



DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL  
COMMUNITY REVIEW PANEL

Handbook 2021

IN PARTNERSHIP WITH

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# CONTENTS

1	Introduction	3	11	Expenses	10
2	Dacorum Borough	4	12	Meeting dates	11
3	Panel composition	5	13	Briefing and training	12
4	Panel remit	6	14	Review agendas	13
5	Role of the Panel	7	15	Review reports	14
6	Independence and confidence	7	16	Review charges	15
7	Conflicts of interest	8	17	Panel membership	15
8	Freedom of information	8	18	Key references	16
9	Types of meeting	9		<i>Appendix A: confidentiality</i>	17
10	Site visits	10		<i>Appendix B: conflicts of interest</i>	18

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# 1. INTRODUCTION

There will be significant new development across Dacorum in the coming years, required to deliver the Borough's much-needed housing, infrastructure and employment. The Council is currently preparing its new Local Plan to guide development and change to 2036. Most of the growth will be in and around existing towns. Hemel Hempstead has been awarded Garden Town status by central Government, which creates a historic opportunity to transform the town with 11,000 new homes and 10,000 jobs.

Dacorum Borough Council aspires to deliver this growth in a way that is inclusive and empowering to existing and new communities, maximises opportunities and enhances quality of life. To achieve this, it is essential to understand the views of people living, working and studying in Dacorum.

Through the Community Review Panel, the council wants to give a voice to local people, in particular those who know their local area and who want to have a say in the way it's developed and regenerated. The vision is for a local community that is actively engaged in planning for the future of the area, where all people have an opportunity to be involved and feel a sense of pride and ownership in the place. This is emphasised in the revised Sustainable Community Strategy, *Destination Dacorum (2012)*, outlining the Council's vision of what the borough will be like in 2031, 'a happy, healthy, prosperous and safe place in which to live, work and enjoy.'

*(reference: Adopted Core Strategy, 25 September 2013, 5.1, p25)*

If you would like a summary of this Handbook in your language, please contact [cindy@frame-projects.co.uk](mailto:cindy@frame-projects.co.uk),



18th century summerhouse, Tring Park © Timelapsd / Flickr



## 2. DACORUM BOROUGH

Dacorum Borough covers 81 square miles of West Hertfordshire, extending north from the fringes of Watford to the Chiltern Hills. 60% of the Dacorum area is located within the Metropolitan Green Belt; 85% of the borough comprises small hamlets located within rural land. Significant environmental constraints apply to the district's small villages and hamlets located within the green belt and the rural areas. The aim is to protect their individual and distinctive characters, to maintain the openness of the green space, and to protect and enhance the natural and historic character of the landscape.

The largest of three historic market towns, Hemel Hempstead, is a Mark One New Town designed by Geoffrey Jellicoe in the 1940s. The majority of the new growth is to be focused in and around Hemel Hempstead. The town centre and the Maylands Business Park are both designated as key regeneration areas.

A key part of the growth is a new garden town, Hemel Garden Communities. This urban extension to Hemel Hempstead, on land split roughly equally between Dacorum and St Albans districts, will provide approximately 11,000 homes and 10,000 new jobs, as well as transformational benefits to the existing town of Hemel Hempstead. In addition to the new homes, new schools, a range of open spaces with community facilities, and upgrades to roads including Junction 8 of the M1 motorway and the Breakspear roundabout will be provided to support the increase in residents and businesses. Hemel Garden Communities will provide an opportunity for cross-boundary working with St Albans District Council and other South West Hertfordshire authorities, for both Dacorum Borough Council and the Community Review Panel.

A Charter for the Hemel Garden Communities has been endorsed by Dacorum and St Albans (refer section 18). This sets out placemaking principles for creating a new garden town that is economically, socially and environmentally sustainable. The charter is divided into three key themes under which the placemaking principles sit. Together they set out new ways of living in, planning, and financing suburbs that meet the pressing issues of development at the periphery of towns in the 21st Century:

- place and design
- engagement
- delivery

The pressure for new housebuilding is high: Dacorum's Local Housing Need is 1,025 homes per year through to 2036. The Council's Emerging Local Plan is currently being developed to ensure that the development and change will be well managed, to deliver balanced growth alongside much needed infrastructure.



### 3. PANEL COMPOSITION

The Dacorum Community Review Panel brings together ‘local experts’, local people from a non-planning background with a passion for and knowledge of the Dacorum area. It is made up of a chair, and 8-12 members drawn from across the community who:

- bring a strong understanding of the area, the way it works, its history, its inhabitants, and local needs
- can provide constructive advice from a community perspective on proposals for development and change, as well as the needs of existing residential and business communities
- will make confident contributions in meetings
- will collaborate and respect the contribution of others in panel discussions

Following an initial one-year pilot, the panel will operate for a further 6 months during and after which it will be reviewed, in order to assess whether the panel is performing its intended role effectively. This will also provide the opportunity for panel members to decide if they want to carry on being involved.

The panel will be chaired initially by Tony Burton, an external community engagement consultant. The longer-term objective, once the panel’s remit and working processes have been fully tested and established, is that the panel may appoint a chair from among its members.



Public consultation event © OPDC



## 4. PANEL REMIT

The Dacorum Community Review Panel has been established to support the Council in achieving high quality placemaking that reflects the priorities of local people.

The panel performs a public role and the Handbook is therefore published on the Dacorum Borough Council website, including the names of the panel's members. However, the individuals in the panel do not perform a representative role, on behalf of a community group, for example. They are not required to have professional planning skills or experience. They are appointed so that they can contribute their own personal experience of living or working in the Dacorum area and the surrounding neighbourhoods.

The Community Review Panel will provide independent advice to the planning authority as a 'critical friend' to support the delivery of high-quality development in Dacorum. The Community Review Panel will review and comment on development proposals and strategic documents across the Dacorum Borough – both those where Dacorum is the client or landowner, and also those brought forward by third party developers, where Dacorum is the planning authority but not the client or landowner.

Dacorum is likely to refer schemes to the Community Review Panel at an early design stage to ensure that local priorities and concerns can inform the design process. Advice is likely to be

most effective before a scheme becomes too fixed. Early engagement with the Community Review Panel will help test and understand the appropriateness of the proposals to the area and the needs of its communities.

The panel considers significant development proposals in the Dacorum area. Significance is not necessarily only related to scale but may also fall into the following categories:

Significance related to size or use, for example:

- large buildings or groups of buildings
- infrastructure projects such as bridges or transport hubs
- large public realm proposals
- masterplans, design codes or design guidance

Significance related to site, for example:

- proposals affecting sensitive views
- developments with a major impact on their context
- schemes involving significant public investment

Significant social infrastructure, for example:

- schools or other education buildings
- parks and open spaces
- streets, cycle and footpaths
- public buildings, for example libraries

As with normal pre-application procedure, review advice given before an application is submitted remains confidential, seen only by the applicant, the planning authority and any other stakeholder bodies that the council has involved in the project. This encourages applicants to share proposals openly and honestly with the Community Review Panel – and ensures that they receive the most useful advice.



## 5. ROLE OF THE PANEL

The Community Review Panel provides local views and recommendations to Dacorum Borough Council at key stages of the planning process.

The panel plays an advisory role in the planning process. It is for the Dacorum officers and elected councillors to decide what weight to place on the panel's comments and recommendations – balanced with other planning considerations.

If any comments made by the Community Review Panel require clarification, it is the responsibility of the presenting team, whether project promoters or Dacorum officers, to draw this to the attention of the panel chair (if during the meeting) or the panel manager, Frame Projects (if the report of the meeting requires clarification).



Aerial view of Hemel Hempstead © Doc Searls / Flickr

## 6. INDEPENDENCE & CONFIDENCE

The Dacorum Community Review Panel is facilitated on behalf of Dacorum Borough Council by Frame Projects, an external consultancy. The Council has appointed Frame Projects to manage the panel, to maintain its independence. This means that review meetings are arranged and managed by Frame Projects staff and the panel is chaired, and the discussion managed, by Tony Burton, an expert in community engagement who is employed on a consultancy basis by Frame Projects. All reports and formal recommendations are written by the Community Review Panel manager, and issued with the approval of the chair, with no prior approval from Dacorum Borough Council.

The process for managing the Community Review Panel, the appointment of panel members, including selection of the chair, and the administration of meetings, are agreed in partnership with the Council.

Community Review Panel members are required to keep confidential all information acquired in the course of their role in the panel, with the exception of reports that are in the public domain.

Further details are provided in the confidentiality procedure included at Appendix A.



## 7. CONFLICTS OF INTEREST

The Dacorum Community Review Panel is intended to provide a constructive forum for applicants and their project teams and Dacorum planning officers to understand the views of local people.

In order to ensure the panel's independence and professionalism, it is essential that panel members avoid any actual or perceived conflicts of interest that may arise in relation to schemes considered during the meetings that they attend. Minimising the potential for conflicts of interest will be important to the impartiality of the panel.

Panel members are asked to ensure that any possible conflicts of interest are identified before each meeting. For example, if a panel member or a close relative is directly involved, has a financial interest in, or would directly benefit from a scheme or site being reviewed, this may be a conflict of interest. Members should declare potential conflicts of interest to the Community Review Panel manager. This does not include panel member's homes, as the Community Review Panel has been set up to provide the perspective of local residents, among others.

Appendix B contains more detail on what constitutes a conflict of interest. Meeting agendas provided in advance of reviews will include information on the project and who is involved. When these are sent out, each panel member will be asked to check for any conflict of interest, and to contact the Community Review Panel manager straight away if they believe that there is a conflict.

In cases where there is a conflict, a panel member may be asked to step down from a review. In other cases, a declaration of interest may be sufficient. If in any doubt at all, panel members should contact the Community Review Panel manager at Frame Projects, Cindy Reriti – [cindy@frame-projects.co.uk](mailto:cindy@frame-projects.co.uk) – to discuss.

## 8. FREEDOM OF INFORMATION

As a public authority, the Dacorum Borough Council is subject to the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (the Act). All requests made to the Council for information, with regard to the Community Review Panel, will be handled according to the provisions of the Act. Legal advice may be required on a case by case basis to establish whether any exemptions apply under the Act.



River Gade, Hemel Hempstead © Peter O'Connor / Flickr

# 9. TYPES OF MEETING

Two types of Community Review Panel meeting are offered:

- Community Reviews
- Governance and development sessions

## COMMUNITY REVIEWS

A Community Review Panel meeting will be held for major development proposals, masterplans, significant planning policy or guidance documents. Meetings will take place for schemes from outline design stage onwards, either at pre-application or application stage, so that the panel can provide advice to the scheme promoter and to the Dacorum Borough Council.

All members of the Community Review Panel, including the chair, will be invited to attend. Dacorum officers and appropriate stakeholders / organisations may also be invited and asked to give their views after the scheme has been presented.

Community Review Panel meetings will usually take place at a stage when a client and design team have decided their preferred option for development of a site, and have sufficient drawings, models, etc. for a comprehensive discussion. There may be a second pre-application review to provide an opportunity for the panel to comment on more detailed design matters, before planning submission.

The scheme will typically be presented by a member of the design team, normally the lead architect, following a brief introduction by the client. Presentations may be made with drawings and / or pdf or PowerPoint and models, as appropriate. At least one paper copy of the presentation should be provided, for ease of reference during the panel discussion. Individuals, with professional expertise relevant to the topic of the meeting, may be invited to provide facilitation or specific advice.

A typical Community Review Panel meeting will last 120 minutes: 10 minutes of introductions; 10 minutes briefing by planning officers; 30 minutes presentation by the design team; 60 minutes discussion; 10 minutes summing up by the chair.

## GOVERNANCE & DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

To support the Community Review Panel's role in the planning process, governance meetings may be arranged to provide an opportunity for reflection among the panel on emerging themes and issues. This would also be an appropriate forum for discussions to inform the development of the panel after its initial one-year pilot. Governance meetings will be facilitated by the Community Review Panel chair, and all panel members will be invited to attend.

Training will be provided to equip the panel members with the skills required to understand and constructively input to the review meetings. Development sessions may take a variety of formats, beginning with a panel induction meeting, and with potential to provide training on other topics such as: sustainable design, landscape design or more practical topics such as how to read and interrogate architectural drawings. Topics will be identified with input from the panel members.



## 10. SITE VISITS

Dacorum Community Review Panel members are drawn from the local area, and so we anticipate that they will be familiar with the locations where development is proposed. Formal site visits will therefore not be arranged in advance of reviews, but the aim will be to circulate agendas a week in advance of each meeting, to allow panel members to visit the sites independently if they wish to do so.

## 11. EXPENSES

Community Review Panel members are entitled to claim reasonable expenses for travel to review meetings, and for other costs incurred in order to attend meetings. Frame Projects will provide an expense form which should be completed and sent to the Community Review Panel manager, with receipts or other evidence of expenditure, before the date of the next panel meeting.



The High Street, Hemel Hempstead © John Newberry



## 12. MEETING DATES

One Community Review Panel meeting is provisionally scheduled every month. These dates may be used for full meetings or workshop meetings, as appropriate. Exceptionally, additional meetings may be required to respond to specific requirements for advice at key points in the masterplan, policy development, planning application and delivery programme.

The panel will meet between 18.30 and 20.30 on Tuesday evening. The following dates are currently set for Dacorum Community Review Panel meetings in 2021:

- January - no meeting
- 2 February
- 2 March
- 14 April (Wednesday)
- 4 May
- 8 June
- 6 July
- August - no meeting
- 7 September
- 5 October
- 2 November
- 7 December





St Mary's, Hemel Hempstead © Matt Brown / Flickr

## 13. BRIEFING & TRAINING

All Community Review Panel members are required to attend an induction meeting before taking part in review meetings. This includes briefings on the Dacorum Borough Council context, and on the schemes likely to be reviewed. It also includes a briefing on the panel's role, how it will be governed, and on practical arrangements.

Development sessions may be arranged for panel members, for example on urban design and planning process, and professionals may be invited to contribute to these sessions. Occasionally, professionals may also be invited to attend Community Review Panel meetings to provide additional briefing and to ensure that the panel has all the information it requires.

The induction meeting and governance meetings provide opportunities to discuss the wider needs of panel members, including training needs, to ensure that they can fulfil their roles effectively.



## 14. REVIEW AGENDAS

Agendas will be issued to panel members in advance of each meeting. The agenda and its contents are confidential and should only be read by members of the panel.

For Community Review Panel meetings, a detailed agenda will be provided that includes notes on the planning context, details of the project to be considered, the applicant and consultant team, and those presenting the project, as appropriate.

A scheme description provided by those presenting to the panel will set out factual information about the project. Key plans and images will also be provided to help to give a sense of the scope and nature of the project under review.

Where a project returns for a second or subsequent review, the report of the previous review will be provided with the agenda.



Tring Memorial Garden © Dacorum Borough Council





Berkhamsted Town Hall Clock © Paul Downey / Flickr

## 15. REVIEW REPORTS

During a Community Review Panel meeting the panel manager, Frame Projects, will take notes of the discussion – to form the basis of a report. Reports will be drafted, approved by the panel chair and issued within 10 working days to only those individuals attending the meeting. This ensures that any panel members who are not attending a specific meeting due to a conflict of interest, will not receive a copy of that particular report. The report summarises the comments and advice provided by the Community Review Panel and clearly sets out specific recommendations.

At pre-application stage, reports will provide clear advice on the appropriateness of the proposals to the area, and the needs of its communities. This may assist officers in negotiating improvements.

The report at this stage is not normally made public and is shared only with Dacorum Borough Council, the applicant and design team, and any other stakeholders that Dacorum officers have involved in the project. Once planning applications are submitted, the report may provide guidance to Dacorum officers in reviewing the planning application with regard to community views.



## 16. REVIEW CHARGES

Applicants are referred to the Community Review Panel by Dacorum Borough Council as an external service. They pay fees to Frame Projects for delivering this service.

The charges for Community Review Panel meetings are reviewed every year; from 1 January 2021 to 1 January 2022 the charge is:

- £3,750 + VAT Community Review Panel meeting
- £2,500 + VAT governance or development sessions

The cost of venue hire, if required, would be in addition to the charges above.

Payment should be made by the applicant in advance of the review, and the review may be cancelled if payment is not received five days in advance of the meeting. Full details of payment will be provided when an invitation to present to the panel is confirmed.

- 50% of full cost : less than two weeks before scheduled review
- £600 + VAT : between one and four weeks before the review

## 17. PANEL MEMBERSHIP

### Chair, Tony Burton

Tony works on a wide variety of community, environmental and planning projects. He has over 25 years' experience on the boards of major charities, and an extensive track record of working with local communities and volunteers seeking to influence their neighbourhood.

### Community Review Panel members

Quentin Halfyard  
Cheryl Hall  
Brian Kazer  
John Kjorstad  
Angela Lynch  
Bethany Marchant-Roe  
Michael Ridley  
Joseph Stopps

All future opportunities to join the panel will be advertised on Dacorum's website.



# 18. KEY REFERENCES

## **Dacorum Borough Council planning**

including the emerging Local Plan (post-June 2020)

<http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development>

## **National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)**

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2>

## **Hemel Garden Communities Charter**

<http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/hemel-garden-communities-charter.pdf?sfvrsn=2>



View of Berkhamsted © Peter O'Connor / Flickr



# APPENDIX A

## Confidentiality

The Dacorum Community Review Panel provides a forum for advice and guidance to be provided at an early stage in projects, before proposals are public, when advice can have the most impact. Confidentiality is therefore important.

1. Panel meetings are only to be attended by the panel's members, Dacorum officers, and officers from stakeholder organisations involved in the project, as well as the applicant and their design team. If anyone else attends, it must be approved by the Community Review Panel manager.
2. Members of the Dacorum Community Review Panel will keep confidential all information provided to them as part to their role on the panel, and shall not use that information for their own benefit, nor disclose it to any third party (with the exception of reports that are in the public domain – see points 5 and 6).
3. The Dacorum Community Review Panel's advice is provided in the form of a report written by the panel manager, containing key points from the panel's discussion. If any applicant, architect or agent approaches a panel member for advice on a project subject to review (before, during or after), they should decline to comment and refer the inquiry to the panel manager.
4. Following the meeting, the Community Review Panel manager writes a draft report, circulates it to the chair for comments and then makes any amendments. The panel manager will then distribute it to all those included on the meeting agenda.
5. As with normal pre-application procedure, review advice given before an application is submitted remains confidential, seen only by the applicant, the planning authority and any other stakeholder bodies that the council has involved in the project.
6. If a panel member wishes to share a final report with anyone, they must seek approval from the Community Review Panel manager, who will confirm whether or not the report is public.



## APPENDIX B

### Conflicts of interest

Following the selection of Community Review Panel members, each potential panel member will be asked to fill out a Declaration of Interest form. The form will identify if there are any conflicts which may preclude an individual's participation in the Community Review Panel.

An individual may be conflicted from participating as a panel member if s/he has a financial, commercial or professional interest in Dacorum Borough Council.

Once the panel is fully established, to ensure the integrity and impartiality of advice is given by the Dacorum Community Review Panel, potential conflicts of interest will be checked before each panel meeting. The following process will apply.

1. All panel members are required to declare any conflicts of interest, and these will be formally recorded at each meeting.
2. Panel members are notified of the schemes coming before the panel at least one week in advance. At this time panel members should check the meeting information provided to them and contact the Community Review Panel manager if they have an interest in a project, or believe they have an interest. If in doubt, the Community Review Panel manager should be consulted.
3. The Community Review Panel manager, in collaboration with the panel chair and Dacorum officers, will determine if the conflict of interest is of a personal or prejudicial nature – that is, whether it will prevent the panel member from giving impartial advice.
4. A panel member may have a prejudicial interest in a proposal if s/he has:
  - a financial, commercial or professional interest in a project that will be reviewed, its client and / or its site;
  - a financial, commercial or professional interest in a site that is adjacent to the project (not including a panel member's own home) that will be reviewed or upon which the project being reviewed will have a material impact;
  - a personal relationship with an individual or group involved in the project, or a related project, where that relationship prevents the panel member from being objective.
5. If it is deemed that a conflict of interest is of a prejudicial nature, the panel member should not take part in reviews for the proposal. S/he should also not take part in private discussions of the project and should not be in the room during the discussions of the project.
6. If it is deemed that a conflict of interest is personal, but not prejudicial, the panel member may be allowed to participate in the review. In this situation, the interest will be noted at the beginning of the review, discussed with the presenting teams and formally recorded in the review report.

