



**Dacorum Environmental Forum  
Full Meeting Thursday 10.11.2016**

MINUTES

**Attendance**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Cllr Janice Marshall	Environment Portfolio Holder, DBC
Cllr Phil Hills	Tring Town Council
Tom Aldridge	DEF Web Consultant
Chris Ridley	DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe	HCC/DBC
Cllr Paul Harris	Great Gaddesden PC and DEF
Siva Niranjana	West Herts. Action Group and DEF

**Apologies**

Roger Hands	DEF Water Group

Meeting started at 7:30pm

**1. Apologies**

See above. **GE** arrived late and **SW** took the chair up to Item 5

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 25/8/16**

No corrections suggested.

**3. Matters arising**

*Friends of Halsey Field*

**CR** reported the following ongoing initiatives by the Friends at the Halsey Field Wildlife Site:

Members were invited to join ecologist Steve Lings and other Friends on site at 10.am on Saturday 5th November. There was good support - 13 gathered by the bench at 10am, and achieved a lot during the morning, including:

- A quick discussion about priorities for this winter.
- Cutting down the fresh growth from the Ash trees that had been lopped in the top part of the field last winter.
- Lopping some of the single Hawthorn, Maple and Blackthorn bushes which were growing in amongst the wild flowers, and next to the main path (but leaving those which were full of berries for the birds to enjoy, and also those which formed clusters, as these will provide good shelter and nesting sites for next spring).
- Scything and raking the grass on the side of the path, to leave different heights of grasses to suit different invertebrates.
- Sowing some Yellow Rattle seeds. This plant grows on the roots of grasses and therefore prevents coarse grasses from overpowering the wild flowers.
- During coffee break plans for the signage were discussed. **MR** is going to make a wooden notice board for temporary signs, and Steve Lings is going to put some illustrations together for the permanent information board. QR Codes (2 dimensional barcodes) are to be included on the boards, to enable users of smart phones to link to related online resources. At present, the Halsey Field section previously on the DEF website (see Item 4 below) is not on the new site, but in the meantime the link could be made to the Friends' Facebook page.

The sun came out, and the field was looking very pretty in its Autumn colours, and yet again the team were treated to a display of a hunting Kestrel.

**CR** hoped that all Friends would be able to make the next work party scheduled for Wednesday 14th December, when CSHCV have kindly volunteered to help the friends. Meet at 10am on the field as usual.

Meanwhile, a group from the Osborne Property Services are going to have a company team-building day on the Halsey Field, on 24<sup>th</sup> November, and help the Friends chop down some more Ash trees on the northern part of the field, widen some of the footpaths, and clear an area at the bottom of the field of shrubs which are threatening to shade out the orchids.

In response to **CR**'s earlier query, Janice Marshall had found out that Community Action Dacorum will be working with the Volunteer Centre to create a voluntary sector directory for this Borough by which the voluntary sector bodies can promote what they do and look for volunteers. However, the time scale is such that it will not be ready until the end of 2017.

In the meantime, the best email address for Community Action Dacorum to advertise events and have a particular push on seeking volunteers is [events@communityactiondacorum.org.uk](mailto:events@communityactiondacorum.org.uk)

### ***Dacorum Borough Council's Street Champions project.***

**SW** arranged a litter pick in Gadebridge park (for the Friends of Gadebridge Park) on Thursday 20th October. FoGP cleared the river and both banks from the White bridge down to the children's play park, right to the end of the park.

**CR** suggested three possible dates to Nigel Brant-Wilcock for the re-arranged litter pick in Gadebridge (down the alleyway near the Gadebridge Community Centre), that was originally scheduled for Saturday 22nd October, and from these Sunday 15th January has been chosen.

#### **4. Demo of new DEF website**

**TA** gave an online demonstration of the newly-rehosted website, using his own laptop connected to the Meeting Room's projector and to the Internet via its guest Wi-Fi login. His tour of the site included a look at the Water Group's treasury of local water-related issues, which were now incorporated with in a single integrated site, sections on Waste Management, the page where minutes of DEF meetings stretching back many years are held, together with their associated documents and the all-important Diary Dates page.

**SW** said he was happy that the Water Group section was now integrated, and said that the integration process had benefited from a review and slimming down of the existing content, which had been the subject of a dedicated session in January between himself, **GE** and **TA**.

**PH** Pointed out that the overall page header description of DEF as "The Forum for Water, Transport and Waste Issues in Dacorum" was too limited. This was generally agreed, and a more all-encompassing description should be sought.

**TA** Suggested that there should be a "News" section or page. This was agreed.

**CR** Suggested that visitors to the site should be able to leave comments. This was agreed.

**SN** Pointed out that the "Pages in this Site" pane on the right partially duplicated the navigational assistance provided by the drop-down menus, took up space and gave it a dated appearance. However **SW** suggested keeping it for now, and others found the extra navigational aid useful.

**JM** said the site looked attractive.

It was noticed that the section on Halsey Field could no longer be found. **TA** said that he would search for it amongst the transfer files, failing which **CR** said that she still had the pictures.

The Website address <http://www.dacenvforum.org.uk/> is unchanged, but the site differs slightly in style and layout from the old one. At **SW**'s suggestion it was agreed that DEF members should be encouraged to visit the site and send observations to **GE** in the first instance.

**GE** thanked **TA** again for all his work. He said that following a protracted period of less frequent content maintenance the site is in need of bringing up to date, but a major purpose of the transfer, prompted by Marion Baker's departure over two years ago had been to make updates easier to do, and hence to share the task of doing them. He pledged to play his part in this task.

#### **5. Update on Friends of Gadebridge Park**

**SW** said that on Sept 27<sup>th</sup> he had attended a Friends of Gadebridge Park meeting where members were updated on an important potential development by Nigel Brant - Wilcock, DBC Neighbourhood Support Lead Officer. There was a proposal by Affinity Water in partnership with the Environment Agency to invest a substantial sum of money on the River Gade in Gadebridge Park. It was envisaged that projects to benefit would include:

- Changing the course of the river to the south of the White Bridge, introducing a meandering route. This would probably require new footbridges to the children's play area.
- Narrowing the width of the river.
- Improving the wetland area in the corner between the Leighton Buzzard Road and the East-West Link Road.
- Mud and sludge traps to reduce the impact of runoff from the Leighton Buzzard Road.

**SW** had expressed, and continued to have, some reservations regarding changing the course and width of the river. In particular, regard would need to be taken of the underlying gravel layer, and the need to maintain water on the surface.

**MR** asked how the community would benefit. **SW** said that he could see the advantages of the last two bullet points above.

## **6. Transport issues - consultation on HCC transport policy up to 2050.**

**MR** said that he and **PH** had completed an online response on behalf of DEF to this consultation, and were finalising it in good time to submit for the closing date of Dec. 14<sup>th</sup>.

As well as replying to specific questions in the questionnaire, they had included the text from the document "Future transport in Hertfordshire, with particular reference to Hemel Hempstead in DBC" that was circulated to DEF with the minutes of the August 25<sup>th</sup> meeting, highlighting text where it concurred with the consultation document.

**MR** said that he had been pleasantly surprised by the extent to which aspirations in the consultation document lined up with the document produced independently by DEF, in particular HCC's objectives of reducing reliance on cars and improving public transport.

In the response, DEF call for more reliance on electrically powered vehicles, a goal that was becoming more achievable through advances in battery technology, for use both in vehicles and in fixed energy storage points feeding the transport network.

DEF's response also supports the idea of a new link between the East-West Cross-Rail link and the West Coast Main Line (Aug. 25<sup>th</sup> minutes refer.), innovations such as Zip Cars and smart taxi/minibus hybrids and inter-town bus services with fewer intermediate stops.

**WW-L** said that a Zip Car scheme had been proposed for Maylands Avenue, but there would have needed to be one pick-up location, which for most potential users was beyond the distance they were prepared to walk.

In response to the question whether the "Objects and Principles" were comprehensive, DEF submits that these should address the problems caused by parked cars. **PH** cited an example in Tring where a large vehicle was illegally parked on grass (Public Open Space) and said that Rob Cassidy (Parks and Open Spaces Officer at DBC) was looking into the possibility of a prosecution in this case. Several people present quoted similar cases. **JM** said that in this case there was the aggravating factor of visual obstruction causing danger to traffic.

Links to the HCC consultation document and questionnaire respectively are:

<http://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/docs/pdf/1/LTPtranvis2050>

<https://surveys.hertfordshire.gov.uk/s/L8ILV/>

**MR** and **PH**'s response document is also attached to these minutes.

## **7. Planning and the recent Examination in Public (LA3 etc.)**

**GE** said that he had represented DEF at the Examination in Public of the Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) on **Matter 1 – 'Legal Compliance, Including Duty to Cooperate'** on Tue 4 October and on **Matter 9 – 'Policy LA3: West Hemel Hempstead'** on Tue 11 October (14.00). DEF had also sent written representations on **Matter 2 - 'General Matters'** and **Matter 4 - 'Housing.'** Other representers included DBC's Strategic Planning Team (headed by Laura Wood) and legal advisor (Rob Jameson) and HCC officers including Nick Gough for HCC Highways.

At the Matter 1 session of the Examination it became clear that many of the points that **GE** was attempting to raise would be unlikely to be taken on board as the Inspector regarded them as beyond its scope. This was because the principle of development of the 6 sites LA1 etc. was established by the Core Strategy so the comments under Matter 1 on DBC's own poor sustainability rating of for example LA3 and the fact that the Core Strategy's assessment of it contradicted past decisions and planning history were not relevant to the current examination of the Site Allocations. Matter 1 was just about whether Dacorum had complied with their legal requirements.

At the Matter 9 (LA3) session, the developers' representatives, including Martin Friend for Vincent and Gorbings were present. Responses to **GE**'s points from the Inspector, and DBC fell mainly into one of two categories:

- a. This is no longer up for discussion. It was all fixed in the Core Strategy.
- b. Yes, we know there are challenges, but DBC have commissioned specialist reports and have committed to continuing to do so. The scale of any problems will become clearer as we advance through the planning stages, and will be addressed accordingly.

**GE** queried Vincent and Gorbings' assertion "The very special circumstances for amending the Green Belt boundary in this location have already been accepted", pointing out that this was confirmation that there was a requirement for "special circumstances" to be proved in order to remove Green Belt status, and enquiring what the special circumstances were referred to. (Answer Type a)

Vincent Gorbings said that (subject to acceptance of the DPD by the Inspector) there would be a further round of consultation "towards the end of this year", a planning application early next year, and (Subject to Planning Permission) infrastructure works in 2018.

In introducing the Agenda question 6 "Should the site come forward prior to 2021 if it is available?", the Inspector said that Cala Homes (developers of LA5 in Tring) during a previous session of the Examination had opposed the provision of pitches for travellers, and that if this was accepted, and because of a requirement to have a five year supply of pitches overall, LA3 might need to be brought forward from (first completions) 2021 to 2019, since it contained a provision for seven traveller pitches. This argument was criticised by Lee Royal, representing the West Herts Action Group as a case of "the tail wagging the dog". **GE** supported this analogy.

**GE** said that since there were obvious and exceptional environmental disadvantages to LA3 the site should not "come forward" until after a review of the Core Strategy and preparation of the new Local Plan, when the allocation could in theory be removed and the site retained in the Green Belt. (Answers Type a and b. The possibility that the allocation could be removed was emphatically rejected by the Inspector.)

*(Later Note: It appears subsequently from a letter sent by the Inspector to DBC Strategic Planning that the completion of LA3 will be brought forward to 2019 as indicated above.)*

A fuller (four page) report of DEF representations at the Examination will be sent out with these minutes.

## **5. Any Other Business**

**PH** said that equipment and tents used by "Scarenation 2016 - Dr Carnevil and the Circus of Fear" in Gadebridge Park had been in place for a total of three weeks, causing a large patch of the grass to turn brown, and possibly harmfully compacting the soil, and that DBC should reconsider sanctioning such an event at this time of year in future.

**SW** said that two days earlier he had attended a Royal Geographical Society meeting on Flood Risk Assessment, and had registered as representing DEF.

**GE** said that prior to the Examination in Public (see Item 7 above), on Thursday 29th September he had - using DEF funding - attended the CPRE Hertfordshire Planning Skills Seminar at Knebworth Village Hall, where attendees were addressed by Jed Griffiths MA DipTP FRTPi and Steve Baker, Planning Manager for CPRE Herts. The programme included National Planning Policy and the legal framework, including the role of National Planning Practice Guidance (NPPG) - which can be viewed online. Local Plans (which Steve Baker said had tended to be 'Landowner Led' rather than 'Planning Department Led'), Neighbourhood Planning (there is only one Neighbourhood Plan under way in Dacorum - Grovehill), Development Proposals and Planning Applications and How to Influence Decisions (one tip given in relation to public consultations was to make representations shortly before the deadline so that there was less time for others to prepare refutations). The item on Planning Applications contained this useful checklist of what were Material and Non-Material considerations for planning decisions:

### **Material**

design and visual impact  
privacy/daylight/sunlight  
noise, smell, pollution  
vehicular access  
health, safety  
ecology, landscape  
crime (and fear of)  
economic impact  
planning history/related decisions  
cumulative impact

### **Non-Material**

the identity and character of the applicant  
the identity of the landowner  
private rights, e.g. of access  
restrictive covenants  
property values  
competition  
loss of view  
moral issues  
numbers of representations  
change from previous plan  
building regulation issues