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**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting – 17th January 2013
Bulbourne Room Civic Centre**

MINUTES

Attendance

Phil Pennington	DEF Chairman
Gruff Edwards	DEF Vice Chair
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Lizzy Staincliffe	Dacorum Borough Council
Roger Hands	DEF Water Group, Box Moor Trust
Paul Harris	Green Party
Steve Wilson	DEF/Royal Geographical Society
Alan Sweetman	Groundwork
Emma Norrington	Sunnyside Rural Trust
Norman Jones	West Hearts Ramblers
Cllr David Nobbs	Chipperfield Parish Council

Apologies

Cllr Fiona Guest	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe	DBC & HCC
Marion Baker	Transition Town Berkhamsted
Dennis Harvey	Hemel Nature
Jason Williams	Hemel in Transition

The meeting started at 7.30pm

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

3. Matters arising from Minutes

Luton Airport

Garrick Stevens reported that it was not public yet but Luton was the favoured airport for expansion in the Southeast.

(Subsequently a planning application for extensions to the airport buildings, taxiways and car parks has come to DEF's attention. An explanatory letter from Luton Borough Council Development Control is viewable via the front page of DEF's website. The application and submitted details can be inspected at www.eplan.luton.gov.uk by entering **12/01400/FUL** into the Application Search. The closing date for objections is 20th February 2013.)

HS2

Roger Hands commented that the HS2 route had not yet been finalised and was facing opposition on the current proposed route. The M1 corridor and the existing transport corridor through Dacorum were not out of the picture in the minds of the Government advisers.

Local Energy Conservation and Awareness Projects

Alan Sweetman reported that 200 houses had taken up the offer of home energy visits and that others were in the pipeline. Loft and cavity wall insulation aid had now finished and new schemes were to roll out soon, with further funding to those experiencing Fuel Poverty. Further leaflets had been produced and were circulated.

Water Company Powers: Ministerial response

As agreed at the May 17th meeting, DEF sent an E-mail to Mike Penning MP calling for Water Companies to have the power to block strategic development on the grounds of there being insufficient water resources. Mike forwarded this to Bob Neill MP, Under Secretary of State for Communities and Local Government, and the correspondence, including the Ministerial response of 13th July which includes "The Government is not considering such a measure, . . ." have now finally been scanned and put on the front page of the DEF website.

Planting for People and Wildlife

The DEF delegation to meet with DBC Environmental Services, proposed in the July meeting, has not yet been organised.

4. Information Items

Local Core Strategy

Gruff Edwards reported that in response to the Inspector's report on the Core Strategy that was subject to an Examination in Public in October 2012, DBC have published a "Modifications Document" for consultation, with an end date of 6th March 2013. A main concern of the Inspector's appeared to be whether the housing demand projections were sufficiently high, and whether Dacorum had co-operated adequately with neighbouring planning authorities, St Albans in particular, in its quest for new housing land.

A number of relevant documents, including the Inspector's report and letter and DBC's (robust) response are available for viewing on the DBC website.

Local Food Strategy

Dacorum Local Food Strategy: Emma Norrington reported that the Local Food Coordinator had been appointed on a two year contract. She was Nicole Jackson and was to start work on 28th January based at the Two Waters Food Garden hosted by Sunnyside Rural Trust.

(Members may also be interested in CPRE's current campaign to promote more local food and less wastage of food. The CPRE site offers a proforma letter and an easy way of E-mailing the top executives of all the major supermarkets. See link on DEF Website front page.)

5. Pavement Parking (deferred from October meeting)

Gruff Edwards (DEF) presented a paper on inconsiderate pavement parking which can act as a disincentive to walking rather than taking to the car.

He said that the encouragement of walking - and by implication the removal of those factors that hinder it - is desirable in terms of carbon emission reduction as well as for reasons of public health, the latter having recently been underlined by The National Institute for Health and Clinical Excellence, who were reported by Nick Triggle Health correspondent, BBC News 28 November 2012, as saying that people should shun their cars if a trip could be done in 15 or 20 minutes on foot or bike, and calling on councils to do more to make walking and cycling an easier option in local communities.

There were defects in respect of dealing with pavement parking, which lay in the powers and priorities both of the police and of the local authority, who both seemed keen to minimise their own responsibilities and/or to place them at each other's doors.

Reports to the police of pavement obstruction over recent years had resulted in some telephone responses which indicated that there is an unwritten policy that they may take action if the parked vehicle has not left enough room for a wheelchair to pass on the pavement (kerbside or fence-side). However, several recent reports to the police of pavement parking in Hemel Hempstead that contravened even this criterion had gone unanswered and un-actioned.

In September last year an attempt to get a written statement from Hertfordshire Police as to their policy on pavement parking, requested under the Freedom of Information had elicited a response (21/9/12) that contained:

"there is no specific Force Policy relating to parked vehicles causing an obstruction."
"Information that may be of assistance relating to parking and relevant legislation is available in the Highway Code"

The Highway Code contains (Section 244)

"You MUST NOT park partially or wholly on the pavement in London, and should not do so elsewhere unless signs permit it", (with only the "must not" having the force of law.)

The Code also opens the possibility Decriminalised Parking Enforcement, whereby the local traffic authority assumes responsibility for enforcing many parking contraventions in place of the police. However, for example Dacorum Borough Council's parking

policy, as published on their website, reveals the limited extent of such enforcement by them, either because of legislation or because it not regarded as of high priority:

"DBC Parking Policy Applies principally to Car Parks, designated on-street parking areas and residents' controlled parking zones".

". . it will only be possible to issue Penalty Charge Notices to vehicles where vehicles are parked alongside a valid parking restriction"

"We only introduce parking schemes where commuters to places such as shopping centres and railway stations park inconsiderately in residential areas. Although seven schemes have been introduced in the Borough and we intend to maintain a record of areas that would potentially benefit from the introduction of a scheme, at this time no further new schemes can be introduced."

"We do not introduce schemes in areas where vehicle ownership by the residents is the sole reason for a lack of available kerb space to accommodate them. We can not put a limit on how many cars a household can own or insist that householders with off-street parking availability use it."

Gruff said that the last quote was doubtless a response to a frequently-expressed public perception of the unfairness of free on-street parking for multiple car owners, and that there was some inconsistency in DBC's policy, since in those very limited cases where residents' controlled parking zones are introduced, there is a limit of three permits per household.

The police authority had been requested at fairly short notice to field a presenter to the Forum, but there had been no response to this request. A link to Gruff's presentation, including photographs of some inconsiderately parked cars, is on the front page of the DEF website.

In the following discussion, Garrick Stevens said that introducing residents' parking schemes on a large scale in Berkhamsted had proved a very contentious issue. Emma Norrington said that in her part of Berkhamsted it was seldom possible for walkers to squeeze past cars parked on the pavement, and that they were therefore forced to walk for long stretches in the middle of the road. Roger Hands said that in Sebright Road (the subject of one of Gruff's photographed examples) commuter parking was so bad that the only way some wheelchair users could load and unload themselves from a vehicle was to park the vehicle entirely on the pavement.

Gruff proposed that DEF should:

1. Write to the Herts. Constabulary or Police Commissioner saying that there should be a published policy on when in practice the police will act on pavement parking etc.
2. Write to Mike Penning MP asking for legislation to outlaw pavement parking outside as well as within London.
3. Write to Mike Penning asking for more powers and/or incentives for Local Authorities to introduce residents' parking schemes, or similar.

The Forum supported only Item 1, plus a cc to Mike Penning. (These have now been done. No substantive response yet from Police Commissioner. Mike Penning's response letter said "I do agree that the Police Policy on 'pavement parking' needs some clarity and would be grateful if you could keep me informed of any response.")

6. Water Group Update by Roger Hands, DEF Water Group

Roger Hands gave an update on the work the Water Group are undertaking, though felt it was too soon to make a full report as the minutes of the last meeting had not yet been finalised. He would have papers ready for a future meeting. Lizzy Staincliffe reported that DEFRA had identified Hertfordshire as one of the largest water users in the country and they had asked the water companies to carry out a survey/audit of water use and water efficiency in the area.

(Steve Wilson and Dr David Wilson have produced a short report "Report on river flow, rainfall and water abstraction on the Bulbourne and Upper Gade, 1986-2010", which concludes:

"In wet years abstraction probably does not create a problem. However . . . particularly in a sequence of dry years, abstraction is too great for the river flow to be maintained. This inevitably leads to the drying up of large sections of the rivers and the demise of the river ecosystems. Management of the river flow to an acceptable level would require that abstraction is varied according to rainfall. In dry years, other water sources for domestic use should be imported into the Upper Gade and to a lesser extent the Bulbourne."

There is a link to the report on the front page of the DEF website.)

7. Open Discussion - issues that DEF members wish to see DEF address in the future.

Members were asked to identify issues not already covered by the Forum that they wished to see raised in future meetings.

The following issues were suggested:

Protection of birds, especially birds of prey. Someone from the local RSPB should be invited to talk to DEF on the subject.

Reducing car dependency, including liaison with Sustrans and Travel Smart.

There was concern that there were few younger people becoming members, and this issue should be addressed.

The Forum should consider ways of increasing its public profile. It was suggested that the Forum could be more proactive, for example by sending reports of the meetings to the Press. Steve Wilson advised that the 'Clubs and Community' section of the Gazette would take any report sent to them, and it was agreed that a cut down version of the minutes could serve this purpose.

8. Review of Steering Group Membership

The Chair reported that Marion Baker had now stood down from the Steering Group and he wished to thank her for all the support and effort she had put in over the years, notably the web site and the Local Food project. He expanded on this, saying that she had been valuable in the formulation of many other projects, which she had done with enthusiasm and energy.

The Chair thought it was time to review the structure of the Steering Group as the current members had been serving for a long time.

Members were asked if they wished to become members of the Steering Group, and Steve Wilson offered his services. Roger Hands stated that he would attend when meetings included Water group topics.

Other members would remain, and they are Phil Pennington, Gruff Edwards, Dennis Harvey, Paul Harris, Emma Norrington. Sheila Doyle and Jason Williams.

9. Any Other Business

Election for Chair and Vice Chair

The Chair reminded members that at the next meeting the Forum would have to elect officers, and said that this time he would not be standing for re-election as Chair.

The meeting closed at 9.15 pm

The next meeting of the Dacorum Environmental Forum will be on Thursday 23rd May, 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

<http://www.dacenvforum.org.uk/minutes.php>

Links to files related to these Minutes can be found on the front page of the DEF Website:

20130117Scanned ministerial reply re Water Companies.zip

20130117 Local Sustainably sourced food CPRE Supermarket campaign.msg

20130117Luton Airport Expansion Planning Application - Deadline Feb 20th.doc

20130117Pavement Parking Pres.pdf

20130117 Report on Bulbourne and Gade.doc