



**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 12.11.2015**

MINUTES

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Roger Nicholls	Individual
Chris Ridley	DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF
Janice Marshall	DBC Environment Portfolio Holder
Paul Harris	Great Gaddesden Parish Council
Siva Niranjana	West Herts. Action Group and DEF
Cllr. Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Dennis Harvey	DEF/ Population Matters

Apologies

Roger Hands	DEF Water Group, etc.
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Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies

See above. Some attendees said that they had not received the Agenda via E-mail. **GE to investigate.** Late attendees had needed considerable initiative to gain access to the meeting, since the front door to the fire station block was by then unattended. SN suggested that a contact mobile 'phone number should be sent out with the agenda for this purpose **action GE.**

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 27/8/15

No corrections suggested.

3. Matters arising (*Paragraph numbers from the previous minutes are in Italics*)

3.1 *Reducing Litter in Dacorum*

It had appeared from MR's correspondence with Cllr. Janice Marshall on the subject of disappearing dog poop bins, that DBC now condoned the use of general litter bins for this purpose. This had caused some surprise to the DEF Steering Group, since in the past the two types of bin

were required to be well separated. GE said that he had queried this in an Email to Cllr. Andrew Williams (Oct 8th.) together with a further request for information on the disappearances of general litter bins at specific sites, but had received no reply to date.

GE said that since becoming a Street Champion he had posted four dump reports on the Dacorum Website, 3 out of 4 of which had been cleared, though in each case it had taken around four weeks and reminder E-mails via Joe Guiton. The telephone system for checking on progress by Incident Number had been deficient in all four cases. (Two records could not be found, and the other two had given “false negatives”, i.e. the dumps had been cleared, but the system had not been updated to say so.)

GE said that he had received a response from Joe Guiton regarding GS’s suggestion that some equivalent for Berkhamsted’s Town Warden would help co-ordinate the efforts of Street Champions in areas of Hemel Hempstead and make them more effective. Joe said that he had three Neighbourhood Support Officers that do carry out this function at the moment, and gave contact details for one, Nigel Brant-Wilcock, who had then been invited to attend the current DEF meeting and although unable to do so, had indicated his willingness to attend a future meeting. After some discussion it was decided that:

Cllr Janice Marshall (present) should be requested to consider and comment on the outstanding issues as set out above, and that GE should let N B-W know the dates of meetings in 2016 (see Item 6). **Actions GE, JM**

3.2 LA3 Housing

GE had invited DEF members wishing to contribute to a DEF response to the “Site Allocations Pre-Submission Focused Changes Consultation 2015” (closed 23rd September) to E-mail him with their comments for him to collate. MR had done so, and therefore a DEF response was submitted, suggesting amendment to the “Development Principles” for LA3 as follows:

Remove the principle “Optimise the potential for views (*from the new houses*) across the Bulbourne valley.”

Amend other principles on Design etc. as per the mark-ups in green in the following to -

“Design, layout and landscaping to safeguard the archaeological, **ecological, biodiversity** and heritage assets within and adjoining the development **and to minimise the visual impact of the development as seen from all points of the surrounding landscape**”

“Arrange buildings and routes to achieve natural surveillance, good pedestrian access to facilities and an attractive relationship to open spaces, **and to maximise the potential for active and passive solar heating and energy generation.**”

Later Note: Though the Consultation has now closed, all comments can still be viewed. Those from Taylor Wimpey UK Ltd. and Martin Hicks (on behalf of Herts. County Council) are of interest. They can be found in Section 6 “Providing Homes” after the section on LA3

3.3 Population Matters

As suggested by Cllr Janice Marshall at the meeting, GE had sent (18th Sept.) the set of policy proposals produced by Population Matters to the other Dacorum MP, David Gaulke, together with an introductory message and an invitation to be added to DEF’s circulation list. To date he had not received a reply.

5. Solar power, heat pumps etc.

GE had not succeeded in a recent attempt to Google for possible “economies of scale” in installation costs for solar panels and/or heat pumps, which might then form part of DEF’s further submissions regarding LA3.

6. Any Other Business

Hatfield Incinerator Refusal

GE said that he had as agreed congratulated David Ashton and John Webb, of Herts. Without Waste, who had addressed DEF on the subject at their 4th Sept. 2014 meeting, on the refusal of planning permission for the proposed Recycling and Energy Recovery facility (including Incinerator) at New Barnfield, Hatfield, on July 16th. In acknowledgement John Webb had written "Since the case was won on grounds of amenity (heritage, Green Belt) rather than environment (esp. climate change), our congratulations are mainly due to the local campaigning groups.", adding that his group would be taking part in UKWIN's (=United Kingdom Without Incineration Network) conference in October, so as to exchange views on the global/national picture and to think about the way toward a "Circular Economy".

Solar Farm at Ashley Green

GE had received no views from DEF members regarding the proposed Community Owned Solar Farm near Ashley Green. The Steering Group's views were mixed. Some thought there might be ecological advantages in such a scheme, whereas GE thought that accommodating the (30 acre) scheme in LA3 would be better than introducing it into a greenfield site. Tom was notified of DEF's position on Oct 8th, with a request to be kept informed of developments. He replied saying that he didn't think any such schemes will be going ahead as the government cuts have made them uneconomical. He said the main reason the developer wanted to use that location (Ashley Green) was because of the availability of an easy grid location.

Luton Airport Noise Limit relaxation

GE had not heard from any DBC Councillors whether they knew of any DBC objection similar to that from St. Albans.

4. Halsey Field (Roman Snails etc.)

Christine Ridley reported as follows:

A first date for The Chilterns Society Herts. Conservation Volunteers (CSHCV) to help with the management of the field has been set for Sunday 13th December 2013, starting at 10am at the site. Additional volunteers are more than welcome, and should register their presence on the day with CSHCV in order to be covered by their insurance.

Later Note: Those wishing to join in, particularly if they are not familiar with the area, are invited to arrive in front of Chris and Mike Ridley's house at 19 Halsey Drive, HP3 1SE, which is a short walking distance away from the site, at about 9:50am. Chris and Mike will be around to advise on parking. They will also provide some elevenses-style refreshment on site, and plan to end the work session at around 1pm. Their contact details are: Phone 01442 386322 Email chrisridleysen@yahoo.co.uk, and they would appreciate knowing in advance if you are planning to be there.

Barry Watson, one of the CSHCV organisers, came to look round the field with CR on the morning of 17.09.15, and it was decided that the group would concentrate on clearing Ash trees and scrub around patches of important wildflowers, such as cowslips, Bird's-foot Trefoil and Knapweed etc., and also from a 3 metre margin along one side of the main paths. Wild-life friendly bushes such as Spindle, Buckthorn and Wild Privet, would however be left intact. On Oct 28th Carol Lodge, HMWT Wildlife Sites Officer, met Christine on site in order to discuss/advise further. Carol made the following recommendations:

We should concentrate on cutting back the area in the centre of the field, which is nutrient poor and rich in wild flowers. Cutting the vegetation at different levels is ideal, and it doesn't matter if we miss some bits - thus mimicking grazing animals.

- We should tackle a quarter of this at a time, and cut most of the vegetation down in that quarter (not the spindle!) - (I suggest we concentrate on the north-west quarter first, as this is where cow-slips, ox-eye daisies, and bird's foot trefoil grow.)
- Rake off everything we cut, and push this into a bramble patch in that quarter.
- Trim the areas of bramble in the quarter, without cutting them out completely.
- Cut down as many Ash saplings as possible throughout the field, (but leave the area in the far corner, as cutting all the trees there would be too much work).
- Trim some patches on the slope - especially in and around the areas of knapweed.
- Scythe areas of the more aggressive grasses (False Oak grass and Brome) in July, before it has had time to set seed.
- Cut back each quarter at different times of the year.
- If possible, cut a margin on one side of some of the paths in May, late June, mid August and October.

Carol had also said that she would write to the Boxmoor Trust about the field, and that the best solution to the management would be to graze a few long-horn cows on the site, but these would have to be looked after.

The main advertising of the 'Friends of Halsey Field' Group will be left until next spring, so any momentum from joining will not be lost over the winter months. A flyer advertising the Friends group was sent to people who had already expressed an interest in helping, together with an invitation to turn up and help on Dec 13th.

Tom Butcher from Lambert Smith Hampton, estate managers for Herts. County Council is currently working on the licence for doing the work as proposed on Dec 13th.

5. River Gade in Gadebridge Park

Steve Wilson, in his capacity as a leading member of Friends of Gadebridge Park, said that the Gade formed part of the Colne system, which also includes the Bulbourne and the Chess, examples of chalk streams, which are rare and internationally valued resources.

He quoted the previous day's figures for water flow in these streams, showing them to be at levels lower than recommended for maintaining their quality in terms of purity and biodiversity. This would not have been affected by the previous few days of dry weather, since flow reacts to rainfall levels over a period of around six months. Low flow means that contributions from short-term flash floods, whose effect Steve illustrated with a twenty four hour flow diagram, were particularly harmful as these contributions contained a high proportion of road run-off which contains pollutants from vehicles. Water traps to avoid this are now recommended for major new road schemes, but this was not the case for earlier schemes such as Leighton Buzzard Road through the Park.

A lot of run-off pollutant ends up as sludge in the river bed, and therefore does not show up in the Environment Agency's water samples, the usual basis for categorising the health of rivers. However the build up of sludge reduces the visible flow and attractiveness of the river by stimulating the encroachment of vegetation from either side. The problem does not occur with the Bulbourne, as the banks are grazed, the only contrary factor there being that the presence of cattle increases nitrate levels in the water.

Although periodic flooding is a natural phenomenon when flow is high following months of rain, and not necessarily a bad thing, this level of clogging up means that the river is liable to flood at much lower flow levels. This occurred with the Gade two years ago, when the Park was flooded for three months, but after Friends of Gadebridge Park had initiated a clearance of the sludge, the floods disappeared within about two weeks.

Steve said that there would be an Environment Agency week of meetings beginning on December 7th looking at issues regarding the whole of the Colne system, and that Friends of Gadebridge Park would contribute to that with their experiences to date.

DH asked what proportion of water came from sewage treatment works. SW said that there were none currently affecting the Gade, the one at Great Gaddesden having closed. The Bulbourne did however receive a contribution from the outflow of Berkhamsted sewage treatment works.

DH asked about the effect on the flow through the Water Gardens. SW agreed that within the Water Gardens restoration project there had been more emphasis on landscaping than on water flow. Recent agreement between the Environment Agency and the Water Company had resulted in a promised reduction water abstraction – a key factor in determining flow levels – by 2018.

MR said that sources of water where there was currently a problem of surplus, such as College Lake near Tring, should be considered.

Christine Ridley gave an illustrated talk of a technique for determining the health of rivers in terms of counts of various riverfly species found by sampling. She had recently attended a training course on the subject given by the Riverfly Partnership.

In 2007, the Riverfly Partnership had launched a scheme to monitor the biological health of streams in Britain. They believe that “anglers are natural guardians of the river environment, (and) are in an ideal position to monitor the health of the watercourses they fish, by using (i.e. counting) the riverflies they aim to imitate with their artificial flies.”

CR said that the numbers of river fly larvae are monitored each month, at the same sites in the river, and the results are posted on-line. If pollution is found, the incident can be reported right away, and immediate action can be taken.

After attending the Riverfly Partnership’s training session at Latimer, CR and Rodney Tucker, who are members of Friends of Gadebridge Park, had recently started to monitor the River Gade at two sites in Gadebridge Park, one immediately upstream of the outflow from road drainage (TL0509108428), and one downstream of the outflow, near the children’s skate park (TL0525808008). CR presented graphical summaries of findings at these two points, which indicated that the river was moderately healthy.

6. Any Other Business

GE said that bookings had now been made with the Fire Station for the four meeting dates in 2016 agreed by the Steering Group, which were (Thursdays):

Feb 25th

May 12th

Aug 25th

Nov 10th

PH recommended that Susie Mercer, General Manager, Ashridge Estate should be invited to present to the Forum at as early a date as possible for her. GE said that a number of external speakers had been invited for the current meeting, and though unable to make this date had expressed willingness to do so at some future date. Now the 2016 dates have been fixed he would approach all of them again. **Action GE.**

GS spoke of his concern over a planning application for a multi-storey car park next to Waitrose in Berkhamsted. See:

<http://www.berkhamstedtoday.co.uk/news/more-news/multi-storey-car-park-plan-for-berkhamsted-1-4291142>

DH recommended members to consider environmental issues beyond Dacorum (*Chairman's Note: This is within DEF's Terms of Reference, provided that Dacorum is or will be affected by them*)

He advertised Sustainable St. Albans Week, 21-28 November, which comprises "Over 100 events in the district run by the community for the community – all about environmental sustainability!"

See <http://sustainablestalbans.org/>

He also drew attention to the climate change march on Nov. 29th in London, timed to coincide with the Climate Change conference in Paris. *Later Note: According to Berkhamsted Transition Towns "The People's March for Climate, Justice and Jobs" is taking place in London on 29th November 2015. There will be a Transition Bloc participating.*

See <https://www.facebook.com/events/549138965234838/> “

MR said that he was sending a letter to Mike Penning, MP urging that the UK take a pro-active role in the Paris Climate Conference, and lead the world by example, and asked whether DEF would back this.

Later note: as there was no time for the text of Mike's letter to be discussed in Forum, a copy was subsequently sent to attendees for comment within a week, which has since elapsed with no response. GE will accordingly send a DEF-backing-up Email to Mike Penning and to David Gaulke.

SW said that he would shortly be attending an environmental conference at the Royal Geographical Society, of which he is a Fellow, and registering as Vice-Chair of DEF.