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**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting – 18th October 2012**

MINUTES

Attendance

Phil Pennington	DEF Chairman
Gruff Edwards	DEF Vice Chair
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Lizzy Staincliffe	Dacorum Borough Council
Adrienne Gear	Community Action Dacorum
Douglas Walker	DEF founder member
Dennis Harvey	Hemel Nature
Roger Hands	DEF Water Group, Box Moor Trust
Jean Blackman	Friends of the Earth
Paul Harris	Green Party
Steve Wilson	DEF/Royal Geographical Society
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe	DBC & HCC
Claire Covington	DBC
Vicki Nash	DBC
Cheryl Spain	Groundwork
Michael Nidd	LLATVCC

65. Apologies

Cllr Fiona Guest	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr David Nobbs	Chipperfield Parish Council
Marion Baker	Transition Town Berkhamsted
Emma Norrington	Sunnyside Rural Trust

The meeting started at 7.30pm

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

3. Matters arising from Minutes

Re: 3, Matters arising from previous Minutes

Correspondence with Mike Penning, MP as follows:

Opposition to HS2. Response by letter 30/7/12, as detailed in DEF Email 13th Aug with minutes of previous meeting. "My personal view is that, as we will be one of the only countries in the modern world without a high speed rail network, the proposed HS2 line is necessary."

20th July in respect of May 17th meeting: Call for Water Companies to block development on the grounds of there being insufficient water resources. Mike forwarded the written response of 13th July from Bob Neill MP, Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government: "The Government is not considering such a measure, . . .".

It was proposed by Steve Wilson that a scan of this letter should be made available to DEF members.

DBC Core Strategy

Claire Covington said that the public examination of the Core Strategy had ended today, and the Inspector had set some clarification questions, which Dacorum Borough Council had two weeks to respond to. The responses would then be made available on the Dacorum Borough Council website for a further two weeks. An informal response from the Inspector on the Core Strategy was expected in approximately four weeks. (See more under Item 7.)

Garrick Stevens had attended the examination of the Core Strategy. He reminded the Forum that DEF earlier in the year had approached the Borough to request that the Annual Monitoring Report should report on rivers and water supply. He had informed the Inspector at the examination that the AMR was silent on these issues and had expressed concern that replenishing the aquifer should be reported upon.

Paul Harris had also attended and spoken at the examination. He said that developers' representatives were calling for higher housebuilding figures than those under DBC's preferred Option 2.

Item 4 Planting for People and Wildlife

The proposed DEF delegation to meet with DBC Environmental Services has not yet happened.

4. Luton Airport Expansion, Presentation by Michael Nidd, London Luton Airport Town & Villages Communities Committee (LLATVCC). (See also presentation document on DEF Website.)

Michael Nidd gave a well-illustrated presentation on the recent planning history and expansion aspirations at Luton Airport.

He criticised the demand forecasts of the current Airport Master Plan, which contains a predicted usage of 30 million passenger per annum by 2030 (currently around 10 million) for which a second runway would be needed. Other points he raised were:

Noise Envelope maps in the plan were too optimistic. Noise mitigation measures presented as innovations were in fact already largely in place, and ineffective.

The environmental impact of new infrastructure for "Surface Access", i.e. getting to and from the airport, was played down. Access to Century Park would increase pressure for a new link road to the A505.

Though not in the Airport Master Plan nor approved by Luton Borough Council, a recent report by the think-tank Policy Exchange had claimed that building the second runway would necessitate levelling Luton Hoo and building a new railway connection across the Chilterns from Tring via the airport to Stevenage.

The landfill operation required for a second runway would be huge and disruptive.

Questions:

Robin Harvey: Could the effect be mitigated by restricting flight times to exclude the 11pm to 7am period which is well-protected in other areas of legislation?

Answer: This would be a hard case to win. LLATVCC are pursuing more achievable damage-limitation objectives.

Paul Harris: Should we not be challenging the whole concept of ever-increasing and therefore unsustainable air travel? Air travel figures in Spain are actually declining. PH will write to the Gazette on this.

Answer: No, it is beyond the task we have set ourselves.

Douglas Walker: Are the current proposals that much worse than those of 20 years ago, when the plans included a projection for 15 million passengers by 2015/2020 and an underground transport interchange?

Answer: The current proposal is for 18 million by 2026, but we should not forget the ambitions described in the previous, withdrawn, "Project 2030" scheme which referred to 30 million by 2030, and a second runway.

5. Local energy conservation and awareness projects Presentations by Vicki Nash, Home Energy Conservation Officer, DBC, and Cheryl Spain, Groundwork. (See also presentation documents on DEF Website.)

Vicki Nash:

Under the Herts and Essex Energy Partnership, since 2009 £390,000 had been spent on energy efficiency schemes including boilers, insulation and solar panels via loans, grants, and subsidies according to recipients' circumstances. Loft and cavity wall insulation grants under the present arrangements continue to December 2012, and the Warm Front and "Keep Warm, Stay Well" schemes will continue until March 2013. Under the provisions of the Home Energy Conservation Act Local Authorities must now prepare "HECA" reports for submission to the Department of Energy by the end of March 2013. A proposal for a cross-tenure Housing Energy Strategy was agreed by Cabinet on 24th October. It will include setting up partnerships with Green Deal providers. DEF could form part of this process.

Cheryl Spain:

Groundwork are moving into the area of community energy efficiency. They are one of eight delivery partners for the "Keep Warm, Stay Well" project, which ran for the first time last winter and will run again this year.

Funding comes from the Department of Health via Herts. CC. Groundwork has been given some further funding from Herts CC to run the project again this winter, and the Council are awaiting the outcome of a bid for further funding from the Dept for Health which would allow the project to expand further.

Focusing on vulnerable people, Groundwork provide a home visit service, giving people tips and advice on fuel bills, energy efficiency advice, checking their heating system, providing emergency heating where necessary, ensuring they have enough insulation, applying for grants and other services. Last year this involved 407 visits in Herts., 66 of which were in Dacorum, but Groundwork aim to do more visits this year and are asking people to refer anyone to the scheme who would benefit.

To refer people to the service, call Herts Help on 0300 123 4044 (local rate) or email: info@hertshelp.net.

Questions:

Robin Harvey: What is "fuel poverty"?

Answer: Spending over 10% of one's disposable income on fuel.

William Wyatt-Lowe: Where do referrals come from?

Answer: LAs, Housing Officers, local radio advertising, talks to lunch clubs etc. Please feel free to refer anyone into the scheme now who would benefit and Groundwork will distribute a leaflet about the scheme to DEF when it is ready.

6. Water Gardens and River Gade update by Claire Covington, Strategic Planning & Regeneration DBC

Claire Covington said that Dacorum Borough Council had submitted a Stage 1 "Parks for People" bid to the Heritage Lottery Fund in October for funding to restore the Water Gardens in keeping with their historical significance and to provide facilities for today's community. The Heritage Lottery Fund has a two stage bidding process, and if successful when the results are announced in December, Dacorum will submit the Stage 2 bid in August 2013.

The bid plan includes:

- Green screening to the car park (to minimise the impact of the upper deck which was not part of Jellicoe's original scheme).
- Moving the play area to the end of Water Gardens south car park.
- Creating a community space in the ornamental gardens opposite Bank Court for activities, seating etc.
- Creating a more informal grassed space where the play area currently is.
- (Possibly) A new community building.

The Water Gardens are Grade 2 listed, having been placed on English Heritage's Register of Parks and Gardens of Historic Interest in 2010. Preparing the Stage 1 bid, has highlighted an issue, to be resolved by DBC, between English Heritage's listing and the Environment Agency's objectives of implementing the Water Framework Directive, which amongst other things (see below) requires all ground and surface waters to achieve 'good status' by 2015, subject to an exemption in some circumstances.

A further factor is the Dacorum Chalk River Restoration Strategy, which was prepared by the Environment Agency prior to the listing of the Water Gardens, and endorsed by the Dacorum Environmental Forum Water Group. The Strategy includes:

For Gadebridge Park: –

- Restoration of the original channel at the low point of the valley through the Park.
- Securing a buffer zone to the water course.
- Periodic vegetation clearance of the channel.

For the Water Gardens: -

- Restoration of the river channel.

In order to facilitate the discussions taking place with the Environment Agency and English Heritage so that a solution acceptable to both parties can be found, Dacorum Borough Council has prepared an addendum to the Green Space Strategy, which (the latter) broadly supports the aims of the Dacorum Chalk Rivers Restoration Strategy.

For the Water Gardens, the addendum proposes:

"To restore the Water Gardens to reflect and reinforce their historical significance, incorporating an environmental solution to support the objectives of the Water Framework Directive, which is appropriate to its heritage listing. Claire will shortly be putting the Green Space Strategy addendum on the Dacorum Borough Council website, on the Regeneration pages.

The Environment Agency has offered to meet with Dacorum Borough Council to start a discussion about Gadebridge Park. Any changes made through the park would need to be carefully considered so that the function of the park as a space for recreation and events would be retained, and so that any changes to the channel would have a sustainable flow. A "Friends of Gadebridge Park" group has been set up to help look at improvements and facilities for Gadebridge Park.

As a result it is proposed to amend the Green Space Strategy action relating to the River Gade in Gadebridge Park, including as follows:

"Action (Gadebridge Park)

To work in partnership with the Environment Agency to improve the ecology and sustainability of the River Gade through Gadebridge Park, as part of a scheme which supports the recreational use and status of Gadebridge as Dacorum's principal park."

The full wording has been discussed with Roger Hands.

Question/observations

Roger Hands said that reconciling these complementary aims contained challenges, in particular that posed by Water Framework Directive 4.7 concerning weirs.

(Claire subsequently provided information that Article 4.7 details how under special circumstances, an exemption can be given that could resolve this issue.)

Steve Wilson: Another challenge would be continuing Low Flows of the Gade. Even today, with Gadebridge Park flooded, the Gade is still in low flow. The new group, Friends of Gadebridge Park will be launched on Nov 4th, to be followed by a clean-up of the river. There needs to be a dialogue between those concerned with these successive stages of the river.

Answer: DBC supported the formation of the Friends of Gadebridge Park, and are keen to continue to liaise with them. There is also a Friends of the Water Gardens group, which may well have shared interests with the Friends of Gadebridge Park. The two groups could be kept aware of each other's activities.

7. Localism in practice: Grovehill Future Group's Neighbourhood Plan Area, Gruff Edwards DEF/Claire Covington

Gruff Edwards said that DBC were currently consulting (deadline 12th November) on an application from the "Grovehill Future Group" to 'Designate a Neighbourhood Plan Area . . . in accordance with regulation 5 of the Neighbourhood Planning (General) Regulations 2012' (This is part of the "Localism Act"). See www.dacorum.gov.uk/grovehillfuture. The application area includes land at Marchmont Farm (Area LA1 - in DBC's Core Strategy) 'as an opportunity to influence the design, layout and facilities the development should provide'. It appeared from this that the Grovehill Future Group if successful could influence the nature of the development of this area, which under the existing Borough Plan was still Green Belt and which was situated in a position that would have considerable visual impact on many parts of Hemel Hempstead and the Gade Valley. The loss of LA1's Green Belt status was dependent upon the outcome of the public inquiry into the Core Strategy that had only finished on the day of the DEF meeting. Development of LA1 was only included in the higher-growth "Option 2" of last year's consultation, to which the majority response, including DEF's, had favoured the lower-growth Option 1, which did not include LA1. Gruff proposed either of both of:

1. A DEF response to the DBC consultation asking that the Neighbourhood Plan Area should not include Marchmont Farm.

and/or

2. A DEF letter to Mike Penning MP expressing disquiet about this and possible similar consequences of Localism.

In response, Claire Covington said that Grovehill Future Group would have no more say in whether LA1 was allowed than any other group or individual who raised concerns via the consultation and hearing process, and that the decision as to whether Marchmont Farm came forward as a housing site allocation lay with the Planning Inspector at the just-completed public inquiry.

The Localism Act aims to give local people more influence over housing and planning decisions. However, neighbourhood plans cannot deliver less housing than is within the Core Strategy, and they cannot be used to block development or put forward alternative locations for development already planned.

One of the issues for Hemel Hempstead is that it is not Parished, and as a result there are no groups that developers or the Council can work with to ensure any development within their local area is of an appropriate quality and at the same time provides community facilities that meet local needs. It was for that reason that Marchmont Farm was included.

The following process is followed to develop a neighbourhood plan, the plan must conform to the Core Strategy and be supported by a minimum of 50% of voters at a referendum stage, in order to be adopted.

- Designation of the neighbourhood plan area
- Approval of the neighbourhood forum
- Preparation of the Plan – vision, issues and aims, policies, key changes
- Validation check

- Independent examination
- Examiner's report
- Plan modification
- Referendum
- Adoption by the local authority

Comments:

Dennis Harvey and Adrienne Gear said they were in favour of Localism, and had no worries concerning the matters Gruff had raised.

Garrick Stevens reported that Berkhamsted Town Council has been approached by local bodies requesting that the council embark on developing a Local Plan. The response was to defer until after the Local Development Framework had been assessed as the new Borough Plan. One key issue is that no additional funding is available to support local councils in developing a Local Plan.

Michael Nidd pointed out that Grovehill Future Group currently consisted of only ten members, while the statutory minimum was 21.
(Claire has subsequently stated that there are currently 15 official members, with more shortly qualifying for membership after they have attended their third meeting.)

By a show of hands, with the majority abstaining, it was decided not to approve either of Gruff's proposals.

Having spoken to colleagues in Strategic Planning, Claire subsequently provided an update regarding housing levels Option 1 and Option 2 in the Core Strategy, which Gruff had queried at the meeting. When moving the Core Strategy forward to the pre-submission stage, the Council had chosen Option 2 as the preferred level of housing. (See DEF Minutes of 20th October 2011 when this was discussed previously.) Option 2 was therefore presented to the Planning Inspector at the public hearing. The Inspector will need to consider whether this is an appropriate level of housing given the arguments for both lower and higher housing numbers which were presented at the hearing, and advise on what he considers to be an appropriate housing target.

8. Reclaiming Pavements for Pedestrians, Gruff Edwards, DEF.

Time constraint led to this item being postponed until the next meeting.

The next meeting of the Dacorum Environmental Forum will be on Thursday 17th January, 2013 at 7.30pm in the Civic Centre.

Note: The Agendas and Minutes from the Dacorum Environment Forum meetings, together with any available supporting documents, can be found at

www.dacenvforum.org.uk

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm