



Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 26th February 2015

MINUTES

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Chris Ridley	DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF
Paul Harris	Green Party
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Phil Pennington	DEF
Michael Nidd	PERA/CPRE Herts.
Siva Niranjana	DEF/WHAG
Norman Jones	Ramblers
Martin Hicks	DEF
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe	DBC/HCC Councillor

1. Apologies

Dennis Harvey	Hemel Nature
Fiona Guest	DBC

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1	Apologies Cllr Fiona Guest, Dennis Harvey
2	Minutes of the Last Meeting held Update in item 3
3	Matters arising
3.1.	<p>Halsey Field (Roman Snails etc.) – Subsequent to the DEF tour on June 8th 2014, the Herts. & Middlesex Wildlife Trust surveyed the site in July and had a meeting on Nov 6th to discuss the result of the survey, and to make recommendations for protective status and subsequent management. The latest news from Judith Cox from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust (26.02.15) is that ‘The owner of Former Halsey School Playing Fields has been formally notified that the site has been selected by the Local Wildlife Sites Partnership as a Local Wildlife Site.’</p> <p>Chris Ridley (C.R.) has emailed Judith, thanking her for her hard work in surveying the field etc. and asking for information about future management of the site.</p> <p>Gruff Edwards (G.E.) asked Martin Hicks (M.H.) what he thought might be the next steps, and Martin replied that this would depend on what plans Herts. County Council had for the</p>

field.

William White-Lowe (W.W-L.) remarked that the Herts County Council tended to hang on to pieces of land, just in case they might need them in the future.

3.2 **LA3 Housing**

G.E. said that there had been 62 online responses to question 1 of the Master Plan consultation on the Green Belt housing area LA3 (West Hemel Hempstead). These responses included DEF's and one on behalf of the Environment Agency which had raised concerns over water supply and run-off:

On water supply the Agency point out that the groundwater beneath the site feeds potable water supplies, and that the area is part of the Mid-Chilterns Chalk groundwater body, a Drinking Water Protected Area which is currently classified at 'poor' status by the Thames River Basin Management Plan. They say that any plan would need to ensure that further groundwater contamination does not occur as a result of the development.

On flooding, the Agency points out that there are some surface water flooding issues through the north-east and southern parts of the site. They say that the development proposal should address these issues, ensuring that flood risk is not increased on or off site and that a Greenfield runoff rate is maintained. (DEF Steering Group took "Greenfield runoff rate" being maintained to mean that the development would produce no extra run-off, and noted that this appears to be a stronger requirement than Core Strategy policy CS31.)

The Agency also back water efficiency measures in housing design, pointing out that Hertfordshire is an area of extreme water stress due to limited resources and increasing demand.

Regarding Shrubhill Common Local Nature Reserve, the Agency are pleased that it has been recognised as a valuable piece of green infrastructure and that links will be maintained with the wider countryside. This concurs with DEF's submission to the Master Plan, as reported in the minutes of the November meeting, which calls for a strip of land no less than 15 metres wide to be maintained as a Wildlife Corridor.

Michael Nidd (M.N.) asked: as there are going to be 350 dwelling built on the LA1 development, why had there been no DEF response to this site? The same sort of concerns apply to this development as the LA3 site, but LA1 is a sloping site, where the bottom part is often flooded.

Gruff explained that DEF had opposed all the "Local Allocations", i.e. building on Green Belt, in its responses to the various stages of the Core Strategy, but that the group of members convened at the Master Plan stage had greater collective knowledge of LA3 and had decided to focus on it. DEF member Dennis Harvey had responded to the Master Plan on LA1.

M.N. added his concern that these developments were being presented as a done deal, whereas until planning permission has been approved, that land is still Green Belt.

He remarked that not many people living in the Grovehill area had expressed concern about LA1; but many of the inhabitants of Piccotts End were complaining about the plans.

Meanwhile, the proposed new build between Fletcher Way and Piccotts End road would wreck the view across to Gadebridge Park, and be detrimental to Hemel Old Town.

M.N. added that, the plans for Little Hay Golf Course having been seen off, a planning application for a complete redevelopment of the Bourne End Mills site for warehousing, a single vast warehouse plus secure lorry compound, with 24-hour lighting has also been turned down, as no councillors would agree to it.

Steve Wilson (S.W.) commented that WWF has just brought out some information (a 62 page document), about chalk streams, which might help any opposition to the proposed developments

in Hemel. Every new house will use water and therefore have an influence on the local chalk streams.

(Later Note: All the LA Master Plans are still subject to Examinations in Public by an independent inspector.)

3.3 **Litter in Dacorum**

Following Mike Ridley's presentation on 27th November GE sent the letter that Mike (M.R.) had drafted to the Council Leader Andrew Williams on 10/12/14, with copies to the Chief Executive Sally Marshall, The Environment Portfolio Holder Julie Laws, David Austin (Neighbourhood Delivery) and Joe Guiton (Neighbourhood Action).

GE received a postal reply from Andy Williams on 10/1/15 saying that he had discussed the comments in our letter with officers and was waiting for them to provide him with more information, and that when he had this he would be happy to provide a fuller reply or alternatively to attend with colleagues a future meeting of DEF.

The DEF Steering Group decided that GE should respond to Mr Williams, taking up the offer to attend a DEF meeting, after receiving the proffered "fuller reply". GE did this by E-mail on Jan 16th, which included the scheduled dates for DEF meetings in 2015.

G.E. suggested encouraging DEF members to participate in the Street Champions scheme, which the Council launched in March 2012. DEF had heard from Joe Guiton 17/11/14 that the Scheme had 41 registered street champions, some more active than others, and that the Council would soon be offering the Street Champions the opportunity to carry out Environmental Audits with the Neighbourhood Support Officers, which would enable DBC to measure the condition of an area so that it can be improved and monitored.

The Street Champions' Welcome Letter on DBC website refers to a forthcoming "Street Champions Online Portal" - a new online reporting system which will make reporting and tracking reports much easier. GE had E-mailed Joe Guiton on Feb. 6th asking whether this had been implemented. In reply Mr Guiton said that they were still working towards this (objective) so not all of it had been implemented. It was possible to report issues online, and Street Champions could have an ID login to save putting all of their details in each time. They were in the process of looking at other ways to improve the reporting service.

G.E. said that he had today (Feb 26th) received a letter from Cllr Williams replying to DEF's letter about the litter problem.

M.R. summed up the main points:

1) Mr. Williams welcomed the appreciation of the wildflower planting in Hemel. The idea is gaining support, and planting will be increased this year, in Canal Fields and Woodhall Farm. He was not aware that the Council had allowed the number of bins to decrease through vandalism or decay. If DEF knew of any that had disappeared through vandalism they were invited to report them to him.

(G.E. commented that he knew of some bins which had disappeared, and in June 2012 he had reported them to Clean Safe and Green without success. He would double check and again report to Cllr Williams.

M.R. said he has noticed there is often litter around the bins, which may be caused by foxes, and more secure bins may be the answer.)

Cllr Williams kindly said he would attend the DEF meeting on 14th May, to discuss the issues raised.

	<p>G.E. applied to be a street champion two weeks ago, but his application has not yet been acknowledged.</p> <p>PH noticed a lot of litter on Warners End Green last Tuesday after the weekend football matches.</p> <p>W.W-L. said that teams were fined if they leave litter and advised members to let him know of any other incidents of littering by teams and their supporters.</p> <p>G.E. advised members to take a photograph of the litter, and send this to A.W.</p> <p>S.W. asked if the council are using camera technology to enforce litter control.</p> <p>W.W-L. replied he wasn't sure.</p> <p>S.W. said that Pancake Lane was a regular tipping site, so could a camera not be used there to prosecute offenders.</p> <p>W.W-L. explained that the council haven't got the right licence to prosecute, but they keep working on different problem sites in Hemel.</p>
4	<p>Update on Pavement Parking</p> <p>Referring to the Forum's meeting on May 23rd 2013 GE said that he had maintained a correspondence on the subject with the Police and with Dacorum MP Mike Penning, who is now Police Minister, most recently in an E-mail to Mr. Penning on Jan 21st this year.</p> <p>One issue had been the lack of clarity on what constituted an obstruction of the pavement. The definition supplied on the Police Website at https://www.herts.police.uk/advice/illegal_parking.aspx does now contain an example of obstruction as "parked across a footway blocking free passage to pedestrians, particularly those using mobility scooters or with push chairs", which is satisfactory, though GE suggested the addition of "wheelchairs" to the list. The same page also confirms that "Hertfordshire Constabulary still has the power to act on obstruction offences".</p> <p>GE said that the outstanding issue was the difference between this definition and power, and what appears to be everyday policy, as reflected an unsatisfactory response from the police Safer Neighbourhood Team in February 2014, which included assertions that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • The interests of motorists are greater than those of pedestrians. • Pedestrians should be forced into the road or take an alternative route if they find the footway obstructed. • Informal agreements by residents override the interests of the public right of way. <p>A response from Corporate Services at Herts. Constabulary to Mr. Penning, which was copied to GE in November 2014, said that these issues had been passed to the Chief Inspector of Dacorum Community Safety Partnership.</p> <p>WW-L explained that unless police see someone parking on the pavement, they won't do anything.</p> <p>Norman Jones (N.J.) advised that the organisation 'Living Streets' now have a new executive who is very keen to stop pavement parking.</p>
5	<p>Current consultation on Bus Services.</p> <p>There is a public transport consultation which closes on 10th April.</p> <p>http://www.hertsdirect.org/newsevents/news/18647357/</p>

Paul Harris (P.H.) summarised points from the letter he had written to the Hemel Gazette, which read:

“The proposal by Hertfordshire County Council to stop subsidising bus services from 7.30pm in the evening and on Sundays is an attack on the liberty of anybody who does not possess a car. It robs people of the right to move freely around our district, taking away their ability to participate in activity if it occurs in the evening or on a Sunday.

It will affect bus users whether they are elderly, or non-drivers with health problems, or are on a low income or attend evening classes. Can the County explain how non car-owning shift workers can expect to keep their jobs when they have no way of getting to or returning from work?

These plans will force people to use their cars even more, increasing exhaust pollution and carbon emissions, thereby accelerating climate change.

Economically this will hit local businesses, restaurants, shops etc., as increasing numbers of people will opt to stay at home in the evening and on Sundays. It will rob walkers and visitors of the ability to access the local beautiful countryside.

We live in one of the wealthiest counties in the sixth richest country in the world, yet the County Council pleads poverty. It needs to be more innovative in raising finance to subsidise such an essential public service. I would strongly urge the people of Dacorum to oppose the proposed cuts to their bus services by completing the consultation survey. Please do this by before the close date in early April.”

Paul also gave the following statistics:

The first bus consultation was late summer and autumn 2014. From notes made at this consultation meeting for Parish Councillors held in Stevenage, the County Council stressed that they wanted to save £ 700,000 on bus service subsidies. Commercial operators are financially responsible for 75% of services in Hertfordshire.

Hertfordshire County Council fund 11% of bus passenger services in Herts. The remaining 14% comes from out of County providers where their services cross into Herts. HCC stated that the saving would be made by cutting services from 6.30 pm, and Sunday services. Following the consultation this has been changed to 7.30 pm, but there are still no Sunday services apart from essential hospital services. There was 96% opposition to the first consultation The current consultation ends on April 10th.

N.J. questioned some of these figures, but it was decided to write them in the minutes, then they could be corrected later, if necessary.

Phil Pennington (P.P). asked if some routes would be cut, as well as evening and Sunday buses. W.W-L said he couldn't be sure what the bus companies would do, but some services would probably be cut. However only 2% of journeys were likely to be affected.

N.J. said people who drive a car wouldn't respond to the survey.

M.R. said although he had a car, he would use the bus more if he could get back from the train station in the evening.

C.R. said although she has a car, she often use the bus around town, when it's convenient.

M.R. said there should be a complete re-think about organising public transport in the evening, such as sharing taxis, dial-a-ride or similar schemes. A creative solution should be found and implemented. Evening trains back from London are always full, even around midnight, so there is an obvious need for transport throughout the evening.

S.W. said he has studied networks, and the more you reduce a network, the less it is used. If the system is reliable and frequent it will be used more. If services are cut, the system will start to

	<p>implode.</p> <p>W.W-L commented it must be remembered that young people are some of the major users of public transport. His son uses the buses a lot and could comment on some of the stupidities of the present system.</p> <p>N.J. observed that Abbots Langley will be cut off in the evening if evening bus services cease. S.W. thought we shouldn't cut off rural areas. He also remarked that we are asked not to drink and drive, but if there are no evening buses, this more difficult.</p> <p>G.E. asked whether the group thought we should have a general DEF response to the consultation.</p> <p>S.N. thought a DEF response was a good idea, then if people wished to respond individually they could do that too.</p> <p>Steve and Paul offered to get together to pen a DEF response and Gruff said he'd also like to be involved in this.</p>
6	<p>Result of last year's River Gade consultation</p> <p>S.W explained that on Monday 9th December 2013, he attended a River Gade day workshop, together with some Dacorum Borough councillors, and many other parties interested in the Gade.</p> <p>The workshop was to generate ideas for the river Gade, so it would unify the town, all the way up to Apsley</p> <p>However, Steve has heard nothing more about the outcome of the workshop, and recently contacted Emma Cooper, one of the chief organisers, to ask about the results. However, she thought that Norma Young from the Environmental Agency was dealing with the meeting outcomes. And when Steve contacted Norma, he was told that she thought the Council was dealing with the matter.</p> <p>Steve remarked that this workshop could have had a great local impact, but people don't seem to feel responsible for the outcome. The river should be dealt with as an entity, not piecemeal. For example a lot of money is currently being spent on the Water Gardens, but these will be no use without water to feed them.</p> <p>Water is often the centre of a development, and dealt with sympathetically could become a centrepiece of a town, e.g. Barnes Reservoir development.</p> <p>He pointed out that some good river management solved the flooding problem last year</p> <p>P.H. pointed out that the water quality varies along the course of the Gade.</p> <p>S.W. said the bulk of the silt comes off the roads, and the amount of abstraction has been catastrophic for the chalk streams. Chalk streams do not naturally dry up (except in the higher reaches at certain times of the year).</p> <p>Martin Hicks (M.H.) remarked that the heads of our chalk streams have moved downstream over the years.</p> <p>W.W-L. explained that the council has not got involved with the Friends of Gadebridge Park group, as there are not enough staff to cover these meetings. It would be a sensible idea to coalesce the Friends of Gadebridge park with DEF.</p> <p>S.W. stated that the planks of wood near the Bury must stay in position, but no one seems to understand this. When they are in place, the Water Gardens won't flood, as they have the function of managing the flow of water through the town.</p> <p>M.H. remarked that when the Water Gardens were first designed, there was more water in the system, because abstraction was less.</p> <p>S.W. said that he would follow up the outcomes of the day's workshop with Nancy and M.H. added that the organisers have a legal obligation to act after such a meeting.</p> <p>S.W. also said that he has been told that the Orange Balsam which is at present beginning to colonise the banks of the Gade should be cleared, or the plant will begin to block the channel of</p>

water.

W.W-L. asked S.W. if he could write a document of concerns, detailing what needs to be done about the river, and send it to him.

P.P informed the group that Nancy Young of the Environment Agency Colne Catchment Team and the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project have plans for the Bulbourne valley, and these are due to be executed over the next two years, now funding is available. This may help the river Gade; Alan Beechy of the Chilterns Chalk Stream Project is leading this project, and the measures could be continued up the river Gade.

Any other business

Phil Pennington

GE said that, sadly for DEF, Phil Pennington would be moving away from Dacorum following his retirement at the Boxmoor Trust in April. In May 2013 when Phil had handed over chairmanship, Gruff had thanked Phil for his term of office since 2006, but now was the time to thank him for the formative role that he had played in DEF since its setting up in 1993, which had included setting up and actively participating in four working groups, frequent attendance at and contribution to lobbying meetings and other events on DEF's behalf and in recent years in hosting DEF meetings at the Boxmoor Trust Centre. G.E. presented Phil with a DEF commemorative mug.

Meeting Dates and Venues for 2015

Following PP's retirement at the Boxmoor Trust in April, use of the Boxmoor Trust premises for our meetings would no longer be free. GE and SW visited the fire station in Queensway, Hemel on Friday 9/1/15. They were shown two meeting rooms (one upstairs, one downstairs). Downstairs had a computer projection facility. Upstairs may also have this in future. Both rooms were well heated. It was kindly agreed that DEF would not be charged for use of either room. The Steering Group decided to take up the offer, and free dates have subsequently been checked with our contact at the Fire Station.

DEF meeting dates for 2015 now stand as:

Steering Group (Tues)	DEF Quarterly (Thurs)
Jan 13th	Feb 26th BT
March 17th BT	May 14th FS
June 16th SG	Aug 27th FS
Sept 29th SG	Nov 12th FS

Key: BT = Boxmoor Trust Centre,

FS = Meeting Room at Fire Station, Queensway

SG = Steering Group member's home - to be agreed

Community Orchard

M. H. told the meeting about a community orchard which he was going to help set up in Nant End, near Leverstock Green, as part of the Local Food Initiative. The Housing Section and Food Group will also be involved in setting this up. With luck, the first planting should take place this autumn, and there should be room for about 60 to 70 small fruit trees, and a surrounding hedge. The project could eventually include cookery classes, and be combined with a health agenda.