



Nash Mills Chalk Mines News

Update 1

November/December 2008

Introduction

When we met residents in October to bring people up to date with investigations that had discovered chalk mine workings in the area we gave a commitment to keep you informed.

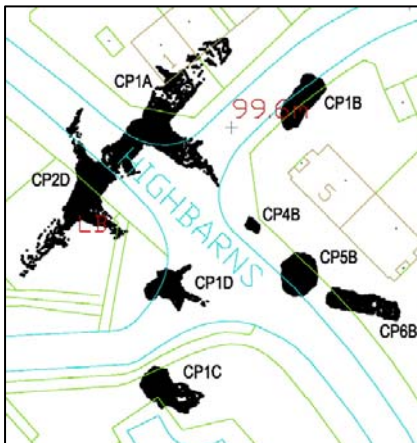
It is now one month since the public meeting and this newsletter is the first of what I propose will be regular communication with you. It provides an update on what we've been doing since the initial public meeting.

As we explained at the meeting, the investigation and remediation is a significant piece of work that will take some time to resolve. The process of unlocking funding and appointing contractors is lengthy and time consuming. This is due to the considerable sums of public money at stake which we have a public duty to ensure is spent wisely throughout every phase of the project.

However, rest assured that we will do this, that we will undertake this work properly and that we will make every endeavour to keep local residents informed at every stage.

Mike Peters
Director of Environment and Regeneration

First stage of works completed



In mid November, work to fill in a cavity across the footpath and highway outside no. 7 Highbarns (the cavity referred to at the public meeting as CP5B) was completed and signed off. This was the location causing particular concern due to its relatively shallow depth..

To get work started quickly, Dacorum Borough Council employed the contractors who had been working at 5 Highbarns who therefore had the necessary equipment on site. The work was funded as an exceptional item following agreement from Borough Councillors to release emergency funding.

Update from Hertfordshire Highways

Now that the cavity under the closed section of Highbarns has been filled, Hertfordshire Highways will be working to get this stretch of road back to normal as soon as possible. The next step is to resurface the footway so it is safe for public use. The County Council also have to carry out some statutory procedures before the closure positions can be changed. Both these pieces of work should be completed by mid-January and this section of Highbarns to the south-east of the junction with Pond Road will then be reopened.

As discussed at the public meeting, following the reopening of this section of the road it is Hertfordshire Highways intention that Highbarns will then be closed just north-west of the junction with Pond Road and partially across the access to East Green. It is anticipated that this will take place in January/early February. Pond Road will remain closed near its junction with Highbarns.

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Update from Hertfordshire Highways (continued from page 1)

Residents will receive a letter from Hertfordshire Highways notifying them of the changes to the closures.

We have also taken on board concerns about the robustness of the temporary moveable barriers that are currently being used for the road closures. Hertfordshire Highways is investigating ways of making the barriers used for the longer-term closures planned for the new year both sturdier and easier on the eye.

We will continue to monitor the site on a weekly basis and remain committed to progressing this work, while protecting public safety.

Funding Future work

Dacorum Borough Council is seeking funding from the English Partnership's Land Stabilisation Programme to help pay for works needed in the area.

The initial proposal for funding submitted by the Council is currently being reviewed by English Partnerships (EP). This will be followed up with an outline application and, following confirmation by EP that their basic criteria have been met, a full application.

Putting together a full application is an extremely complicated piece of work that will require further detailed geological surveys, valuations, full costing of works and an explanation of the methods and techniques to be used.

The Council will need to bring in specialist project managers and engineering consultants who have experience in dealing with abandoned mining works to make sure we put together the strongest possible funding bid.

We have been advised that recruiting this specialist help from the outset will improve our chances of maximising the funding available from English Partnerships (see below).

Progress on Project Management

The Council has advertised for companies to bid for the project management contract and the Cabinet Councillors have delegated the actual appointment of a contractor so that there is no need for a further Cabinet approval and the process is as streamlined as possible. Potential suppliers have up to Christmas to submit their details. The Council will draw up a shortlist of potential suppliers in January with a view to making a final appointment during March, after contractor selection and legal requirements have been met.

The successful contractor will be appointed for a four year period and a key part of their responsibilities will include regular liaison with residents.

Learning from other Councils

The chalk mines in the Highbarns area are not an isolated incident. There are examples of abandoned mining works around the country, the nearest being in Hatfield.

Officers from Dacorum Borough Council have been speaking to their counterparts at Welwyn Hatfield Council and in Bath and North East Somerset where lengthy programmes of work have been completed.

We are gathering a wealth of learning and advice from listening to the experiences of other Councils and will use this to benefit the project here in Nash Mills.

While the chalk mines in Hatfield were small in size to those we believe to be in Highbarns, those in Combe Down near Bath are significantly larger. These have been time consuming projects that have taken a number of years to resolve but the experience of others show that discoveries of this nature can be satisfactorily remedied with the minimum of disruption to the whole community.

Information on-line

We have created a dedicated area of the Dacorum Borough Council web site where you can find the most up-to-date information on the Highbarns chalk mines project. As well as electronic copies of this and future newsletters you will find:

- Questions and Answers
- Minutes and presentations from public meetings
- Cabinet and full Council papers
- General advice

Insurance issues

As part of your building insurance cover you will be obliged to provide to your insurance company details of anything that could affect your property in the future. This includes information about the chalk mines.

A number of residents have asked for guidance on what information to provide to their insurance company. In response, the Council's Insurance Manager, Linda Dargue (who was at the public meeting), has suggested the following advisory note for insurers.

"Old chalk mine workings dating back to the 1700's have been discovered within the High Barns/Pond Road area of Hemel Hempstead. As a result of initial investigations some remedial work, (land grouting to fill a void space) has already taken place beneath the road in Highbarns.

In light of the findings of the initial investigation Dacorum Borough Council together with Hertfordshire County Council are looking at what further work is required to ascertain the extent of the workings. The results of these investigations will then be used to establish what other remediation works may be required, in order to stabilise the land in a proper and orderly manner.

There is a Government funding programme (English Partnerships – Land Stabilisation Programme) for dealing with chalk mines. Dacorum Borough Council is in the process of submitting an application for such funding."

Closing thoughts...

If you have any general enquiries about the chalk mines, please contact Jenny Young on (01442) 228834 or jennifer.young@dacorum.gov.uk. We will log your enquiry and arrange a response.

You can also use the Contact Form (available on our website, or by calling the number above) to send a query in writing or report a local issue you think may be relevant to the investigations.

The local knowledge that residents are able to pass on will add to the information we already have and help us to build up a more complete picture.

If are concerned about any recent or sudden changes to your property or the surrounding area, please telephone our Building Control team on 01442 228587 for advice.

Other useful contact numbers and web sites

Hertfordshire Highways

Tel: 01727 816000

Web site: www.hertsdirect.org/highways

Association of British Insurers

Tel: 020 7600 3333

Web site: www.abi.org.uk

English Partnerships (Land Stabilisation Programme)

Web site: www.englishpartnerships.co.uk/lsp