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**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting – 17th May 2012**

MINUTES

Attendance

Phil Pennington	DEF Chairman
Gruff Edwards	DEF Vice Chair
Emma Norrington	Sunnyside Rural Trust
Lizzy Staincliffe	Dacorum Borough Council
Marion Baker	Transition Town Berkhamsted
Cllr David Nobbs	Chipperfield Parish Council
Sheila Doyle	HH GM Action Group
Jason Williams	Hemel in Transition
Bob Farrer	Water measurement, Bulbourne
Cllr Gordon Godfrey	Northchurch Parish Council
Roger Hands	DEF Water Group/Box Moor Trust
Dennis Harvey	Hemel Nature
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Adrienne Gear	Community Action Dacorum
Cllr Fiona Guest	Dacorum Borough Council
Jean Blackman	Friends of the Earth
Alex Back	Veolia Water Central
Dee Fisher	Hemel in Transition
Jude Rook	Hemel in Transition
Paul Harris	Green Party
Cllr Anthony Armytage	Berkhamsted Town Council

65. Apologies

Steve Wilson	Royal Geographical Society
Peter Thring	CPRE Herts
Alan Sweetman	Groundwork
Cllr Julie Laws	Dacorum Borough Council
Paul Maison	British Waterways
Alison King	Dacorum Borough Council
Sheila Pilkinton	Markyate Parish Council

The meeting started at 7.30pm

1. Minutes of the last meeting & matters arising

- 1.1 G Edwards asked whether Mike Penning MP received the minutes from the last meeting as he didn't send them. P Pennington asked whether anyone objected to the minutes being sent to Mike Penning. No one objected. R Hands asked for the minutes of this meeting to also be sent to Mike Penning. F Guest suggested that all minutes should be sent to Mike Penning. G Edwards replied that they are not always relevant, but that he particularly felt that the minutes from the last meeting should be sent due to the discussion on HS2. It was agreed that minute sending would be left to G Edwards discretion.

2. Information Items

- 2.1. M Baker reported that there was likely to be some more progress on the local food strategy:

In 2009 Dacorum Environmental Forum approached the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee seeking support from the council for the development of a local food strategy. The work was to be done in conjunction with f3 a professional group with over 10 years experience in the local food sector. F3 were looking for Lottery funding to do pilot studies to get local food strategies underway for 3 local authorities.

It has taken a while, but we have been told unofficially that the f3 lottery bid is likely to be successful, so now Dacorum have the opportunity to continue the development of their current local food strategy with help from experienced outside consultants.

The f3 project will aim to create and pilot a Toolkit to help communities develop action plans for their local food economies, at a local authority scale. On completion of the pilots, a final version of the Toolkit will be made available online for any interested local authority or community group to use.

Sunnyside Rural Trust in conjunction with the Dacorum Local Food Initiative are just about to submit a final stage bid to Esme Fairbairn to fund the salary for a local food coordinator for Dacorum. The aim being to make local food more accessible to all members of the community. If this bid were successful it would work very well with the f3 food strategy project.

F Guest asked M Baker to let her know when the Lottery funding for the f3 work had been officially announced so that she could inform the Environment Overview and Scrutiny Committee.

- 2.2. G Edwards reported that DEF had received an email message stating that the council's pre-submission core strategy would now be considered at a specially convened Full Council meeting on Tuesday 22 May, and not at the Annual Council meeting on 16 May as previously advised. At this meeting, Councillors will be asked to agree the response to issues raised during the recent public consultation and confirm a list of changes that are proposed to be made to the plan in order to address some of the concerns raised.

It remains the Council's intention to submit the Core Strategy and other associated documents to the Planning Inspectorate at the end of May.

The Planning Inspectorate will then allocate an independent Inspector to preside over the public Examination into the plan. It is expected that this Examination will be held in early autumn 2012.

- 2.3 G Edwards reported that DEF had received an email message from Katherine Wyatt including reports from the Local Nature Partnership stakeholder event that was held on 27th February 2012.

The email also states that the process to apply to become a Government-recognised LNP has now opened and an application will be submitted for the proposed Hertfordshire LNP for the 6th June deadline. It asks for a letter of support for this application to be returned to by Wednesday 30th May at the latest.

It was agreed that DEF will support the application.

Action: G Edwards will send the letter of support from DEF.

- 2.4 P Pennington expressed his thanks to E Norrington of Sunnyside Rural Trust for a very enjoyable day at the Hemel Food Garden launch event on 11th May 2012.

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

- 3.1 L. Staincliffe reported that no nominations had been received for the positions of chair or vice chair. G Stevens proposed that P Pennington remain as chair, this was seconded by D Harvey. P Pennington proposed that G Edwards remain as vice chair, this was seconded by E Norrington.

4. DEF Water Group Update

Roger Hands reported on the progress and history of the DEF water group over the last 20 years. He recalled a lifetime of personal enthusiasm for the water environment and fishing.

1975 Roger purchased and ex watercress bed to establish the Boxmoor Trout Fishery.
1978 Clearly recalls enthusiasm being fired by NCC Rivers of Hertfordshire.
1996 River Bulbourne Low Flow Study collaboration.
2003 Served on River Gade Sustainability Study - EA/Veolia Water.
2008 Draft Thames River Basin Management Plan
2008 DBC Local Development Framework
2009 Water Framework Directive.
2010 HCC River Quality of Hertfordshire Rivers. Originally there was no mention of the Bulbourne or Gade in this study, but by attending the meeting Roger could ensure that the Bulbourne and Gade were included.
2010 Westminster Forum on Water Security – a national conference, where water metering was dismissed as unfair on the population.
2010 Bulbourne Abstraction Assessment – New Road/Cow Roast. Launched by the EA the abstraction document is now close to publication.
2010 Dacorum Chalk River Restoration Strategy. Launched by the EA due to involvement by DEFWG. Funding is needed for these projects.
2010 Two Waters Lake – the future of the lake is now receiving attention from DBC.
2011 Veolia Draft Drought Management Plan. The worst drought for 100 years.
2012 DEFWG response to the above (12th Jan).
2012 Colne Catchment Workshop. The Colne is more relevant to our chalk streams than the Thames catchment, as they feed into the Colne.

R Hands is chair of the Dacorum Heritage Trust. As chalk streams are part of a historic landscape they may be allowed to apply for Heritage Lottery Funding for the chalk stream restoration projects.

Drought. We are currently in the worst drought for 100 years. There should be an emphasis on getting local water back into the aquifer by creating holding areas such as Two Waters lake; wetlands to take surplus water for a temporary period such as Gadebridge Park; Berkhamsted Sewerage works where water passes through reed beds and is eventually put into the canal. Sustainable urban drainage systems (SUDS)

are supported by DBC. We need more permeable surfaces and less concrete so that water can more easily return to the aquifer.

5. Presentation on the current water situation from Alex Back of Veolia Water

- 5.1 Alex's powerpoint presentation together with the DEFWG Statement of Requirements table can be found on the DEF website together with these minutes at www.dacenvforum.org.uk/minutes.php

Key points from Alex's presentation:

- 40% of our supply comes from surface water, 60% from groundwater
- During winter 2010/2011 there was 80% of LTA rainfall, causing a reduction in recharge to our aquifers
- Autumn/winter 2011/2012 rainfall was 80% of LTA resulting in only 44% of long term recharge
- In April there was 265% of LTA rainfall. This was the wettest April on record, which some areas receiving 400% of LTA rainfall.
- To 15th May there has been 64% of LTA rainfall
- Despite the rain in April, the low volume of recharge has failed to allow normal recovery of water levels in the Chalk aquifer. This means that the groundwater levels will start to decline from their current position, which is well below the normal for the time of year. This has severe impacts for water availability
- Veolia have been following their Drought Management Plan since October and are continually refining projections of likely groundwater level for late summer early autumn 2012.
- 7 Water companies announced Temporary Use Bans starting on 5th April 2012. Since then demand has dropped from 850MI/d to 800MI/d

Due to the April rain, predictions no longer show resources moving to drought zone 4 this summer. So hopefully we will not have drought orders this year.

Metering. Veolia Water asked to be able to implement metering. This was rejected by OFWAT as too expensive for customers. Only new builds or specific requests are given meters. There is a possibility for more extensive metering if we go into drought zone 4. Veolia are pressing for permission to install meters as this would also help to identify leaks.

Questions:

- 5.2 M.Baker. *How long does water take to go from the surface to the aquifer?*

This depends on the ground. For clay and gravel it may only take hours, but for chalk it will probably be several weeks.

- 5.3 D Fisher. *Is it important for water to run away quickly? E.g is it an issue when drains become blocked?*

Water caught by drains ends up in the sea. If we go to sustainable urban drainage (SUDS) with small wetlands, soakaways etc instead of using the drainage and sewerage systems then water will return to the aquifer. Legislation now prevents developers from connecting to the drainage system.

- 5.4 B Farrow. *In an average year when do transpiration and evaporation prevent water recharging the aquifer?*

This depends on the temperature. If the soil is dry it will absorb all the rain. So it is unusual to get a recharge in May.

- 5.5 D Harvey. *Is there a forecast for increase in demand due to increase in population?*

The water companies are not statutory consultees on longer term planning strategies. In the past they would go to regional planning authorities to ask for forecasts. Now they have to go to individual local authorities.

They do the best they can to work out whether there will be a surplus or deficit and the number of people to supply. If moving close to a deficit they could install compulsory meters or apply to drill new wells or boreholes. Veolia do not have reservoirs.

- 5.6 J Williams. *What is the relationship between the long term average rainfall and long term demand?*

In an average year there is plenty of spare water available for use. This means that no funding has been available for compulsory metering.

- 5.7. D Nobbs. *Is there a downward trend in average household consumption?*

Household consumption has dropped since April. As a company Veolia have one of the highest uses of water. The cost to the customer in this area is low – due to lower treatment costs as water extracted from chalk has already been naturally cleaned. Consumption is high, probably due to the low costs, which are actually only half the costs in some areas e.g. Cornwall.

- 5.8. P Harris. *Would it be viable to pump water from wetter to drier regions of the country?*

1000 litres of water weighs one tonne, so it is very expensive to move water long distances. There is some modelling being done of S.E. water to see if it can be moved.

It is possible that water could be moved from the Midlands using the British Waterways canal network, but the cleaning and treatment of dirty water from the canals would not be an easy task.

Water could be purchased from Anglian water, but this has a different chemical make up to Veolia water which can result in water appearing cloudy when it comes from the tap. Although this is perfectly safe it often leads to a lot of customer complaints.

- 5.9. G Stevens. *What percentage of houses in this area are metered?*

35%. This is better than some areas, but not as good as it could be.

- 5.10. G Edwards. *If we were to transfer water via the canal system wouldn't the locks get in the way?*

British Waterways have said that water could be pumped over the locks. So it could be possible to move water to the Iwer treatment works, which is capable of treating water from dirtier sources such as the Thames.

- 5.11 D Harvey. *What percentage of water is drunk straight from the tap. If money is spent purifying water where a large % is just used in the garden or flushed down the toilet, wouldn't it be better to supply bottled water for drinking and water that hasn't been purified for all other uses? Should there be a requirement for houses to re-use water?*

Drinking water is also needed for e.g. cooking and cleaning teeth, so we would still need piped clean water. Plus it would not be practical or good for the environment to bottle and transport water.

There could be more recycling of water. Australia has very good examples of this. The privatised water companies are small and disparate. OFWAT challenges anything not wanted by the customer, so until there is legislation it is difficult to make progress on these sorts of solutions.

5.12. J Williams. *What pressures are Veolia putting on local and central government to introduce grey water systems?*

Licenses for water abstraction are granted by the Environment Agency. So responsibility for over abstraction lies with the EA. OFWAT are trying to get costs of water supply down, so not sure what power the water companies would have to lobby government.

There was a trial in Bishop Stortford where customers were charged more for their water in the summer, as at this time of year there is a lot of use for swimming pools, gardens and cars. In the first summer the customers actually used more water than previously as the price was still too low to have an impact on customers in a wealthy area.

5.13 S Doyle. *DEF has been responding to the Core Strategy and saying that water is limited in this area. It is told that the water companies have been consulted but this hasn't stopped planning permission being granted.*

Veolia Water would like the rules changed so that they can challenge development. At the moment they can say that they may have problems supplying water but not that they are unable to supply.

Suggestion to DEF members to lobby MPs requesting that planning rules need to change so that water companies have the power to block development on grounds that water resources are not sufficient.

5.14 P Pennington thanked R Hands and A Back on behalf of the forum for their very interesting presentations.

72. Meeting Dates

The next meeting of the Dacorum Environmental Forum will be on Thursday 19th July at 7.30pm in the Council Chamber, Civic Centre.

Note: The Agendas and Minutes from the Dacorum Environment Forum meetings can be found at www.dacenvforum.org.uk

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm