

HIGHBARNES CHALK MINES PROJECT - QUESTIONS AND ANSWERS

Your Questions	The Answers
What is the expected time-scale for the various stages of the project?	We will now start the process of appointing a contractor to carry out the further ground investigation works. The contract is likely to be in place by the end of January 2012. The ground investigation works are anticipated to commence early February 2012 and the subsequent remedial works in October 2012. All works on site should then be completed by April 2013.
How much notice will I be given if I need to vacate my property? Where will I go? Will my insurance cover a hotel for my family?	A programme of works will be agreed with the Contractor at the start of the treatment works to ensure that maximum notice periods can be given to those residents who will need to vacate their properties while remedial works are carried out directly beneath or immediately adjacent to their houses. By early programming it should be possible to give a minimum of 4 weeks advance notice to each affected household. You will need to notify your insurance company of the works and enquire whether your insurance policy covers the cost of temporary accommodation. If your household insurance does not cover the costs, you may choose to stay with friends or relatives whilst the work is carried out, which should not be for more than a fortnight. Dacorum Borough Council may be able to advise or assist with alternative accommodation in exceptional circumstances.
How will this affect me as a Council tenant?	If you are a Council tenant and need to vacate your property, we will provide you with suitable alternative accommodation whilst the work is being carried out.
What provision will be made for residents who are elderly or have special needs?	The Council and contractors will work closely with any residents who have special needs to ensure that any inconvenience is minimised as far as possible. We will seek advice from Adult Care Services if necessary.
Will more roads need to be closed-off during the work? Where will I park my car? Will utilities and emergency services be kept informed?	No more roads will need to be closed-off to carry out the ground investigation site works. However, it is likely that parts of Pond Road, Highbarns and East Green will need to be closed for the remedial phase of site works to enable remediation of the mine beneath these roads. Once the full extent of the mine has been established by the further ground investigation works, a traffic management plan will be agreed with Hertfordshire Highways with regards to

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	<p>any necessary road closures. The traffic management plan will also address safe pedestrian pathways and access arrangements. The utilities and emergency services will be advised of these arrangements.</p> <p>When the work is completed, any remaining road closures will be lifted.</p>
<p>How will lorry movements be controlled? Do you know how many there will be and at what times of day?</p>	<p>A traffic management plan will be agreed with Hertfordshire Highways to ensure that lorry movements are controlled. We will be speaking to residents again once traffic movements have been agreed.</p>
<p>What happens if you need to drill down into my patio or driveway? Will it be repaired afterwards? Who will pay for this?</p>	<p>In the event that the work will cause damage to your flooring or garden this will be made good by the contractors. The cost of this is covered by the project budget. Repairs will be made to a reasonable standard so that it is in its original condition. Improvement works will not be undertaken. Photographs will be taken before and after to ensure that the repairs are satisfactory.</p>
<p>Will you need to access my property whilst it is vacated? Would I need to give you my keys? Would I need to empty my home?</p>	<p>Access to the inside of your home will not be necessary in most cases. However, some properties may require some internal validation testing. In this case, access would only be required to one or two ground floor rooms so furniture would only have to be removed from those rooms. The Contractor will use plastic sheeting to seal access to other parts of the house. You will be advised of this beforehand and arrangements for access whilst you are away can be made. If you will be out of the area, leaving a spare key with a neighbour may be the best solution.</p>
<p>Will we be able to access our homes in the evenings?</p>	<p>Access to all properties should be available during the ground investigation site works. However, for the treatment site works we will need to work with Hertfordshire Highways to produce a traffic management plan. This is quite a complex task as we need to consider that the mines are located underneath the road and residents accessing their homes as well as lorries carrying infill material through the narrow road network in the area. We should have more detail on the traffic management plan to share with you on completion of the ground investigation.</p>
<p>What happens to the properties themselves?</p>	<p>The project only relates to works underground and reinstatement of gardens on completion of the remedial works. If any buildings are accidentally damaged this will also be repaired. However property owners or insurers will have to pay for any repair works due to pre-existing damage to properties themselves.</p>

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<p>What will the work involve? I am concerned about noise levels and heavy machinery that may affect my family.</p>	<p>The works will involve two phases of site works. The first phase will involve a ground investigation which is programmed to last approximately 6 weeks while the second phase will involve the main treatment works which is expected to take approximately 16 weeks on site. The ground investigation will consist of sinking a number of exploratory holes comprising dynamic probes and boreholes predominantly within garden areas while the remedial works will consist of drilling holes to enable grouting of the mine. Although some noise and dust is inevitable, proper controls and monitoring will be put in place throughout the project, including maximum working hours, to minimise any disruption. The works will be safely managed and monitored so that impacts on residents are kept to a safe level. Drilling rigs will be surrounded by safety barriers while plant movements will be carefully supervised.</p>
<p>What happens when the work is complete? Will we have proof that our house has been made safe, to show to insurers and mortgage companies?</p>	<p>We will carry out testing and provide each resident with a short report extracted from a detailed validation report for the whole scheme. Each brief report will detail the remedial and validation works undertaken within the property proving that the ground has been successfully remediated. You can share this report with your insurer, mortgage provider and estate agent(s) etc should you wish to sell your property. Dacorum Borough Council will hold a copy of each report on our building control files.</p>
<p>What will happen if further investigations reveal a larger mining area than anticipated? Who would cover the costs for any extra work needed?</p>	<p>The money we have been allocated for the project covers all of the known mine workings and the “interpreted mine layout” (ie, where the data suggests that the mines may extend to). The geophysical survey has indicated the general location of the mines, so significant changes to the mine layout are not expected. However, until the further exploratory work is carried out, we will not know for definite the full extent of the mines. We are confident that the funds made available by the HCA will be sufficient to cover the entire project but if the mine proves to be far more extensive than we realised the Council can apply to the HCA for additional funds.</p>
<p>Who can I speak to during the work if I have any questions or concerns? Would it be the Council, or the contractors?</p>	<p>For all general enquiries about the chalk mines, please contact Jenny Young at Dacorum Borough Council on 01442 228834 or email jennifer.young@dacorum.gov.uk. When we appoint a contractor they will provide you with contact details for a liaison officer, should you have any direct enquiries about the investigations or remedial work.</p>

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Who will ensure the security of properties when works are happening?	Security of properties is the ultimate responsibility of the police, who the Council will continue to work with. However, contractors will keep properties secure when they are working in them.
Do the planned works fall within the time period deemed as acceptable on the risk assessment?	The Geotechnical Assessment Report prepared by Hyder last year suggests that the investigatory and remedial work should be completed in the “medium term” (i.e., within 2 years). We anticipate that the works will be completed by Autumn 2013, which falls slightly outside of these parameters. However, as the additional laser/CCTV surveys that were carried out on site during May showed no deterioration of the known mines, there is nothing to suggest that this will have any detrimental effect.
Can you clarify the situation with regards to Council Tax?	<p>The Valuation Office Agency is responsible for maintaining accurate council tax lists. The VOA reduced the council tax bands on 74 properties in and around Pond Road in October 2010.</p> <p>The reductions, which took effect from 31 May 2007, were made following the partial ground collapse in Highbarns and subsequent road closures. Geotechnical investigations, commissioned by Hertfordshire County Council, revealed that a number of properties in the locality are built over historic chalk mine workings.</p>
Why did the VOA reduce the council tax bands?	We reached the conclusion that the physical changes on 31 May 2007 had an impact on the value of these properties, reflecting 1 April 1991 values (the date of valuation for all council tax bandings), such that a lower council tax band should apply.
Are you going to reinstate the original council tax bands once remediation works are completed?	No. Completion of the remediation works will not result in reinstatement of the previous council tax band.
Did you inform the residents that the band changes would be permanent?	We wrote to all the affected taxpayers informing them of the band reduction. We also informed them that the council tax bands would remain in place after the remedial works had been completed. The band applied to a property would be reviewed if and when that property sold or if there is a general revaluation of all homes.