

Borough / County Councillor Report to Nash Mills Parish Council – October 2024

I am working on many different cases and supporting residents in different ways, and I don't tend to make lists, but here is a flavour of my endeavours at both borough and county councils.

Dacorum Borough Council

Gade Tower – In the last 18-20 months there have been huge changes to Gade Tower, following my question to full council in February 2023 (“Is Gade Tower the only Dacorum Housing block that needs demolishing, or are there any others that are as bad?”) and a site visit with the Housing management team the very next day. We inspected the communal areas and visited several residences to see the extent of the issues. We found damp, mould, smells of smoking from other flats, through the ventilation system, gaps between windows and frames, broken asbestos tiles in a children's bedroom, a broken lift and more. Every flat was approached with an invitation for a survey, then followed an extensive programme of works to improve the entire building. Every flat now has a new, fire compliant front door (including two flats that are leasehold), the communal areas have been completely refurbished, new floors, decoration, new lifts, replaced front doors, glass etc. Antisocial behaviour has also been tackled and is now greatly improved.

Reports from residents are now, on the whole, very positive. However, I am not satisfied that it is yet in an acceptable state; social housing should be pleasant, safe and appealing for people to come home to. I have negotiated with Dacorum council who have agreed to decorate the ground floor level externally, and clean the higher levels as well as possible, clear the rubbish from the external netting, power-wash the external paved areas and paint the external railings. We are still discussing the rubbish chute and cupboard. I am hopeful that by the spring, Gade Tower will be somewhere that people choose to move to rather than feel they have been dumped there.

Dacorum Borough Council Committees: Since I was first elected in 2015 I have been pleased to serve on 2 committees, Health in Dacorum and Development Management (planning). However, following the unexpected major changes to the format of the council in September, I have asked for an additional seat on the Housing and Community Overview and Scrutiny committee. This is due to the robust challenges, but very positive working relationship I have built up over the last 20 months with officers in all areas of the housing portfolio.

Planning Applications: I will always try and do the right thing for my residents on planning applications. Sometimes this means challenging a planning officer's intentions, either to oppose something they are minded to approve, or to support an application that the planning officer is minded to refuse. In these instances I call the application in to committee and speak in my capacity as the ward councillor. I have called in such an application, *if the officer is minded to approve*, on the application that has been received for Shafford Knoll Farm in Lower Road. I will be challenging this application as I firmly believe that we need to protect the tiny piece of green belt that separates Nash Mills and Dacorum from Kings/Abbots Langley and Three Rivers.

Wilding Areas, the Willows: I invited the open spaces team to attend the rewilded areas last week, to discuss the successes and frustrations of this year's exercise. Residents had noticed that each year since we started in 2021, the size of the wild areas has gotten smaller and smaller. We introduced a third area this year following the reclamation of a small strip of land that had previously been 'adopted' by a resident, and this was very successful. I have requested that we increase the two main patches, so they are as big as possible next year, and also asked permission to invite a team of volunteers from the Residents' Association (as we did the first year), to help me clear a 4th patch of grass to sprinkle seeds that I have had donated. This was warmly received by the officers and so I will now approach the Willows RA to gather interest.

Memorial Garden: This is still ongoing, but my most recent update from DBC was looking more positive. I have been assured that, whatever the situation, DBC will ensure the garden is looking lovely for the

Remembrance service.

Hertfordshire County Council

Highways:

Chambersbury Lane: I worked with Cllr Andrew Williams (HCC) and together we challenged Herts Highways regarding the uneconomical repeated filling of potholes and we managed to secure the funding for the entire lane to be resurfaced. This is in the process of being done and should be completed this week.

Belswains Lane: The very longstanding issue of flooding opposite the end of Teal Way has, at last, been resolved after I complained to Herts Highways, who had previously assured me that it had been done with the other blockages further down the lane last year.

Barnacres Road: There are 2 issues in the parish on Barnacres Road that I have reported and discussed with my Highways manager; firstly the sign at the roundabout by Belswains that was knocked over, and secondly the leaking water hydrant. Both are being dealt with and should be resolved soon. The sign has to be ordered so we are waiting on that, and HCC is putting pressure on the water company to resolve the leak.

Outside Nash Mills: Cllr Williams (HCC) and I also secured the funding for Bennetts End Road to be resurfaced. After three years I managed to have a zebra crossing installed outside Reddings School, Bennetts Gate car park was resurfaced on one side (I'm pushing for the other side), Belmont Rd/Athelstan Rd/Risedale Rd has been redesigned and the new design will be implemented before the end of the financial year in March, and I am working with Cllr Pete Hannell (DBC) to try and force Dacorum to resurface the informal car park at the rear of Bennetts End Surgery.

Other HCC Matters:

Education, Libraries and Lifelong Learning Cabinet Panel: I have been a member of this panel since my re-election in 2021 and I continue to challenge the council on various matters, but in particular SEND (Special Educational Needs and Disability), due to the very poor OFSTED inspection report in November 2023. The council has set up a SEND Academy and has recruited around 200 new staff members to go through the academy. Many of these are now completing their training and starting to work on the 'front line' to help clear the backlog of EHCP (Education and Health Care Plan) reports that are overdue.

Both Councils

Casework: Of course, it is not possible to discuss individual cases, but to give an idea of the types of case I have been working on, these include supporting families through the threat of homelessness and the housing journey which can be very traumatic, fighting the corner for SEND children at HCC, school appeals, guiding residents through the complexities of council 'notices' and paperwork, working with officers to improve housing conditions, and supporting newer Dacorum councillors, particularly those within my HCC Division (Bennetts End and Apsley/Corner Hall).

Please don't hesitate to ask if you have any questions.

Jan

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Dacorum Borough Councillor, Nash Mills

Hertfordshire County Councillor, Hemel Hempstead South East