

3. Borough Portrait

Location and Context

- 3.1 The name Dacorum comes from the “Hundred of Dacorum,” one of the ancient administrative units of Hertfordshire. The borough covers 81 square miles of West Hertfordshire extending almost from the outskirts of Watford, northwards to the Chiltern Hills (see Figure 3). In 2011 it was home to approximately 144,800 people, making it the largest district in Hertfordshire. The population is forecast to increase.
- 3.2 The majority of residents live in the principal town of Hemel Hempstead. This is a Mark 1 New Town and will continue to be the focus for development and change within the borough. Much of the town’s infrastructure is over 50 years old and in need of renewal. The town centre and Maylands Business Park are designated as key regeneration areas (Map 1).
- 3.3 In addition to Hemel Hempstead, there are also two market towns (Berkhamsted and Tring) and a number of villages, all with their own distinctive character. Almost 85% of the borough is rural. 60% of this area, and just over half of the borough as a whole, falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt.
- 3.4 Dacorum’s location on the western side of Hertfordshire means that the area has strong links with the adjoining counties of Buckinghamshire and Bedfordshire. Significant growth is expected for Luton, whilst many smaller nearby towns, such as Amersham and Chesham, will experience relatively little change.
- 3.5 Much of the borough’s countryside falls within the Metropolitan Green Belt, reflecting its proximity to London and the development pressures that this brings. This countryside is accessible to visitors from a wide area. The Chiltern Hills are one of the most accessible areas of countryside for residents of many large towns and cities, including Aylesbury, Luton, Watford and London to spend their leisure time and plays an important role as their ‘green lung’.
- 3.6 The main lines of communication through the borough are the A41 trunk road, the Euston to Glasgow (West Coast main line) railway and the Grand Union Canal. The M1 runs down the eastern boundary and the M25 crosses the south-eastern tip of the borough. There are limited east-west links. Luton airport is easily accessible from the M1, with Heathrow airport also within a relatively easy distance. There are mainline stations at Berkhamsted, Tring, Kings Langley and two stations in Hemel Hempstead. All offer good commuter and leisure services south to Watford and London, and north to Milton Keynes, Northampton and Birmingham.

Figure 3: Dacorum's Location in West Hertfordshire

Dacorum's Economy

- 3.7 Dacorum has a successful economy, which employs around 60,700 people (2009)¹ across a range of sectors and size of businesses. Historically, the economy of the area has included a strong element of manufacturing. The area was once a centre for paper making, with a number of mills located along the canal, although all of these have now ceased commercial production. In recent years the manufacturing sector has declined significantly. Around a quarter of jobs are now in knowledge based industries such as high-tech manufacturing, financial and business services (FBS), computing and research and development (R&D), and communications industries. Storage and distribution, retail, health, education and the service sectors also employ significant numbers of people. The rural economy and tourism are relatively small, but locally important, sectors. There are 7,375 businesses (March 2012).
- 3.8 The Maylands Business Park in Hemel Hempstead is of significance to the borough and wider sub-region and is a focus for regeneration. The Buncefield oil terminal, on the eastern edge of the Maylands area, is of national significance for the storage and distribution of fuel – in particular aviation fuel. The site is subject to reconstruction following a fire in December 2005.

¹ ONS 2009 data, from www.nomisweb.co.uk

- 3.9 Hertfordshire has the highest average income in the East of England. At £29,456, Dacorum's average annual income is slightly lower than that of Hertfordshire and the adjoining authorities of St. Albans and Three Rivers. However, it is significantly higher than that of nearby Luton, and slightly higher than for the adjoining authority of Central Bedfordshire².
- 3.10 Unemployment levels are lower than the national average, but slightly higher than the average for Hertfordshire. However, these levels vary within the borough, with Hemel Hempstead's unemployment rate almost twice that of Berkhamsted and Tring.
- 3.11 Adult education qualification levels in Dacorum are above average for Hertfordshire and England, with only 7.5% of the adult working population having no recognised qualifications³. Nevertheless, there are still local skills shortages, particularly in terms of basic numeracy skills and specialist skills within certain employment sectors.
- 3.12 Due to good transport links, many residents work outside the borough. However, the proportion of residents working elsewhere is currently the lowest in the county, making Dacorum more 'self-contained' than the rest of Hertfordshire. Within the sub-region the borough's principal competitors for office-based jobs are Watford and St Albans, with Luton and Hatfield also seeking to attract local employers. Historically the M4 corridor has been more successful at attracting new employers than south-west Hertfordshire. A significant number of residents regularly commute into London.
- 3.13 While there are high levels of vehicle ownership, a sixth of households do not own a car⁴. The level of vehicle ownership varies across the borough, generally corresponding with indicators of deprivation. Vehicle ownership is higher in the rural wards than those in and around Hemel Hempstead.
- 3.14 Hemel Hempstead is the principal retail destination within the borough. The larger towns of Milton Keynes and Watford are Hemel Hempstead's main competitors. Dacorum's market towns and small villages play an important retail role, especially in terms of convenience goods and provide a greater range of specialist, independent shops.

Dacorum's Community

- 3.15 The age structure of Dacorum's population is close to that for the country as a whole, though the proportion of people aged 20-29 is lower than the national average.

² Median annual pay, gross: Nomisweb.co.uk 2010

³ ONS, Annual Population Survey, Nomisweb.co.uk 2010

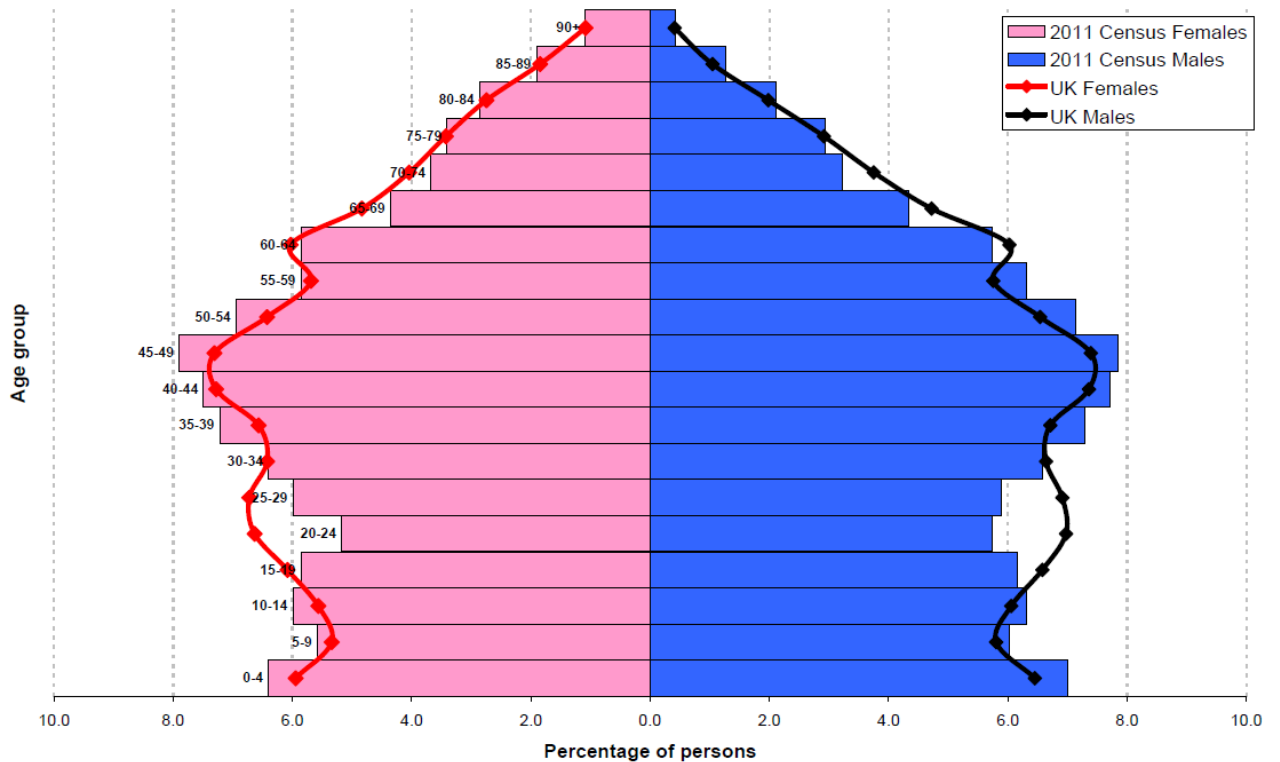
⁴ Census 2011

Around a quarter of the borough’s population is under 20 and a fifth are over 60 (see Figure 4). Future projections indicate that the number of people over the age of 60 will increase substantially by 2031 (see Figure 5). This raises challenges for the borough in terms of providing the right mix of accommodation and ensuring easy access to essential services and facilities.

Figure 4: Population Structure – 2011

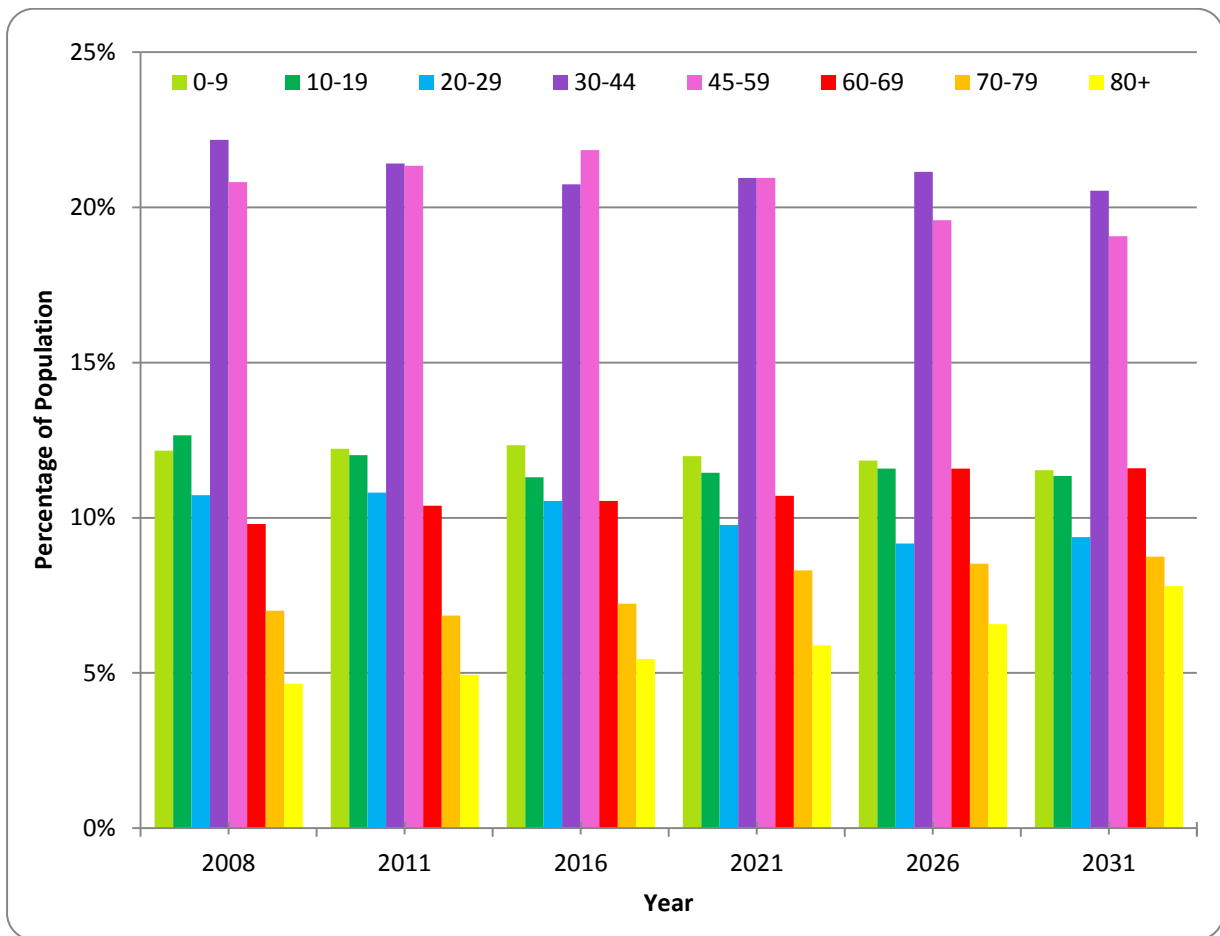
Age pyramid - 2011 Census - Dacorum

Source: ONS, 2011 Census Population Estimates for Local Authorities (published 16th July 2012) and for UK (published 17th Dec 2012). Crown copyright.



Source: Census 2011, Office for National Statistics

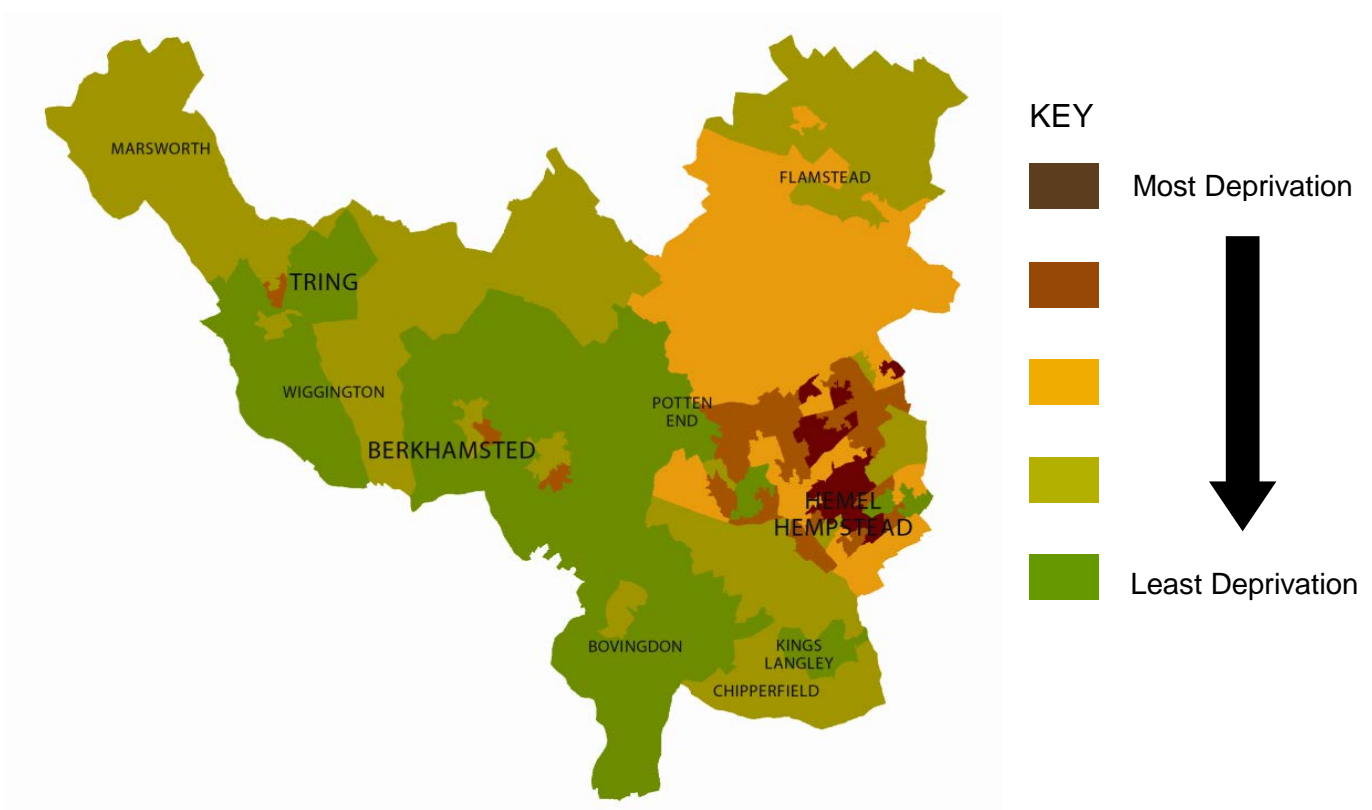
Figure 5: Population Structure Projections



Source: ONS 2008 based sub-regional population projections

- 3.16 Dacorum is less ethnically diverse than the average for England, with just over 9% of the population classifying themselves as ‘non-white.’ The Asian population is the largest non-white group. There is a varied ethnic mix across the borough, with Hemel Hempstead having the highest non-white population. There was a noticeable increase in the number of people from Eastern Europe between 2001 and 2011.
- 3.17 The 2010 Index of Multiple Deprivation ranks the area as only the 266th most deprived district out of 326 authorities. Although overall deprivation levels are generally low, there are pockets of deprivation. The least deprived wards tend to be located in the western half of the borough (see Figure 6). The most deprived wards in the borough are all located at Hemel Hempstead, underlying the need for social and economic regeneration initiatives to be focussed upon the town.

Figure 6: Relative Levels of Deprivation across Dacorum



3.18 Housing in Dacorum is expensive by national standards. The average house price for Dacorum is almost £330,000, compared with the average for the London Commuter Belt of around £324,000⁵. Whilst earnings growth has kept pace with national figures, house prices have more than doubled over the same period. The borough has high levels of public sector housing stock, particularly in Hemel Hempstead; a legacy of its New Town roots. Provision of additional affordable housing to meet existing and future needs is a key challenge.

3.19 The 2011 census found over 80% of Dacorum’s population to be in good health. However, there are inequalities within the borough by location, gender, level of deprivation and ethnicity.

3.20 Crime levels in Dacorum are around average for the East of England, and slightly lower than both the national and county averages. Total recorded crime has actually fallen in recent years.

Dacorum’s Environment

3.21 The borough has a range of very attractive and distinctive landscapes, with several significant visitor attractions including the Ashridge Estate, Grand Union Canal and

⁵ Hometrack, March 2010

Tring's Zoological Museum. Over a third of the area falls within the Chilterns Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. This designation, together with the Green Belt, constrains the amount and type of development that is allowed within the rural areas. The countryside is one of the assets most highly valued by the local community⁶ and it is well used for recreational purposes. The beech woods at Ashridge and Tring woodlands are designated as a Special Area of Conservation (SAC) and protected under European law.

- 3.22 The borough's landscape ranges from the rolling hills, beech woods and chalk streams that characterise the Chilterns, to the lower, flatter landscape of Boarscroft Vale. It contains numerous sites of wildlife interest and some rare species, including the black poplar and water voles. Dacorum also has a rich and varied historic heritage, from the distinctive New Town architecture to more traditional brick and flint buildings of the market towns. The Grand Union canal runs north to south, formerly providing the power for the paper mills that once dominated the Gade Valley. The borough is home to 25 Conservation Areas, 4 Registered Parks and Gardens, some 2,000 Listed Buildings, around 30 Scheduled Ancient Monuments and many known archaeological sites.

⁶ Dacorum Residents Survey 2009, Opinion Research Services

