency procedures to cut short the tendering process. Whatever happens, the aim is to be on site and commenced working by March 2012.

The current exploratory work requires another 2-3 months to be completed and once this is done it is estimated that the remedial works will take around 19 months. Some additional time needs to be set aside to deal with any procurement issues that might arise, so a target of just over two years to complete the work seems reasonable at this point in time.

Mike Jarrett made clear that once the voids and cavities had been dealt with and the hazard has been mitigated the highways will be re-opened.

Mark Skittrall of Hyder explained that the open cavities will be filled with 'foamcrete' and any collapsed caves dealt with by compaction grouting on a grid. He explained that, while this is an extensive task it was made easier because the mines appear to be between approx 9-23 metres down and are a single set of workings, on one horizon.

Residents expressed some concerns about the length of time tendering could take, particularly if the OJEU process had to be carried out. They were assured that every effort would be made to fast-track this process and, even in the event of having to tender under OJEU format rules then March 2012 is still the likely commencement date.

On completion of the work residents will receive a 'Validation' certificate, copies of which will be retained by DBC and Land Charges. Any property search carried out will encounter an 'informative' which will set out the measures taken to mitigate any risk as a result of the discovery of the subterranean Chalk Mines.

It was agreed that a Newsletter be produced shortly, setting out developments and timescales and distributed to the affected local residents. The newsletter will contain FAQs and deal with the issues raised by the proposed works.

DBC officers committed to producing a specimen letter for providing to the residents insurers and those at the meeting were advised they will need to inform their mortgagee.

Residents will need to inform their insurers. Any remedial work required as a result of works by the contractor will be covered by the project's insurance. In this case there will be photos taken before works commence and in the event of any damage, it will be made good, replaced as it was before and reinstated to a reasonable standard. It was stated that every effort would be made to keep to a minimum any disruption and works to the inside of affected properties.

Most of the works will be occur outside the properties and will require inclined grout holes used to access the cavities.

For their own safety, residents will have to move out during any work under each house but this will be scheduled in and programmed, in consultation with the residents. The risk here is associated with people remaining in the house and is not just the risk associated with access/egress to the property. It was made clear that the grant does not cover temporary housing and the resident's insurance company should cover this. Where necessary, DBC tenants will be moved to alternative accommodation as the Council has a duty

to find temporary accommodation in these cases. It was stressed that this would be kept to the absolute minimum of properties.

Mark Skittrall of Hyder proposed that the works will commence in the areas with properties identified as being at most risk.

Mike Jarrett pointed out that there may be a need to close off some surrounding roads in order to carry out the work and this will be set out in a traffic management plan.

The appointed contractor will provide suitable site security.

RESULTS OF RECENT LASER SURVEY/CCTV INVESTIGATIONS

Mark Skittrall of Hyder took the meeting through the results of recent laser survey/cctv investigation.

In 2009 laser/cctv surveys took place through 8 boreholes. A comparison survey of 5 of these boreholes was carried out in March 2011. The recent survey is more accurate due to advances in the technology used which had improved cavity monitoring, robotic, and self propelling capabilities.

The recent survey found no obvious further deterioration in the known parts of the mine. It was pointed out that this survey couldn't assess risk from any or further extension of the mines or any as yet unidentified cavities.

The result is that there is no need to revisit the risk assessment made earlier or to adapt the proposed works or actions. The survey has confirmed that the work needs to be carried out and completed.

The residents asked about the process for validating that the work had been carried out successfully. Programmed into the works are regular assessments, independent examinations and continuous 3D mapping to record progress and effectiveness.

VOTE OF THANKS –MIKE PENNING MP

The residents were anxious to formally record their thanks to Mike Penning MP for his assistance in securing the grant.

HIGHWAYS ISSUE

The residents sought an update on road-markings in Meadow Road. This has only started to create a problem since the road closures instituted as a result of the subsidence. As a result motorists are not expecting traffic coming the other way, so are speeding through the junction without looking. Dave Bowman therefore agreed to add the necessary junction road-markings.

D Bowman (HCC Dacorum) informed the residents that the placement of these has been confirmed with the contractors and will be included in their planned works. They should be laid during the next 3 months. – Mike Jarrett HCC will attempt to speed this up with the contractors.

ANTI-SOCIAL BEHAVIOUR ISSUES

Police and the Anti-Social Behaviour Team from DBC have addressed some instances of anti social behaviour in the area. Residents confirmed that this and community action had meant that the poor behaviour ceased.

J Young (DBC) informed the residents that efforts were being made to identify the owner of an adjacent garage with a damaged wall which was causing concerns in the neighbourhood. She informed them that enforcement measures could be taken to repair the wall if there was evidence of a public danger.

DATE AND TIME OF NEXT MEETING

It was suggested that the next meeting should be held when it is confirmed we have the grant money/ funding and we are ready to commence the process of organising the remedial works. It was suggested that this could be around September 2011 this year. However residents were assured that in the event of any major blockage or delay, they would be informed and an earlier meeting organised.

The meeting ended at 7.30pm.