

ANNUAL PARISH MEETING 2019

BOROUGH COUNCIL REPORT

We have spent the last year pursuing the strategic issues below, along with individual matters raised by constituents. Alan chaired the Strategic Planning & Environment Overview & Scrutiny Committee, and Bob participated as a member of the Housing & Community Overview & Scrutiny Committee.

Green Belt/Housebuilding/Planning - After all the recent who-ha, controversy etc, the year has mostly been quiet, as a result of the Government's decision to keep putting things off. (Procrastinate today, as the saying goes / it's not as if the Government has had anything else to keep it occupied lately!!)

The current situation is that pretty much the whole of the Green Belt around the village has been proposed for development by the 4 landowners involved, and the Government is due to announce Dacorum's housebuilding requirement in the Summer.

This announcement is absolutely key, as the Government has made it clear that housing requirements take precedence over the Green Belt. This means our requirement will determine the amount of pressure on the local Green Belt in Dacorum.

The Government has already taken over planning authorities elsewhere in the country which have failed to meet their requirements, developed the Green Belt anyway, and then charged for the cost of doing so by forcing cuts to other local public services.

Once we know what our requirement is, the council will publish and put to consultation a first draft of the new Local Plan. Council officers are currently testing the viability and so deliverability of the various development sites which have been proposed, and doing all the other homework required to produce that first draft.

Until the first draft is published, one can only speculate about which sites may or may not be included in the first draft, but two things are for sure - (1) We will do what we can to oppose the development of the Green Belt around our village & (2) With the whole Borough under immense pressure, it is unreasonable to argue that we should have no development at all / we are likely to have at least one site forced on us.

MSA Wars (Motorway Service Areas) - Unfortunately, just when we had hoped they had given up, the MSA operator Moto has submitted a planning application for a new "offline" MSA immediately to the South of the M25 Junction 20, accessed via a new roundabout on the A41. (The triangle of land to the South of Junction 20.)

We are strongly opposed to it, because it would exacerbate the existing traffic congestion mayhem, and be an unnecessary release of high visibility Green Belt when an "online" MSA is already being proposed for the M25 between Junctions 16 & 17.

Whatever Three Rivers District Council decides with the Junction 20 proposal, it will be down to the Secretary of State to determine both proposals, as they involve the previously unplanned development of the Green Belt. We will do everything we can to support the Junction 16/17 proposal and to prevent the Junction 20 proposal.

Hospital Services - We have continued supporting all those trying to obtain a new hospital in the middle of the Hemel Hempstead/St Albans/Watford triangle, rather than wasting money on sticky back plastic at the crumbling, unfit for purpose Victorian buildings on the other side of Watford.

We really are at the mercy of Watford people obsessed with the existing hospital, and national politicians who deny the health & financial justifications for a new hospital - the existing Watford buildings are among the worst hospital buildings in the country.

Council Tax - The Council was so badly effected by the previous government's policy on the finances of housing authorities that it was already used to finding the kind of savings required to cope with the current squeeze on public finances.

Having said this, the Council has still had to put a lot of effort into finding savings in how the Council works, (for example finding new ways of providing services and streamlining the council's management), and generally doing everything it can to minimise the impact on frontline services and council tax, whilst making ends meet.

In closing, it has been an honour and a privilege to represent and serve the parish on Dacorum Borough Council over the last four years. As "dual councillors", we would also like to thank Parish colleagues and staff for their help and professionalism.

All the more on this occasion, as after twelve years, Bob is retiring from his Borough Council role. Although, he is staying on as a parish councillor.

In those years, we have enjoyed a partnership which has worked extremely well, and we would like to thank everybody who has supported us and made it possible.

Alan Anderson & Bob McLean,
Dacorum Borough Councillors.