



## **B-Hive response to Dacorum Borough Council’s proposal for BK12 – Berkhamsted Civic Centre and site to the rear of the High Street**

### **1. Introduction**

We wish to state our expression of interest in contributing to Dacorum Borough Council’s aspirations for BK12 as a possible development site within the current draft Local Plan. We welcome the ambition to renew Berkhamsted Civic Centre and consider the potential for other social and community uses on the site to the rear of the High Street, on the basis that:

- The BK12 site is an outdated and underutilised public and community asset that needs investment to be transformed into a much-needed community facility at the heart of the town;
- The site should continue to offer vital community services, taking account of pre-existing arrangements with tenants, and include the opportunity for affordable housing and / or working space in its development;
- The site must deliver improved community facilities and economic and social benefit for the borough;
- Redevelopment of the site and buildings, with a mix of community, commercial and residential usage, must be designed to deliver improved public amenity and operate as a vibrant and viable Community Asset;
- Sustainable redevelopment taking account of the Government's commitments about UK's Net Zero emissions target in 2050;
- The development must be in keeping with and enhance the historic centre of the town and reflect the needs of the Conservation area;
- The replacement Civic Centre facility must:
  - be available and accessible for a range of uses needed by local groups, businesses and residents alongside the delivery of vital community services;
  - be developed in keeping with the architectural historic characteristics of the town centre;
  - incorporate wider access links through the site and between the High Street and adjacent green space;

- be an improvement on its current capacity and flexibility of use, clearly demonstrating investment by the local authority to meet the needs of the local community.

## 2. B-Hive – our track record of working in partnership

B-Hive is leading the development of a viable, community-led plan for the BK12 site in line with the points in 1. above. Our approach is based on co-operation with a range of local community, voluntary, business, youth and faith organisations, listed in Appendix 1. Their concerns about the current provision of community space in the town and priorities for the future inform our plan for the site and are contained in the following sections.

Our experience and approach to BK12 reflect our skills and expertise to reach local residents, community groups and businesses and transform their needs into a clear vision and actionable plan. In 2013, we presented to DBC the consensus plan for the town centre area around the Civic Centre of the 30 local groups and 1,000 people who contributed to our public consultation [report](#). In 2015, the Dacorum Infrastructure Delivery Plan [Update](#) cited the B-Hive report when identifying the deficit in community space in Berkhamsted. In the same year, B-Hive was commended for our work with Hertfordshire County Council Library Services to deliver an extensive community consultation. B-Hive's resulting New Library for Berkhamsted [report](#) fed directly into the design brief for the new High Street library facility.

We are committed to maintaining our open and collaborative approach with Dacorum Borough Council. Our concept and offer for BK12 are in sections 4. and 5. below.

## 3. Local concerns and challenges

Berkhamsted lacks suitable, central, affordable, available community space to deliver community services, activities and offer support needed by local residents, businesses and organisations.

Housing development has been ongoing in Berkhamsted, Northchurch and surrounding villages since this issue was highlighted in the 2015 Dacorum Infrastructure Delivery Plan Update report, yet there has been no noticeable investment or improvement of community asset provision in the town by Dacorum Borough Council since then. Although local organisations work hard to address these shortcomings with, for example, the development of Open Door and additional facilities at the Hospice of St Francis, existing town centre provision is fragmented, dispersed, outdated and too often inaccessible, and the demand for centrally located multifunctional community space continues to grow.

This problem is set to be further exacerbated by the high level of new residential development proposed in the draft Local Plan. Potentially over 2,000 dwellings in and around the town could be added by 2038, placing huge further pressure on already inadequate community provision in the town. The 2020 C19 pandemic has exposed the pressing need for a central hub for community support, health and wellbeing services, local access to cultural and natural amenities, and the need to support local business and social enterprises.

The current main Civic Centre building has seen little investment over a long period and needs modernisation to meet the needs of our community. The interior is dated and in great need of refurbishment: the foyer is large, underutilised and unwelcoming; accessibility is restricted; the space is inflexible and not available for the range of services and activities needed; the bar and kitchen facilities are outdated and inadequate; the main hall lacks up-to-date technology and facilities. The building is unable to fulfil what the community needs, a ‘buzzing’ integrated community hub at the heart of the town.

#### 4. CIVIC CENTRAL – an opportunity

Further to the publication of the draft Local Plan, consulting with a wide range of local community organisations, B-Hive has developed CIVIC CENTRAL as our town’s shared vision to transform Berkhamsted’s Civic Centre into the prominent landmark and powerful asset our town needs. CIVIC CENTRAL will promote health and wellbeing, support business and social enterprise, foster cultural life and provide a living heritage hub in Berkhamsted town centre. It will be a source of pride and the focus for community life in our town.



B-Hive has conducted a January 2021 update survey of key local community organisations (see list in Appendix 1) to determine their specific needs for CIVIC CENTRAL. They have identified the following spaces they would want available for hire in an upgraded Centre. Redevelopment of the site, including improved design and configuration of the main and ancillary buildings, should accommodate these needs in multifunctional spaces, alongside the vital services and activities already on the site:

- a main hall / large venue to host events and performances
- space for community groups (cubs, parent and toddler groups, youth and senior organisations, special interest groups)
- a welcoming, informal space for community drop-in advice and support sessions, including a community wellbeing day centre
- exhibition space for art / heritage displays, including interactive / digital
- smaller spaces for meetings, advice sessions, rehearsal / recording or small performances / exercise or other classes
- a heritage hub to engage audiences in the town's rich past
- a kitchen for community / event catering / sale of drinks and food at a café / bar
- a voluntary sector resource centre / office
- start-up / workshop / shared office space.

## 5. Summary and next steps

To ensure the needs of the community are at the centre of any development plans, we are committed to collaboration with Dacorum Borough Council through the ongoing Local Plan consultation process, and the future development of a Master Plan for BK12 and ongoing delivery of the project.

Our initial concept plan for the BK12 site reflects the needs identified in our 2013 report and updated following our January '21 survey, with financial sustainability and community benefit of the site maximised through increased use of facilities and rental revenue. The plan is also fully aligned to Dacorum Borough Council's eight-point Local Plan objectives.

### Our offer

We look forward to sharing our initial concept plan for the BK12 site at an early meeting with DBC officers, including discussion of a range of development models / vehicles to ensure community representation and the potential for local fundraising contributions to the plans.

The need for improved community facilities in the town is long overdue, and we understand that the local engagement, planning and fundraising process can take time, so we would very much like to support DBC to take positive action early in the current Local Plan cycle.

Our requests

We wish to be kept informed of progress in the development of plans for the BK12 site by alerting BHiveBerko21@gmail.com.

We wish to present our concept plan at a meeting with Dacorum Borough Council officers in Spring 2021. Berkhamsted Town Council would also like to be represented at this meeting.



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## Appendix 1

B-Hive has consulted the local organisations below in the preparation of both this submission and the concept plan for Dacorum Borough Council officers.

1. Age UK
2. Berkhamsted Citizens Association
3. Berkhamsted & District Chamber of Commerce
4. Berkhamsted Film Society
5. Berkhamsted Local History and Museum Society (for Berkhamsted Heritage Hub)
6. Berkhamsted Music Society
7. Berkhamsted Town Council
8. Berkhamsted Town Hall Trust
9. Berkhamsted Theatre Company
10. Berkofest
11. Friends of St Peter's
12. Open Door
13. St Peter's Church
14. Sunnyside Rural Trust
15. Swan Youth Project
16. Transition Town
17. The Way Inn