

HIGHBARN RESIDENTS GROUP MEETING
22 September 2009, 1800hrs
DACORUM ROOM, CIVIC CENTRE

Present:

Dacorum Borough Council & Nash Mills Parish Council

John Clarke – Head of Public Protection, DBC (Chair)
Mike Peters – Director of Environment & Regeneration, DBC
David Martin – Head of Resources, DBC
Jenny Young – Civil Contingencies Co-ordinator, DBC
Katie Kiely – Tenant Services Manager, DBC
Terry Douris – Nash Mills PC
Terence Collins – Nash Mills PC

Residents

Richard and Jennifer Taylor; Michele and Rodney Berkeley

Others

Lesley Kirkpatrick (Herts Police)

Apologies

Nik Pringle (Herts Police); Dave Bowman (Herts Highways); Louise Manders (DBC)

1. Welcome and Introductions

Introductions were made around the group

2. Project Management Process – update

DM – the initial appointment of a project manager has been made. Six final tender documents were received, all of which were very detailed. Although the preferred contractor had been chosen, there was a ten day “cooling off” period, which would expire on Thursday morning. The appointment would not be announced before this time in case any challenges came in. Background work has already started to enable the project managers to get off to a good start and it was hoped that residents would be impressed with the chosen company. They have previous experience of chalk mines within Hertfordshire and in getting funding from the HCA. They had plenty of practical experience and were supported by two strong local authority references.

JC – more details would of course be shared with residents at the public meeting on October 5th

3. Public Meeting (5th October)

JC – would like to take the opportunity to run through the agenda for the public meeting. Presentations were expected from the project managers, the police, Herts Highways and DBC. Proposed that one or two members of the residents group might want to give a brief 5 minutes presentation on the work of the group and what had been achieved so far on behalf of local residents

RT – Volunteered to speak on behalf of the group along with MB

DM – it would be a good opportunity to show residents that they were being well represented by local people, not just council staff. It would highlight that a communication channel between residents and the Council was in place.

TD – lots of concerns had been remedied over the past few months, as residents on this group had pushed them forwards

JC – it might encourage more participation from residents if they see they are being represented. The project managers are expected to speak for around 15 minutes. They will primarily be reassuring residents of their competence and experience in this type of work and describing similar projects they had previously been involved with. They should also give residents an idea of what might happen next. JC would do a 5 minute introduction to the “Emergency Information” leaflet that was being planned for distribution to local residents. It would contain simple advice on what to do in a variety of scenarios, ie, a suspected gas leak, with contact details for the most relevant agencies.

MP – asked if the “leaflet” appointment could be placed before the project manager’s slot on the agenda. JY to make the amendment.

JC – we would want to encourage the public to keep the majority of their questions for the Q&A session at the end of the evening, rather than during the presentations.

JC – asked the Parish Council if they would be prepared to work alongside DBC in running the public meeting. Assistance with meeting and greeting, getting people signed-in and ensuring the room was properly set-up would be much appreciated.

TC – confirmed that the Parish Council would be happy to help in this way.

RB – suggested that a contact sheet was given out at the public meeting for those who had questions but did not wish to speak out in public. They could then make a note of who they needed to speak to and could get in touch afterwards.

TD – Suggested that badges be made for all speakers, council officers, members of the residents group etc to help the public identify us. If a flyer reminding people about the public meeting could be emailed to TD, he would display copies on the community noticeboard and at the school.

JC – if a small A5-sized flyer could be produced and put through letterboxes a couple of days in advance of the meeting it would be a useful reminder to residents

TC – would remind people of the event at the next Parish Council meeting

RB – asked if residents would find out more about the timescales of the work at the public meeting

DM – we were trying to bolt-down rough timescales with the HCA, but it was very difficult to know exactly how long each stage would take. Should be able to get some more details from the HCA on Friday. We will do our best to provide as much information as we possibly can at the meeting. The funding is key to the success of the project and everything will need to be in order before we proceed.

MP – mentioned that the forthcoming general election could possibly slow things down a bit

DM – said that the geo-physical studies would take quite some time anyway.

MP – mentioned that our project management team were actually used by the HCA to help assess other bids, so they were very familiar with the processes involved.

TC – asked whether the blue light services were fully informed about the work ongoing in the area

JY – confirmed that they were

DM – asked if JC could touch on this in his presentation, so that all residents were reassured that we were communicating with the emergency services.

4. Communications

JC – asked if the most recent newsletter had been delivered (the residents confirmed that it had been). No feedback on the content had been received as yet. Cllr Lucy Foster had asked JC in a conversation earlier that day whether the project management company would be involved in any of the communications work with the local community.

DM – confirmed that the project managers would be doing some of the communications work and that it would fall under our communications strategy for the project. There would be a tight contract management system in place to monitor this.

MP – Welwyn Hatfield Council had a project management company in place, but local authority officers worked closely alongside them, not at arm's length. In addition to the HCA funding work, the project managers will assist us in working with the consulting engineers. The three main areas of work are likely to be: the project managers, the consulting engineers and the contractors that undertake physical works.

TC - asked what costs have been so far

MP – The costs that the Council have covered so far include the filling of CP5B, legal advice and project management and that this was a six-figure sum. It is hoped that at least some of these fees can be claimed back in retrospect through the HCA funding scheme.

DM – We will need to maximise our allowable costs from the HCA. The sort of money required is too much for the council tax to bear and it is in everyone's interests to get the funding position right.

TD – asked if the ground investigation work that was completed last year would be lost if further works were done in the area

DM – Herts County Council had paid for the initial investigations which would still be of use, but the area of the investigations would need to be extended to establish the full extent of the mine.

5. Security

LK – information had been received regarding the nuisance motorcycles in the area and some of the lads responsible had been spoken to. The police would remain on their case and if there were further problems then the power to confiscate bikes could be used. They would not be getting two chances.

6. AOB

TC – bark chippings would be added to the planters once the hot weather was over and the plants had been properly watered in. The quotes from DBC's landscaping team were too high so RT had kindly offered to do the initial watering.

RT – asked if DBC's web pages could be brought up to date as the last sets of minutes and newsletters were not yet available (JY to ask LM to do this)

MB – The appeal against the council tax banding decision would be going to a hearing in December

MP – the current road closure only had partial wheelchair access and needed an additional dropped kerb to allow wheelchair users to get through. Herts Highways would need to take a look and arrange for the work to be done.

TD – asked if there was likely to be any push from residents to keep the road closure in place even after any remedial work was done, as it in effect created a cul-de-sac environment that some people may prefer

RT – said that although there were a couple of benefits to this arrangement he had not heard anyone express a desire to keep the closure in place longer than necessary.

7. Next Meeting

13th October, 6pm, (JY to book room)