



Notes of Meeting			
Subject:	HIGHBARN RESIDENTS GROUP MEETING		
Date:	21.09.10	Time: 18:00	
Location:	GADE ROOM, DACORUM BOROUGH COUNCIL		
Attendees:	Steve Baker – Chairman, James Doe, Helen Lawrence and Joy Tompkins - DBC Richard & Jennifer Taylor, Michelle & Rodney Berkley, Lisa Bayley, Carly Savage - Highbarns and Pond Road Residents Geoff Doole – Nash Mills Parish Council Mike Jarrett – Herts Highways Cllr Stephen Holmes Cllr Terence Douris		
Apologies	Les Berry, Cllr L Foster, Dave Bowman		

Item	Subject	Action
Welcome	<p>Steve Baker welcomed everyone to the meeting and then proceeded to introduce the new members to the Highbarns Group and apologise for the time lapse since last meeting.</p> <p>Richard Taylor had produced a list of items the Residents would like to be discussed and it was agreed this would form the basis of the meeting.</p>	
Agenda	<p>1. Has anything changed in way council are dealing with issues?</p> <p>SB confirmed that there are no changes to the way DBC are dealing with this issue. SB gave an update on the status of the funding application. Before he left the Council, David Martin completed the draft application form to submit to the Homes & Communities Agency for funding. James Doe, Steve Baker and Director of Finance, Sally Marshall, have vetted and passed the document to Mark Skittrall the Project Manager at Hyder. A number of queries needed clarification from Mark Skittrall. He has promised to answer the queries as soon as possible, although DBC have been assured these are not major queries and would not cause problems.</p> <p>The funding application will cover 50% of the cost of the works and this will increase to 100% with the making of the Derelict Land Clearance Order.</p> <p>The DLCO has to be submitted to the Treasury as it is a parliamentary order, then raised with Mike Penning MP for advice on the timing to submit for parliamentary approval. Progress is on track.</p>	

	<p>RT queried results of the 2nd survey and the need for further exploratory investigations. SB confirmed the funding application covered both the remedial and exploratory work and that the exploratory work will need to go ahead. JD will liaise with Hyder on this. The funding for the exploratory work was queried. SB advised that the Council has funded some of the work itself and the HCA funding will cover the exploratory and remedial works.</p> <p>MB asked what happens if the funding does not cover the cost of the whole of the work, can the Council re-apply if necessary? JD will discuss this issue with Hyder and find out the next step of the investigations. RB said it was indicated that this exploratory work was already covered. Is it the case that we do not have the funding. SB confirmed that his understanding is that there is currently no funding for the exploratory work and that it has been included in the one application.</p> <p>TD said that he understood that there was money coming in to use for exploratory work and remedial work and once in that would be it. Residents questioned what would happen if there were a shortfall. SB said Hyder have a lot of experience on these matters and we will have to take their advice on this although he will raise this with them. SB believes that Hyder included a contingency within their valuation which supports the application. Can Hyder confirm that there is sufficient cover?</p> <p>TD asked if the Borough could cover the cost of remedial work and then get the money back. SB said Council cannot put more money into this without the approval of Members, it would then become a political matter. He is unable to say categorically that the Council would be able to recover this from HCA: he will pursue the matter.</p> <p>RB asked, bearing in mind the political environment at the moment, if this is a lesser priority for the Council. SB assured the Group that this was a high priority. Councillors Holmes and Douris agreed that this was still a high priority for the Council.</p> <p>MB asked about the DLCO and gaining the advice of the Mike Penning, MP. How long would this take before we got answers from the Treasury and why do we have to go to the MP with a standard government order? Also, what is Plan B to cover the 50% shortfall? SB answered by highlighting that the DLCO is a parliamentary order under secondary legislation and once in the system we need to liaise with Mike Penning, MP, on timing to submit with regard to the parliamentary timetable and for his assistance in supporting it through the system. This will take months rather than weeks. Regarding the second point, SB said that he was quietly confident that the Council will get the DLCO and HCA funding. If the funding is not granted there is no Plan B. It will become a matter for the politicians. SB emphasised that the Council has made it clear all along that it does not accept liability, and does not have a legal obligation. If funding is unsuccessful it will be down to the politicians to make a decision as to what the Council does next.</p> <p>2. Road Closures</p> <p>MJ updated on the Highways issues. For the last 18 months or so there has been a temporary Traffic Regulation Order but it needed to be made permanent. Notices were put on the website and in newspapers, also letters sent out asking for objections to this becoming a Permanent Traffic Regulation Order: no objections were received. By making this permanent it means that the respective traffic road closure signs could be removed as they are not required for Permanent Traffic Orders.</p>	<p>JD</p> <p>JD</p> <p>SB</p>
	<p style="text-align: right;">Cont.</p>	<p style="text-align: right;">2</p>

	<p>RT said the letter did not state it was a procedural order, by becoming permanent residents felt this was an abandonment of the situation. MJ indicated that Herts Highways should have worked alongside DBC on this matter and worded the letter to help prevent any misunderstanding. This will go into the newsletter to put the record straight.</p> <p>3. Number of Properties directly affected by the mine</p> <p>RT stated that up until March it was understood that people were getting mortgages but not insurance. RT has been advised that there are now properties on the market not selling as people are being refused mortgages because of findings on Searches and also someone has now been refused renewal of insurance because information is out on the public domain.</p> <p>Because exploratory work has not been undertaken it is difficult to say how many properties are affected. RT reported lots of uncertainty for residents. Is there going to be some sort of certification and if a house is safe will they get certification to say their property is safe. The only property with this certification is the house where the first incident happened. SB said we will update people with this information when it is available.</p> <p>JD stated he would liaise with Hyder regarding the information that goes out with Land Searches although we are duty bound to supply any information we have.</p> <p>LB raised the question of insurance: people are being refused insurance and it is known that there have been 2 burglaries within the area recently. It was questioned whether DBC could supply a letter of comfort to insurance brokers and mortgage companies to help residents obtain insurance cover. SH highlighted a case he recently dealt with in his area whereby a resident in Woodhall Farm was having similar problems but with contaminated land. A letter was drawn up by DBC, which assisted in the completion of a property sale. SB mentioned that he had spoken to Linda Dargue concerning these insurance issues and she will be taking this up with the Council's insurance brokers to see if they can give any advice. SB confirmed that the Council would do anything it could to help appease insurers and will liaise with individual insurers if this would help. It was asked if it could be included in the newsletter that DBC will offer advice and help with insurance matters.</p> <p>TD felt it was unfair of Insurers to refuse all insurance, could DBC bring on board the Association of Insurers and obtain a satisfactory outcome?</p> <p>LB raised the matter of the Council holding back on planning permission within the area. JD advised that DBC are advising that no building should go ahead whilst the situation is ongoing and applicants should speak to DBC's Planning and Building Control officers. Hyder have stated that before any work is undertaken exploratory work must take place first, it is essential that land stability is determined before building work starts. It was requested that planning advice be included in the newsletter.</p> <p>LB asked what area the restrictions cover, it was stated that the inner and outer zones are covered. There are major implications and public safety needs to be considered.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Cont.</p>	<p>HL</p> <p>SB</p> <p>JD</p> <p>SB</p> <p>HL</p> <p>HL</p>
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	<p>4. Council Tax Review</p> <p>MB advised the Group that the matter has been agreed and will be backdated to 30th May 2007. SB confirmed he had received this information from the Valuation Office Agency today and a letter would be going out soon. RT asked what other properties would be affected, SB advised that he did not have this information but he was aware the VOA would look at each property on its own merits. RB stated that it was disappointing that the matter needed to be dealt with by the VOA rather than the Council.</p> <p>SB advised that DBC have no legal power to alter Council Tax bands, only the VOA could do that. Also, the circumstances in which the Council has a discretion to offer relief is limited. The only remedy for residents was the appeal route as DBC had no legal capacity to intervene. TD said DM suggested that RB should be the principle person for this issue and that this would be a precedent to enable others to obtain this reduction. MB said it had been a real fight to get this agreed.</p> <p>5. Impact of changes in Government/Cut Backs</p> <p>Nothing to add (see item 1).</p> <p>6. Highway Issues</p> <p>The dropped kerbs are going ahead and should be resolved by Christmas. RT said the junction at Meadow Road/Highbarns, is an accident waiting to happen. Is it possible to have junction markings put on the road? Parking is also problem causing blind spots. MJ will ask DB to look into this.</p> <p>7. Utilities</p> <p>RT said that major works had been undertaken in area and asked if Hyder were aware of this. He also questioned the missing water that was a problem in Chambersbury Lane a few months ago. Hyder were going to look into this. SB will liaise with Hyder on this. It was reported that there had not been any activity from other Utility Companies.</p> <p>8. Emergency services</p> <p>RT advised that there had been 2 recent incidents. It is felt that the emergency services should be notified of the road closures. MJ will action.</p> <p>It was felt that following the discussion on the Permanent Road Closure and the road signs not legally being required, it was suggested these be left as they do give some indication of the road closure. MJ agreed that the current signs could stay in place.</p> <p>RT raised the subject of Nik Pringle retiring from the Police Force, he asked if DBC had been advised of a replacement and he wished to pass on thanks to NP for his support and help. SB will speak to Police concerning the possibility of NP's replacement.</p>	<p>MJ</p> <p>SB</p> <p>MJ</p> <p>SB</p>
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	<p>9. Environment</p> <p>It was reported that the area had received a Green, Safe and Clean tidy up. There is some hedging in East Green that requires attention, it was suggested this be cut back to reduce the litter problem. SB will speak to David Austin.</p> <p>The subject of the planters was discussed and the question of funding new plants. Both GD and TD intimated that the Parish Council might be able to help with this. The responsibility of care of the planters was agreed as a partnership between the Parish Council and residents.</p> <p>10. Social Issues</p> <p>Problems with children playing in the roads was reported as not being such an issue this summer, although not entirely resolved. It was suggested that perhaps the newsletter could include a reminder to parents that the road closure area was not a safe area and child supervision was necessary.</p> <p>Motor Cycles – again still some problems especially with speeding, although not just with motorcycles. Car drivers too are using the area as a speed track. The idea to include this matter in the newsletter was raised as a strongly worded article. TD suggested the use of the community speed indicator device. This would need to be regulated by the residents and PCSO; it is available from Nicky McIntyre, at DBC. If the use of this device is taken up it will need to be highlighted in the newsletter and stated that it is not a speed trap. SB will look into this.</p> <p>It was suggested the use of yellow lines to help with the traffic problems but TD advised that this would need to be policed and may not be that worthwhile.</p> <p>Lamp post no. 4 – RT reported there had been a few incidents with this lamp post over a period of time but it has survived.</p> <p style="text-align: right;">Cont.</p>	<p>SB</p> <p>HL</p> <p>SB/HL</p>
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<p>AOB</p>	<p>CS and MB said at the last meeting it was reported that householders would be informed if they were likely to be affected by the chalkmines. They asked what was happening with regard to this. Residents are not happy that this information has not been forwarded. SB will find out and follow up the situation.</p> <p>The next newsletter will be published as soon as possible. The HCA funding application is imminent. RB asked for clarity on the HCA funding and the DLCO in the newsletter with the inclusion of a timetable on procedures and dates. SB reported that he was unable to give clear definition, only broad indications. LB asked for a clearer understanding of procedures such as the DLCO and how it affects the residents and how it helps the situation. Would the DLCO be removed once the land was stabilized and all works undertaken? JD indicated that the main reason for going down this route was to obtain the extra funding. JD and Hyder to action.</p> <p>SB raised a recent case of a chalk mine incident in Reading where funding was received for £4.3 million. He felt this raised optimism for our funding application. RB suggested this be included in the newsletter to reassure people that other areas have been affected and have been successful.</p> <p>SB thanked everyone for attending and closed the meeting.</p>	<p>SB</p> <p>JD/Hyder/ HL</p> <p>HL</p>
<p>Date of Next Meeting</p>	<p>The date of the next meeting to be scheduled once further information is available. Residents requested that the start time be later, if only half an hour. The residents requested the presence of 'interested parties at these meetings. For example, someone from Hyder (as many questions could not be answered because of their absence), rating officers (regarding the adjustment and impact of Council Tax) and someone who could deal with insurance issues.</p>	