



DACORUM COMMUNITY REVIEW PANEL

Handbook 2025

FRAME PROJECTS

In partnership with
Dacorum Borough Council

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Cover image: Aerial view of Magenta Court, Apsley © Dacorum Borough Council
National Building Excellence Award 2021



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)



Old Town Hemel Hempstead © Dacorum Borough Council





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. Community Review Panel members are chosen to:

- 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

Membership of the panel will be reviewed annually so that panel members have the opportunity to decide if they want to carry on being involved, and Dacorum Borough Council can assess whether the panel is performing its intended role effectively.

The panel is chaired by Tony Burton, an external community engagement consultant.



Public consultation event © OPDC



4. ROLE OF THE PANEL

The Dacorum 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. Applicants should consult planning officers following a review to agree how to respond to the panel's advice.

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 at Frame Projects (if the report of the meeting requires clarification).



The Charter Tower, Hemel Hempstead © Dacorum Borough Council



5. 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.



6. INDEPENDENCE & PROBITY

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 in Section 17.

7. 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.



The Gade © Dacorum Borough Council

8. TYPES OF MEETINGS

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 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 or PowerPoint and models as appropriate.

A typical Community Review Panel meeting will last 120 minutes: 5 minutes of introductions; 10 minutes briefing by planning officers; 30 minutes presentation by the design team; 65 minutes discussion; 10 minutes summing up by the chair. Large projects may be split into smaller elements for the purposes of review, to ensure each element receives a fair share of discussion time, e.g. schemes with several development plots.

DEVELOPMENT SESSIONS

Training will be provided to equip 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 areas such as: sustainable design, landscape design or more practical issues including how to read and interrogate architectural drawings. Topics will be identified with input from the panel members.

ANNUAL MEETINGS

To support the Community Review Panel's role in the planning process, annual meetings will be arranged to provide an opportunity for reflection amongst the group on emerging themes and issues.

This will also provide an opportunity for the Council to provide feedback on the impact of the panel's advice on schemes reviewed. Annual meetings will be facilitated by the Community Review Panel chair, and all panel members will be invited to attend.



The Grand Union Canal © Dacorum Borough Council





Hemel Hempstead Town Square © Dacorum Borough Council

9. 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.

10. 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.



11. MEETING DATES

One Community Review Panel meeting is provisionally scheduled every month. These may be used to review development proposals, or for an annual meeting or development session. Meetings may also be required to provide advice on non-application matters such as planning policy development.

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 2025:

- 14 January
- 4 February
- 18 March
- 8 April
- 13 May
- 3 June
- 1 July
- 2 September
- 7 October
- 4 November
- 9 December



River Gade © Peter O'Connor, Flickr





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

12. 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 context in which development is taking place, and on the schemes likely to be reviewed. It also includes briefing on the panel's role, how it will be governed, and on practical arrangements.

Development sessions will be arranged for the panel on request, after discussion with members. This will be provided by professionals, who can also be called on by the Community Review Panel to provide additional briefing at review sessions, to ensure that the panel has all the information it requires.

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



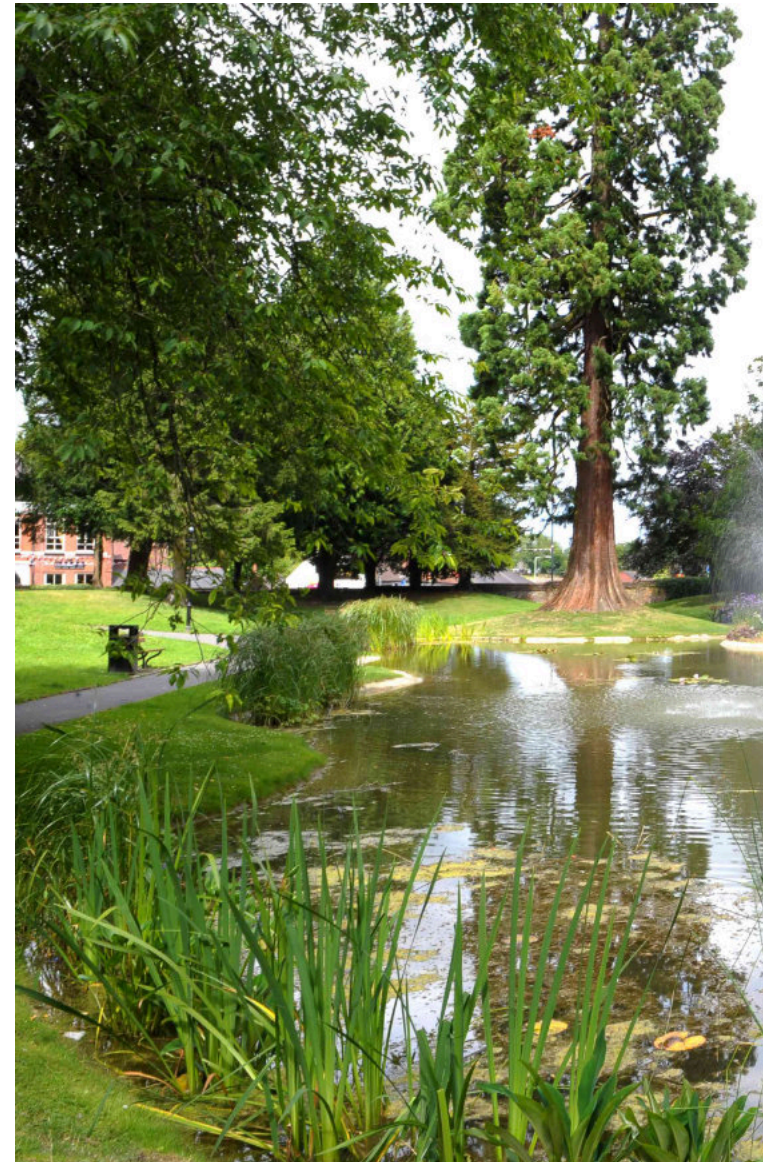
13. REVIEW AGENDAS

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

14. REVIEW REPORTS

During a Community Review Panel meeting the panel's 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. 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 Council officers in negotiating improvements.

The Community Review Panel has an advisory role in Dacorum's planning process, and the project team should consult planning officers following a review to agree how to respond to points raised in the report.

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 the Council has 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.

If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage the report will be a public document kept within the proposal's case file and published on Dacorum Borough Council's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.



15. 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 current charge for a Dacorum Community Review Panel meeting is:

- £4,925 + VAT Community Review Panel meeting

The meeting charge includes a £1,000 contribution to a pool which is used to fund development and training sessions for panel members, and future panel recruitment.

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

Where a scheduled review is subsequently cancelled or postponed by the applicant, an administrative charge will be applied:

- 50% of full cost : less than two weeks before the review
- £800 + VAT : between two and four weeks before the review

16. 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

George Bull
Richard Dewhurst
Broony FitzPatrick
Quentin Watkinson
Cheryl Hall
John Kjorstad
Angela Lynch
Carole Niven
Michael Ridley
Ky Teasdale
Jack Watford

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



17. 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, and 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, Frame Projects.
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 Frame Projects, 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, Frame Projects.
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. If the proposal is at a pre-application stage, the report will not be made public and will only be shared with Dacorum Borough Council, the applicant and design team, and any other stakeholder bodies that Dacorum Borough Council has involved in the project.
6. If the proposal is reviewed at an application stage the report will be a public document kept within the proposal's case file and published on Dacorum Borough Council's website. Where the final review of a scheme takes place at a pre-application stage, the report of this meeting may also be made public once an application is submitted.
7. 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.



18. 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 becoming a panel member if they have a financial, commercial or professional interest in participating in Dacorum Borough Council's Community Review panel.

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.
2. Panel members are notified of the scheme coming before the panel at least a week in advance. At this time panel members should check the meeting information provided and declare any possible interest in a project to Frame Projects.
3. The Community Review Panel manager, Frame Projects, 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. In general, a panel member should not attend a review meeting if they have:
 - 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. They 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.
7. Councillors and Council employees are not eligible to be panel members.



19. KEY REFERENCES

Dacorum Borough Council planning

including the emerging Local Plan (post-June 2020)

www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development

Dacorum Strategy Design Guide SPD

www.dacorum.gov.uk/docs/default-source/strategic-planning/dacorum-strategic-design-guide-spd---part-2---design-principles.pdf?sfvrsn=d04e029e_4

National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF)

www.gov.uk/government/publications/national-planning-policy-framework--2

Hemel Garden Communities Charter

www.hemelgardencommunities.co.uk/our-vision

Hemel Place

www.thinkhemel.com



Apsley © Dacorum Borough Council

