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Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting – 20th February 2014

MINUTES

Attendance

Gruff Edwards	DEF Chairman GE
Steve Wilson	DEF Vice Chairman SW
Paul Harris	Green Party PH
Phil Pennington	DEF(Minute Taker) PP
Cllr William Wyatt Lowe	Dacorum Borough Council WWL
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council GS
Emma Norrington	DEF EN
Chris Ridley	DEF CR
Mike Ridley	DEF MR
PeterThring	CPRE Herts, Chiltern Society PT
Jason Williams	DEF JW
Siva Niranjana	West Hemel Action Group SN

1. Apologies

Cllr Julie Laws	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr Fiona Guest	Dacorum Borough Council
Cllr David Nobbs	Chipperfield Parish Council
Cllr Maureen Flint	Dacorum Borough Council
Dennis Harvey	Hemel Nature

2. Welcome

The Chair welcomed everybody to the meeting.

3. Minutes from the Meeting held on 21st November 2013

The minutes from the meeting held on 21st November 2013 were approved.

4. Matters Arising not covered later by the Agenda

Little Hay Golf Course

GE reported that the proposed project to re landscape the area of Little Hay Golf Club is still ongoing and the contractors have put forward further considerations under a revised planning application. This would still use Bourne End Lane as the preferred access, with a traffic light system and re-profiling of the banks in order to widen the Lane.

After discussion it was agreed that GE would not respond to any current consultation stages on behalf of DEF but invite all DEF members to offer support to the Bourne Valley Residents' group (Email: BBBactiongroup@outlook.com.) This group's letter of objection to Sportspace Trustees was published in the Hemel Gazette on February 19th, and will also be attached to these minutes.

Action: All

GS reported that Berkhamsted Golf Club had also had a request for re profiling their course, as had other Golf Clubs in Hertfordshire. At Berkhamsted the area concerned was relatively small , and near to the Club House.

Roman Snail Field

GE reported that the County had given consent for a wildlife survey to be carried out on the site. EN reported that the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust were happy to carry out the survey later in the year. The results would be expected around June/July this year and may provide evidence to create a wildlife site.

It was further reported that HCC had currently no plans to develop the upper site but maintain it as a sports field.

Fresh Local Accessible Food Project

The action from the last meeting was still awaiting a draft letter from Martin Hicks highlighting the key points. The letter would be sent to Andrew Williams and other local Councillors and Officers as already advised by Local Food Coordinator Nicole Jackson.

Councillor William Wyatt Lowe informed the Forum that it is intended to set up a Farmers Market in the Old High Street in Hemel Hempstead once the refurbishment works are complete. He stated that the two officers involved are Chris Taylor and Nish Khaana.

Action EM to inform Nicole Jackson.

4. LA3 Housing Proposals

GE explained that the letter of response regarding LA3 had been drafted by the Steering Group and sent to Laura Wood and Richard Blackburn of DBC Strategic Planning. (It subsequently transpired that Richard no longer works for DBC but Laura is still in contact with him.)

GE read out the response from Laura Wood who apologised for the delay due to pressure of work and suggested that she and/or the developers of LA3 (Barratts and Taylor Wimpey) come to one of DEFs future meetings after the draft masterplan has been prepared, which she now thought would be around September (previously estimated to be February).

Jason Williams felt that, because of development constraints, the Developers would be unlikely to keep to some of the relevant Core Strategy environmental objectives and policies that pertain to new developments. This had happened at the Manor Estate, where the new railway bridge has so far not been delivered within the timescale agreed to between the Developers and the Borough.

On the question of meeting the Developers at this stage opinion was divided, some feeling that such a meeting would be better scheduled after the acceptance of the Master Plan or at least further down the line of its development.

It was however felt that the Forum would still wish Laura separately before September with the object of gaining better understanding of how and by whom the Master Plan was being formulated and to ensure that DEF's views were fully represented in it. **Action** GE

MR offered to look at Laura's response to our letter in more detail and look for key points (omissions etc.) to include in our next response to her. **Action** MR

It was agreed that DEF's original letter and recommendations to Richard Blackburn and Laura Wood should be sent out to the normal DEF circulation list including DBC councillors. (See attachments to minutes)

Action GE

5. Code for Sustainable Housing

Jason Williams presented his findings on the structure governing all new development, which is currently a voluntary Code of Practice covering nine areas and devolved into a points system produced in 2007. The Code offers a single framework so that the building industry can design and construct homes to higher environmental standards.

This is a voluntary code that aims to reduce carbon emissions and promote a higher standard of sustainability above current standards expected from building regulations. Currently it can only be enforced where local councils require developers to comply with the code in their planning policy, or where building regulations incorporate the Level 3 energy standard, or by Community Agencies who require affordable housing to be built to Code Level 3,

The code measures the sustainability of the building against 9 design categories:

- Energy and Co2 Emissions.
- Water
- Materials
- Surface Water Run Off
- Waste.
- Pollution.
- Health and Wellbeing.
- Management.
- Ecology.

The areas are covered with a points system that results in developers being able to accumulate scores against the development.

The Future.

The code has resulted in pointing the way forward and Government feel it has been a successful exercise. The Government's Environmental Audit Committee argue that the code is a proven policy mechanism for driving incremental improvements in sustainable housing.

In 2013 it was felt that the code has been a proven way of pushing up the building standards and that it should not be abandoned. As the controlling body of the certification scheme the BRE agree and that it has helped to set a standard for carbon reduction and for green growth, green innovations and green exports.

6. Flood Prevention in Hemel Hempstead

SW presented his experienced views on the potential risk locally to urban flooding in the light of the highest recorded rainfall since his records began (30 years ago) and probably since UK records began (100 years ago). Steve gave a brief account of the hydrological system as it relates to chalk streams in the area and how it operates. The flow in chalk streams rises and falls slowly because rainwater takes many months to move down into the porous chalk before reappearing in the deep valley bottoms, in the form of springs, which supply the rivers. The Gade and Bulbourne, unlike rivers in impermeable rock areas, do not have tributaries feeding in more and more water. Groundwater is the main contributor but in urban areas, drains from roads and houses, often feed straight into rivers, thus acting as if they were tributaries.

Gadebridge Park was only flooded once this winter and that was when 30mm of heavy rainfall in 24 hours followed many weeks of rain, when the ground was saturated. The work done by The Friends of Gadebridge Park to get the river channel cleared of weed and silt last year had clearly worked to reduce the flood risk. When flooding did occur it soon subsided. The grid at the gauging station at the Bury tends to get blocked with debris and acts as a dam. This also had to be kept clear. The major cause of flooding comes from the input of water from the road drains. This causes river levels to rise, hit much higher peaks and fall back quickly, not as they would in their natural state. The Core Strategy for Dacorum refers to the need to keep water in the catchment and not to let water run off rapidly. There is a clear need to do this, not only in order to reduce the flood risk in Hemel Hempstead, but also to reduce the knock-on flood risk downstream as that water reaches Watford and ultimately the Thames at Staines. Any new development at LA3, must be designed to the very highest standards in order to minimise the enhanced flood risk.

7. Any Other Business

PH reminded the Forum that Electric buses as run by Arriva in Luton will be on the Agenda for the next meeting in May:

GE reported that he and Roger Hands had met with Marion Baker regarding handing over the running of the DEF web site. Marion had set up the site and run it at her own cost for many years and is now due to leave the area to move to the West Country in the spring. He further reported that the site will be maintained by EN and GE with the costs met informally as before with some distant input from Marion.

GE also thanked Marion Baker for her invaluable work over the years with the Forum

Cllr Wyatt Lowe said there is a county budget that could be used to cover the cost He would discuss this with Gruff who stated it was around £40 a year

GS informed the Forum that there was a planning application for a multi-story car park in Berkhamsted. He said that there were concerns that this would exacerbate the existing high nitrogen oxide levels in this area, which are similar to those in other areas such as Apsley and Northchurch..

There being no further business the meeting closed at 9.10.p.m.