

Dacorum Borough Council Annual Report 2021-2022

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Welcome

Our economic recovery has been a main focus for us during 2021/22 as COVID-19 restrictions were eased.

We've worked hard to support our local businesses and high streets with a number of initiatives. We have established an Economic Recovery Board with partners from the private, education and voluntary sector, which is delivering an Economic Recovery Plan for Dacorum to support our businesses to achieve stability and economic growth and also to help local people gain the right skills and qualifications for our local jobs. We have also developed a Hemel Town Centre Strategy which sets out our future the vision for the town centre so that it will thrive for years to come.

We've continued to prioritise the Climate and Ecological Emergency and this year we established the Dacorum Climate Action Network (Dacorum CAN) where individuals and organisations can sign up and pledge their support to making every day environmental changes. It's been a great success with many residents and businesses joining.

We held our first Dacorum CAN event in November during the COP26 summit with 130 participants.

To ensure our borough remains a clean and safe place, we have decided to take a firmer, more proactive approach to tackle littering and dog fouling by introducing Environmental Enforcement officer patrols.

These officers will be able to issue fines to people who deliberately drop litter, fail to clear up after their dog or breach the borough's Public Spaces Protection Orders. We hope this will reduce environmental crime in the borough and encourage people to take pride in where they live.

Over the last year, we have seen an increase in filming in Dacorum, helping to attract new business to the borough, while showcasing our many wonderful locations.

Over the coming year, we will be delivering a range of events for the community including Armed Forces Day and Halloween, making a very welcome return after the limitations on face-to-face events imposed by the pandemic.

Our customers are at the heart of what we do and we have reviewed the ways we engage with our customers to look at how we can improve satisfaction levels.

This review has inspired our new Customer Strategy which sets out our clear vision to our customers. Our plans for next year include reviewing our complaints policy to ensure full and prompt investigation of all complaints.

We have continued to progress our exciting Hemel Place work, creating more opportunities for our residents, businesses and other stakeholders

This year we have also continued to work with our partners on proposals for Hemel Garden Communities (HGC). HGC is an ambitious development and regeneration programme that will transform Hemel Hempstead and create quality, and environmentally sustainable, new neighbourhoods and communities to the north and east of the town, delivering more than 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2050.

Over the next financial year, we will continue to improve the services we deliver and make them as efficient as possible. We will seek to generate more income to support our service delivery and we

will continue to focus on making our places really great for our residents to live in. We will also continue to deliver our priorities as set out in our Corporate Plan.

Cllr Andrew Williams Leader of the Council.

Claire Hamilton Chief Executive.

Financial summary

During 2021/22 we have continued to support our businesses and residents as we emerged from the Covid-19 pandemic.

We invested £25.65m on the following assets:

- £18.83m on Housing
- £1.02m on Culture
- £1.43m on Essential Services
- £0.55m on Parking
- £0.21m on Planning & Development
- £3.61m on Environmental Services

We spent £59.79m on council housing funded by rents and service charges.

We spent:

- £39.19m on Housing Services
- £12.32m on Environmental Services
- £7.35m on Cultural Services
- £13.26m on Essential Services
- £7.54m on Planning & Development
- £1.15m on contributions to Capital
- £1.04m on Parking & Transport
- £2.28m on Investment Properties
- £1.79m on payments to Local Enterprise Partnership
- £0.90m on Financing
- £1.00m on Precepts to Parish Councils

In 2021/2022 Dacorum Borough Council services cost you around 57.9 pence per day (based on a Band D property)

Where your Council Tax goes:

£1,470.63 - Herts County Council

£211.36 - Dacorum Borough Council*

£213.00 - Herts Police

* amount based on a non-parish band D property annual charge

Ensuring economic growth and prosperity

Our achievements 2021/22

- Consulted on a new Skills and Apprenticeships Supplementary Planning Document.
- Reviewed feedback from public consultation to help inform our draft Local Plan.

- Started work on the development of a Mitigation Strategy for Chiltern Beechwoods to protect Ashridge Commons and Woods with the National Trust and other partners.
- Received revenue and capital funding totalling £2.73m from the Department of Levelling Up, Housing and Communities (DLUHC) including £970,000 through Hemel Garden Communities and £1.76m over the next three years through the UK Shared Prosperity Fund.
- Progressed key strategic workstreams to create a greener, more connected New Town through the delivery of Hemel Garden Communities, providing more than 11,000 new homes and 10,000 new jobs by 2050.
- Continued to promote filming opportunities in the borough to help raise the profile of Dacorum and boost our local economy and screen tourism.
- Launched the Hemel Place Board, in partnership with key stakeholders, to create a new place-led approach for Hemel Hempstead.
- Carried out a Local Journeys survey to better understand the transport needs and aspirations of the community.

Our performance 2021/22

- Collected £7,475,436.22 of Community Infrastructure Levy and £3,133,623.99 S106 towards Infrastructure. *We collect these funds from developers who have been given permission to build within Dacorum, to help provide new infrastructure to serve residents.
- Achieved 98 per cent occupancy at our business centres, 310 businesses promoted through the Loyal Free app, with over 3,000 engaged users
- 97% of Dacorum residents in full-time employment or training (16-64 year olds).

Our plans for 2022/23

- Continue to develop our new Local Plan to deliver new homes and jobs.
- Adopt a Chilterns Beechwoods Mitigation Strategy to help protect Ashridge Commons and Woods from future recreational damage, and to allow restrictions on residential development to be lifted.
- Conduct a Hemel Garden Communities Spatial Vision survey with the public and our stakeholders to help us shape the future transformation of Hemel Hempstead.
- Deliver Solar Bulk Buy Scheme to help homes and businesses reduce their carbon footprint and play a part in supporting the borough to reach its net-zero carbon target of 2050. Visit: www.dacorum.gov.uk/solar-scheme
- Continue upgrades to the Nickey Line to provide a better surface and improved safety, with completion due in 2023/24.
- Deliver improvements to the Grand Union Canal towpath around Red Lion Lane, with completion due in 2023/24.

Building strong and vibrant communities

Our achievements 2021/22

- Refurbished Northridge Way Basketball Court with a new all-weather sports surface, new hoops, fencing and a small seating area.
- Started work on our COVID-19 Memorial Garden to remember those who lost their lives in the pandemic with the planting of a red leaf copper beech tree.
- Continued our commitment to combating fly-tipping with seven prosecutions taking place and 59 waste crime Fixed Penalty Notices issued.

- Introduced our third party partners, District Enforcement Ltd, across the borough to tackle breaches of our Public Spaces Protection Orders. We issued 1,742 FPNs for littering and other breaches of our PSPOs such as dog fouling and dog control.
- Held virtual events to support our communities despite ongoing COVID-19 restrictions such as Armed Forces Day and a Wellness Festival.
- Won the RSPCA PawPrints Award for our stray dog provision.
- Offered free, creative and physical activities to more than 800 people in the borough through our Fun Palace event held in partnership with Hemel Hempstead Library.
- Continued to carry out test and trace at a local level, contacting people who had tested positive for the COVID-19 virus to check they did not have any welfare needs.

Our performance 2021/22

- Sold 3,648 tickets for The Old Town Hall as we emerged from the pandemic, with sales above the national average for theatres in the UK.
- 23 car parks received Park Mark accreditation for safety
- Had over 57,000 users across our four Adventure Playgrounds
- Responded to 97 per cent of anti-social incidents within 1 day and had 181 new cases reported (housing ASB only).
- Responded to 196 General Food Safety Requests
- Carried out 434 Food Hygiene inspections

Our plans for 2022/23

- We will continue to develop our Healthy Hub, and work with our partners to improve the physical and mental health of our residents.
- Bring our communities together and mark the historic Platinum Jubilee celebration with free events and entertainment including the Platinum Party in the Park.
- Recognise the borough's most inspirational community projects through our Community Grants Awards.
- Support our commitment to the Armed Forces Covenant by holding an Armed Forces Day event in Gadebridge Park.
- Organise a Wellness Festival to mark the Commonwealth Baton Relay coming through Hemel Hempstead.
- Continue our partnership with District Enforcement to reduce enviro-crime such as littering.
- Offer a larger programme of exciting entertainment at The Old Town Hall.

A clean, safe and enjoyable environment

Our achievements 2021/22

- Gave away 10 tonnes of peat-free compost to over 400 residents to celebrate International Compost Awareness Week.
- Provided food caddies to all primary schools in the borough, along with lesson resources and monster stickers. This enabled classes to decorate their caddy and create their own 'Monster on a Mission' to recycle their food waste.
- Held three successful Clothes Swap events over two days with 85 per cent of clothes swapped.
- Made approximately 15,200 deliveries to our residents for repairs or exchanges of wheeled bins or caddies.
- Co-ordinated the borough's Spring Clean with 1,030 volunteers collecting 216 recycling bags and 314 refuse bags. A total of 2,871 miles of Dacorum were litter-picked over 950 hours.

- Visited schools to give talks on the importance of recycling and littering, reaching around 1,500 children. These were delivered as a mix of virtual and in-person talks due to COVID-19 restrictions.

Our performance 2021/22

- We responded to 1,482 fly-tipping reports within 7 days
- 5 of our parks retained Green Flag status
- Increased our Additional Garden Waste subscriptions by 12.5% on previous year
- We collected 59,381.27 tonnes of waste and recycling from homes
- Our recycling rate has increased to 54.5%
- Replaced 121 street nameplates and 51 litter bins
- Held our annual Christmas Tree recycling day, recycling approximately 6,000 trees

Our plans for 2022/23

- Continue to increase our recycling rates, working towards a target of 65% by 2035.
- Carry out practical trials and demonstrations of alternative fuelled vehicles for our fleet service.
- Review educational material and support for Eco-Schools.
- Continue to actively promote and help facilitate commercial recycling.
- Expand our schools recycling education programmes to include primary and secondary schools.
- Continue to host in-person events and grow and support the Street Champions network.
- Join forces with local charity Open Door to hold further Clothes Swap events.
- Commission a habitat survey and based on the survey recommendations, develop a path network with new hedgerows, tree and whip planting and leave some areas to re-wild.

Ensuring efficient, effective and modern service delivery

Our achievements 2021/22

- 14 successful prosecutions for a variety of different offences including fly-tipping and Health and Safety and Animal Welfare breaches.
- Successfully conducted Hertfordshire County Council elections, Police and Crime Commissioner plus four borough by-elections through a difficult Covid environment.
- Negotiated and agreed significant financial support to the Council's leisure operator through Covid to ensure that leisure centres could remain open when allowed to by Government guidance.
- Completed High Barns sink hole project – successfully remediating land that was subject to collapse from historic mining tunnels in the Nash Mills area.
- Completed improvements to the Water Gardens car parks, including resurfacing, new lighting and improved pedestrian access to Hemel Hempstead town centre.
- Paid approximately £17m of COVID-19 related grants out to local residents and businesses.
- 2020/21 accounts published within statutory deadlines with a clean audit opinion, one of only 9% of local authorities to do so.
- Completed works to the much-loved Grade 11-listed War Memorial in Boxmoor, including replacement of the damaged stonework, recutting and repainting of lettering.

Our performance 2021/22

- Customer Services responded to 116,537 calls, answered 19,246 emails, and responded to 7,586 social media enquiries

- Processed over 733 new benefit claims
- Took 22.5 days to award new housing benefits
- Completed 42 Right to Buy sales, generating £9,609,400 in capital receipts which will be re-invested in social housing
- 115 taxi vehicle licences issued/renewed
- 102 taxi driver licences issued

Our plans for 2022/23

- Progress customer service and efficiency improvements through delivery of our Customer Strategy.
- Review ways to make Council democratic processes as accessible as possible, through live streaming.
- Develop and deliver the Commercial Strategy and Programme to support the Council's ongoing financial resilience and sustainability.
- Develop implementation plans for phase one of Electric Vehicle Charging Points programme in car parks.
- Prepare for 2023 borough and town/parish elections (in light of proposed change in Election Bill).

Climate and ecological emergency

Our achievements 2021/22

- Established the Dacorum Climate Action Network and had 173 individuals and 39 organisations sign up, with numbers continuing to grow.
- Held the first Dacorum Climate Action Network annual event, with 130 participants.
- Invited residents to submit art for a month-long climate and ecological emergency art exhibition in Hemel Hempstead whilst the UK was hosting COP26.
- Gave away over 1,000 packets of wildflower seeds to schools and residents, and ran a primary school competition for an insect 'sit-and-study' centre.
- Took the lead on launching a free Hertfordshire Energy Advice Tool (HEAT) app for residents, on behalf of all Herts authorities in partnership with HCCSP and was the first local authority in the UK to work with the Energy Saving Trust on this.
- Surveyed our largest built assets to understand what energy-efficiency measures are required.
- Identified thousands of residents who could be entitled to up to £10,000 worth of Green Homes grant funding, sending letters to homeowners who were identified as being potentially eligible.
- Launched our Green Community Grants scheme to support local groups which are carrying out environmental projects.

Our performance 2021/22

- Community Grants scheme gave £20,000 of funding to 8 different projects
- Planted over 1,300 trees to create a home for wildlife and preserve biodiversity
- Increased the number of solitary bee houses and bug hotels by 25%
- Created additional wildflower meadows, bringing the total to over 27 hectares

Our plans for 2022/23

- Plant 60 standard trees and 2,000 whips in 2022/23 planting season, shared across three DBC sites.

- Commission a habitat survey at Bunkers Park to inform site management from 2023 onwards.
- Plant 500 whips and 15 standard trees in Gadebridge Park in 2022/23.
- Work with the bowls club in Gadebridge Park on tree replacement in connection with a future project to install a new bowling green surface.
- Develop and publish our Electric Vehicle Strategy to outline the role we will play in supporting the uptake of electric vehicles and the implementation of appropriate charging infrastructure throughout Dacorum, ensuring the right facilities are put in the right places.
- Progress site improvements at Chipperfield Common and Bunkers Park in line with the Chilterns Beechwoods project.
- Develop and publish our Climate and Ecological Strategy.
- Increase our biodiversity areas across the borough, laying wildflower turf and bee friendly wildflower seeds, native bluebells and wild garlic bulbs.
- Continue to increase membership of our Dacorum Climate Action Network encouraging individuals and organisations to sign up.
- Launch an interactive wildflower map to show residents areas which are left to grow longer to support biodiversity.

Providing good quality, affordable homes, in particular for those most in need

Our achievements 2021/22

- Coniston Road, Kings Langley Development of 10 two- bedroom and three-bedroom homes, including fully compliant wheelchair house, all for social rent.
- Hampton Close Developed eight purpose-built modular homes as follow-on accommodation for people who have previously experienced homelessness in the local area.
- Our Magenta Court development in Apsley won in the 'Best Small Social Housing Development' category at the prestigious National Building Excellence Awards 2021.

Our performance 2021/22

- Built new 18 council homes and started construction on 153 new homes.
- Achieved planning permission on 134 additional homes

Our plans for 2022/23

- Continue to deliver our new-build programme to provide much-needed affordable housing across the borough including Randalls Ride, Paradise Fields, Wilstone village and Eastwick Row.
- Plan further developments to deliver more affordable homes for people in housing need.

Housing tenancy and repairs, tenant engagement

Our achievements 2021/22

- Started our planned programme of Tenancy Reviews, prioritising homes where we had been unable to gain access to carry out electrical safety inspections.
- We successfully maintained an 'outstanding' standard for our supported housing Code of Practice, the erosh accreditation.
- Proactively supported tenants to keep on track with their rent which maximised our income across the year.
- Supported tenants struggling to pay rent because of the financial impact of the coronavirus pandemic, allowing families facing eviction to keep their homes and tackle their arrears.

- Introduced our Block Champions initiative where volunteers work in their neighbourhoods, informing us of issues such as repairs or fly-tipping in communal areas.
- We completed 62,128 welfare contacts to our supported-housing tenants.
- Engaged with landlords, property owners and tenants to improve standards of private rented accommodation and bring empty homes back into use.
- Our supported-housing team worked with our partners to provide more than 120 social events and activities to combat loneliness amongst our older tenants.

Our performance 2021/22

- 63.3% of tenants satisfied with repairs to their home (Osborne)
- Consulted 2,316 tenants and leaseholders
- Average 44 days to relet council general needs property
- Average 87 days to relet council sheltered property
- Carried out 27,494 repairs to council properties
- Provided housing advice to 2,705 households

Our plans for 2022/23

- Consult with tenants to review our standard Tenancy Agreement, with the aim of producing a simpler, clearer document that meets recent changes to legislation.
- Continue to invest in renewable energy and improved insulation to tackle rising energy costs and work towards our net carbon-zero ambitions.
- Upgrade heating systems at two sheltered schemes and improve insulation at five blocks of flats in Northend.
- Upgrade fire safety measures at Elizabeth House, Christopher Court and Gade Tower and continue to explore further improvements to our high-rise blocks.
- Support residents, who have previously experienced homelessness, with our purpose-built modular homes. Eight energy-efficient units were installed in 2022.
- Undertake a Temporary Accommodation review, ensuring we deliver our strategic priorities: providing affordable housing for those most in need, whilst improving service delivery and resilience.
- Our housing officers will be carrying out regular inspections and reporting issues such as fly-tipping or damage.

Keep Connected

You can keep up to date with all the latest council news with regular updates straight to your inbox. It's quick and easy to sign up to our residents' email here www.dacorum.gov.uk/dacorum-life

Find us on Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, YouTube and Instagram.