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**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting – 19th July 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
Sheila Doyle	HH GM Action Group
Bob Farrer	Water measurement, Bulbourne
Cllr Gordon Godfrey	Northchurch Parish Council
Dennis Harvey	Hemel Nature
Cllr Fiona Guest	Dacorum Borough Council
Jean Blackman	Friends of the Earth
Paul Harris	Green Party
Steve Wilson	DEF/Royal Geographical Society
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe	DBC & HCC
Olive Darville	FOE
Paul Sandford	Green Party
Lawrence Trowbridge	Wild Wood UK
Simon Coultas	DBC
Colin Chambers	DBC
Keith Trewes-Brown	Transition Town Berkhamsted
Nigel Crawley	Tring Transition
Chris Hopkins	Tring Transition
Veronica Allen	Tring Transition

65. Apologies

Peter Thring	CPRE Herts
Cllr David Nobbs	Chipperfield Parish Council
Gerald Darville	FOE
Martin Hicks	Herts. Biological Record Centre
Alan Sweetman	Groundwork
Cllr Julie Laws	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council

The meeting started at 7.30pm

(1, 2 Apologies and Minutes of the last meeting)

3. Matters arising from Minutes

Re: 1.1 Correspondence with Mike Penning, MP as follows:

30th May in respect of January 19th meeting: Opposition to HS2. GE cannot trace a response. Sent a reminder 11/7/12.

27th June in respect of May 17th meeting: Call for more powers for Water Companies. Written response 27th June saying that MP had written re DEF's submission to Eric Pickles, the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government.

Re 2.1 Local Food Strategy

Marion Baker and Emma Norrington reported that the 'Fresh Local Accessible' project had succeeded in obtaining funding from the Esmee Fairbairn Foundation. 'Fresh Local Accessible' will be a two year project that will see the employment of a Local Food Coordinator to be a lead figure in coordinating the development of sustainable local food policy in Dacorum, to enhance the Dacorum local food strategy .

The f3 group (of which Nick Weir who facilitated the first Ashridge Local Food workshop is a member) has also succeeded in obtaining lottery funding for the 'Sustainable Food Economies' project which will develop local food strategies for three local authorities. These authorities will be pilot sites and will be used to implement a process that can then be rolled out to other areas. Dacorum will be one of the pilot sites. This work will fit in with the 'Fresh Local Accessible' project and is currently scheduled to start in November 2012.

Cllr. Fiona Guest said that the Local Food Strategy was now on the works programme of the DBC Overview and Scrutiny Committee for Strategic Planning and the Environment, and would be discussed in October or September.

Re 2.2 DBC Core Strategy

G Edwards has received a letter from DBC Strategic Planning stating that on June 22nd the Council submitted their Core Strategy to the Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government for public examination. An Inspector will now be appointed by the Planning Inspectorate to conduct a Public Examination. This is provisionally programmed for October 2012.

Re 2.3 Hertfordshire Local Nature Partnership

G.Edwards sent a letter of DEF support as asked to Catherine Wyatt, the coordinator of the Hertfordshire Local Nature Partnership (LNP). They submitted their application to become a Government-recognised LNP for the 6th June deadline but were not selected at this time. However they have received feedback from Defra on the areas they need more information on, and they will continue to work towards achieving LNP status.

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

P. Pennington remarked that despite the high rainfall of recent weeks we still needed to use water sparingly. Steve Wilson agreed, quoting figures from his own measurements in Warners End while warning that rainfall totalled over the last three years had been less than average :

January to March 2012: 181 mm, i.e. 80mm less than average for the quarter

April to July (part) 2012: 450mm, i.e. 235mm more than average for the quarter

However, if one accumulates the "less thans" and "more thans" by quarter since the end of 2008, the total is still less than average. Despite recent rains the flow in the Gade is still on the low side. A recent check on the Bury river flow gauge showed 14 cms, compared with the normal range of 7 to 50cm.

4. Planting for People and Wildlife

4.1 Marion Baker, DEF Steering Group and Local Beekeeper

Marion Baker said that she had kept bees for eight years. She said that this year all pollinating insects (Bees, Wasps, Butterflies and Moths, Flies, Beetles, Ants) were struggling, their populations both decreasing in numbers and deteriorating in health. If we had no pollinators, we would have no fruit, no berries, and reduced numbers of seeds and food for other wildlife.

The problems these insects face are: lack of a diverse source of food, disease, pesticides and extreme weather. The two most important, lack of a diverse source of food and disease, are both related to a lack of appropriate habitat. Over the last 60 years the UK has lost over 97% of its wild flower meadows. There is also probably an issue with nicotinoid pesticides.

Bees in the UK comprise about 250 native bee species, one species of honeybee, around 225 solitary species and 25 species of bumblebee. The lifecycle of the bees is complex - even many of the solitary bees will hatch out and have to find food, mate and lay their eggs within a very narrow time frame of a few days. So their needs are quite specific.

The honey and bumble bees are both social insects - they live in a colony. The colony consists generally of one queen bee, and many workers and male bees. The main difference between honey and bumble bees is that the honey bees overwinter as a colony i.e. the queen and a large number of workers live through the winter, whereas bumblebees overwinter as just a hibernating queen. All the bumblebees except the new queens will die by the end of the Autumn - only the new queens survive and hibernate through the winter. Both bumbles and honey bees collect and store nectar – but only honey bees collect such large amounts as they need it to feed their overwintering colony.

For all our bees and pollinators to survive and to be healthy they need a constant supply of nectar and pollen-rich flowers through the spring and summer. The bees use nectar as their carbohydrate energy source, and pollen as their protein. The pollen is particularly important as they use it to feed their larvae. They also need a wide mix of pollens from different flowers to supply all the necessary nutrients – much as we need a varied diet to be healthy. Without this, their immunity will be weakened and they will be more vulnerable to disease. There is no point having a mass of flowers in the spring, then a gap until late summer. Bumblebees may be able to survive for about two

weeks without foraging, but a honey bee colony may have up to 50,000 or more bees in the summer, so a prolonged shortage of flowers will weaken or reduce their ability to gather enough to feed themselves and to accumulate enough stores for the winter.

Certain plants, especially ornamentals, have flowers that have shapes that bees cannot use. For example, some flowers have petals that form tunnels which are too long or narrow for the bees to feed from. Other flowers may not be suitable because they produce little or no pollen and nectar, often as a result of selective breeding by horticulturalists for their particular appearance. Plants like these offer nothing for bees and other pollinators.

The best thing we can do is provide the bees with a wide range of suitable flowering plants including trees. These should provide a constant array of suitable flowers, and therefore a wide range of food continuously from spring to early autumn.

Gardens cover one million hectares in the UK. These, plus our road verges, can be made pollinator-friendly. Sowing a varied selected seed mix can rejuvenate public spaces. The seed mixes can be specifically developed to provide a long flowering season, which is visually attractive and at the same time beneficial for bees.

Pictorial Meadows is a Social Enterprise committed to managing green spaces in a way that maximises social, environmental and economic benefits for neighbourhoods. They offer advice to local authorities as well as seed mixes and other services.

4.2 Simon Coultas, Clean Safe & Green, DBC

Clean Safe and Green was launched in 2008 with responsibility for Street Care and Grounds Maintenance, and has recently incorporated Trees and Woodlands. . They have undertaken work on roundabouts, featuring low-maintenance schemes, bulbs, and sponsorship.

They have received Green Flag Awards for projects at Canal Fields and Chipperfield Common and hope to do so for current work at Tring Memorial Gardens.

Other special projects include the Hemel Water Gardens regeneration, Heath Park improvement, the Hemel Town Centre regeneration and Buncefield roundabout.

Since 2008 they have reduced the use of bedding plants by 50%, and are concentrating on more drought-resistant plants.

Colin Chambers, DBC Woodlands said that his department had been approached by the Woodland Trust with the object of creating more woodland in Dacorum. For woodland creation he advocated merely changing the mowing regime for grassland

adjacent to existing woodland, which would lead to the natural regeneration of woodland, rather than the widespread deployment of manufactured items such as galvanised wire and tree cloches. The Woodland Trust approach had given rise to a "Jubilee Wood" project, which would largely be achieved by natural regeneration, though at launch earlier this year councillors and others were involved in the customary photo-opportunity planting some cherry and oak trees.

4.3 Lawrence Trowbridge, Wildwood UK

Wildwood UK, aim to establish high quality wildlife habitat on the doorstep to offer people a deeper connection with nature. Lawrence is also a lead ranger for the National Trust Ashridge estate.

We should as a society be more directly connected to nature and its purposes. Two illustrative examples from his own observation were that of a hornet boring into an apple to create a fly trap, and a small species of bee adapting an empty snail shell for its own protection.

Wildwood UK provides nature play areas constructed from deadwood to create combined play areas and wildlife habitats. One such is at Aldbury School.

At present we over-compartmentalise land use, making too much distinction between gardens and urban recreational spaces on the one hand and nature reserves on the other. These distinctions need to be shaded, specifically to promote nature conservation within towns. It is possible to provide species rich habitats anywhere - barriers and obstacles are largely cultural. Lawrence would like to see species-rich grassland maintained in prominent areas throughout Dacorum (not just roadsides and roundabouts)

Traditionally cows and wild boars contributed to creating species-rich habitats. Today's mechanical mowers do the opposite. Machines kill billions of invertebrates in the grass during cutting.

Costs for the more sensitive management of open space need not be excessive. After the initial restoration work, whose cost depends very much on the pre-existing condition of the land in question, the only ongoing requirement is to cut and remove cuttings once per year.

Cutting and removing grass cuttings, and sowing/planting native species are the best management policies for benefitting wildlife. The traditional municipal gardening approach, and using bedding plants will do nothing for nature and ourselves other than look pretty.

The time to act is now - our wildlife is dying out.

Questions/Discussion on Item 4

Bob Farrar inquired about the recent removal of ragwort from an area in Ashridge. Lawrence Trowbridge said that this was a requirement under the Weeds Act.

Fiona Guest asked whether members were aware the ragwort was poisonous to horses.

Phil Pennington thought that most members present were aware. In his experience, in order to control the spread of ragwort on Trust land, he would cut once, late in the season, thereby avoiding damage to the cinnabar moth that feeds on it. This was effective in preventing its spread since the seeds do not disperse far.

Paul Harris asked whether there could be wildflowers in the Walled Garden of Gadebridge Park.

Colin Chambers thought that public opinion demanded something more traditional there, though wildflowers were appropriate for other parts of the park.

Paul Harris asked whether wildflowers could be part of the Hemel Water Gardens regeneration.

Colin Chambers said that this project had to be under the terms of the Heritage Lottery bid, which required the Gardens to be restored to their original (municipal, species-poor) state.

Marion Baker asked whether DEF could help in identifying further areas for the wildflower/biodiversity treatment.

Colin Chambers thought that this should be possible - see below.

William Wyatt-Lowe said that in his experience horses avoid eating ragwort.

Lawrence Trowbridge concurred.

William Wyatt-Lowe questioned DBC's current practice of cutting and leaving the cuttings on the ground.

Lawrence Trowbridge agreed that leaving cuttings was generally bad, as this enriched the soil, to the detriment of most wildflower species. An exception to this would be sloping ground, when much of the cuttings would slide off.

Colin Chambers pointed out that the cost of "Cut and Remove" was about three times that of "Cut and Leave", and that it was therefore usually focused on priority areas such as Bunkers Park and Shubhill Common.

Veronica Allen proposed the verge of a slip road in Tring as a good site for wildflowers, but would traffic pollution harm the insects?

Lawrence Trowbridge agreed that it might.

Marion Baker said that the pollution problem would be much reduced beyond one metre from the carriageway.

Dennis Harvey emphasised the need for education to change the prevalent attitudes of fear and over-protectiveness as regards wildlife, particularly stinging insects.

Phil Pennington asked Colin Chambers whether the views he had expressed (on favouring wildlife and natural regeneration) were his own or DBC's generally.

Colin Chambers said that at a recent meeting he attended between a local wildlife activist and senior DBC managers the wildlife view seemed to be favoured by those present.

Marion Baker and Phil Pennington asked how the issue of DEF involvement could be carried forward.

Colin Chambers said that the appropriate contact would be David Austin, Assistant Director of Environmental Services, and that we should propose a DEF delegation to meet with him. This was passed to the Steering Group.

5. Waste Group Update, Gruff Edwards, DEF Waste Group

Gruff reported some updates from the Group's "Task List":

He said that there was now some evidence that reporting flytipping via the DBC website works.

He drew attention to the fact that Plastic trays for meat, fish, vegetables and fruit, ready meals and take away food (but not the film lids) could now be put in the green recycling boxes in Dacorum for kerbside collection. Also acceptable are Yoghurt pots, margarine, butter or ice cream tubs and sandwich containers.

He reminded members that the Waste group had responded to HCC Waste Core Strategy & Development Management Policies Pre-submission in November 2010, asking for more recycling and less incineration, but that at the HCC Cabinet meeting on April 28 2011 councillors decided to appoint Veolia ES Aurora Ltd as the preferred bidder. Veolia have proposed an Energy from Waste facility based at New Barnfield, South Hatfield (a site owned by Hertfordshire County Council).

He reported that HCC' s Pre-Submission Waste Site Allocations proposals had been available for comment during February and March.

He said that the Inspector's Report on the Waste Core Strategy Examination had been further delayed following an instruction by the Independent Inspector that further consultation should be undertaken on the inclusion of a new model policy on the "presumption in favour of sustainable development".

Gruff again offered those present some "Return to Sender" labels for the return of Junk Mail.

6. Any Other Business

Steve Wilson drew the Forum's attention to an article in a recent issue of the Hemel Gazette by Mike Penning MP on the subject of water, and his letter of response to the Gazette, both of which Steve summarised as follows:

Mike Penning M.P. wrote in "Speaker's Corner" (p.15), in the Gazette, on 11 July, about water issues. He drew attention to a variety of issues, including the below-average rainfall, problems with the lack of water in aquifers, high demand and the need to conserve water and to repair leaks. He mentioned the impact of over-abstraction on the health of our local rivers and their ecosystems. He highlighted the role of government in putting forward a White Paper titled "Water for Life". Importantly he emphasised the need "to establish a sustainable extraction regime" and he said "locally I have particular concerns about future over-development, especially on the Green Belt, imposing unsustainable demands on our water supply".

On the 18 July, Steve Wilson wrote a reply, in Letters (p.14), in the Gazette. He said that he was pleased that Mike Penning had supported the views expressed by himself and the Dacorum Environmental Forum over many years. However, Steve took issue with Mr Penning's support for water privatisation and suggested that it provided no incentive for the development of a national water network managed by a single agency, such as we have for gas, electricity, rail and trunk roads. He said that we need a National Water Strategy. The White Paper contained good ideas, but the timescales for change could mean that irreparable damage to our ecosystems was likely to occur before any of the White Paper's proposed changes were implemented.

Lizzie Savage drew the Forum's attention to an initiative of the Sustainable Transport Partnership, encouraging participation in a bike ride.

The next meeting of the Dacorum Environmental Forum will be on Thursday 18th October, 2012 at 7.30pm in the 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