



**Dacorum Environmental Forum  
Full Meeting Thursday 9.11.2017**

**MINUTES**

**Attendance**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Cllr Paul Harris	DEF/Great Gaddesden Parish Council
Dennis Harvey	DEF
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Lee Royal	West Hemel Action Group
Anne Lyne	West Hemel Action Group
Ken Jarrett	West Hemel Action Group
John Mawer	Bourne End Village Association
Chris Mabley	Bourne End Village Association
Sean Tabner	Student Journalist
Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Cllr Phil Hills	Tring Town Council
Cllr Ron Tindall	DBC
Cllr Tina Howard	DBC and HCC

Meeting started at 7:30pm

**1. Apologies**

Siva Niranjana, Adrian Whyle, Roger Hands, Cllr. Janice Marshall

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 11/05/17**

No corrections suggested.

**3. Matters arising**

**DBC's Street Champions project**

GE reported that (Facing the left-hand block of flats from the Northridge Park side) the settee base had since disappeared.

**4. Halsey Field Update**

**CR** reported as follows:

The Friends of Halsey Field had had a busy October, and November promised to be similarly eventful.

- On 5<sup>th</sup> October The Halsey Field Committee attended an award ceremony at which the Friends of the Field were declared winners of the group section of the Clean, Safe and Green Community Champions competition, for all the hard work they have done on the site over the last three years.
- On 7<sup>th</sup> October we held a small mammal survey, during which 7 small mammals were trapped, photographed and then released back on to the field. These were all Long- Tailed Field Mice, or Wood Mice, of different ages and sexes and of a good weight. The fact that 7 out of 11 traps had a successful catch shows that the population of small mammals on the field is probably very healthy. October is a peak month for Long- Tailed Field Mice, but voles and shrews have been seen at other times. The newly-installed owl box (see below) may have an impact on numbers.
- We applied for and have been awarded a Locality Grant for £1000 to pay for a brush cutter and associated safety equipment to help with the field management. Brush cutting is preferable to mowing, as the latter flattens anthills.
- On 9<sup>th</sup> October Mike and Chris Ridley attended a day's brush cutting course and passed the assessment, meaning that they now both have a brush cutting certificate.
- Chris Ridley also attended a day's first aid course on 3<sup>rd</sup> October.
- We are now in possession of an owl nest box, made especially for the Halsey Field, and this was installed this morning (9<sup>th</sup> November) by John Fisher, Secretary of the Ver Valley Society, and Peter Wilkinson, who are both experienced Barn Owl handlers. John has also kindly offered to monitor the box for us.
- On 22<sup>nd</sup> November the Osborne Property group have kindly agreed to hold another team building day on the field, when they are going to help us cut down or tree pop some of the overgrown saplings and bushes growing in northern section of the field.
- On 26<sup>th</sup> November, the CSHCV have offered to help the Friends with more path widening, grass cutting and raking.
- Grazing with Belted Galloway cattle (initially, just two) belonging to the Boxmoor Trust, to help with the field's management is currently under discussion. Boxmoor Trust are keen to proceed.

## **5. LA3 Master Plan and sustainability**

**GE** said that though Cllr Graham Sutton was not able to be present, **GE** had sent him a summary of DEF's position and the questions they would like to have had answered thus:

"DEF has consistently sought over the years to influence the Master Plan for LA3 and help it achieve the greatest possible standards of sustainability.

On August 6<sup>th</sup> 2014 at a meeting between ourselves and Council planning officers, chaired by Mike Penning MP, we said that in view of the negative impact of LA3 on the Borough (and Hemel Hempstead in particular) the Council should in mitigation require the developers to build a "Flagship Development" to the highest possible standards of sustainability, and suggested a number of measures that would contribute towards this aim.

We crystallised these suggestions in our response to the public consultation on the Plan in October 2014, and again raised them and added to them at our quarterly meeting on May 11<sup>th</sup> this year, which was attended by developers' representatives.

I list some of the main points here:

1. Solar panels fitted to all appropriately facing roofs
2. Electric Car charging points in all residencies and community areas
3. Build to thermal insulation standards above building regulation requirements
4. Wildlife corridor to follow the route and to be the width recommended by HCC's ecological adviser.
5. Sustainable water usage, to reduce rainwater run-off and to reduce the depletion of the Chilterns aquifers.
6. Transport links to encourage use of sustainable public transport, rather than providing a service merely for the non car owners, (but this would not be the responsibility of the developers)

A case could be made that the extra cost of these proposals can be largely offset by factoring this in to the selling price of the properties.

At our forthcoming meeting we hope that you will be able to provide us with answers to two questions:

- Does the Council have any power to insist on these design ideals?
- If so, will the Council choose to press for any of these stipulations?"

Re (4) above, **KJ** pointed out that this Wildlife corridor route would be bisected by the Avenue access road.

**JM** said increasing the housing density by adding 200 homes to the 900 in the Core Strategy, as suggested by the developers, would have an impact on all of the above proposals. **GE** agreed, and said that that making DEF's proposed Wildlife Corridor of the width recommended by HCC's ecological adviser was one example of this.

**SW** said that the question about DBC's powers was a key one.

**GE** said that to date he had had no communication from Cllr. Sutton on the issue.

**RT** said that over recent years the Government had consistently weakened the planning constraining powers of Local Authorities. In addition, the legal costs of a possible appeal by well-funded developers discouraged them from refusing applications.

**JM** said that Councillors were our democratic representatives. They consult their electors on major developments, but in practice allow the developers to do what they want. This will discourage people from taking part in any further consultation exercises.

**RT** (who is the Liberal Democrat opposition portfolio holder for adult care services at DBC) said that one consequence of increasing housing density was that it would make it harder to achieve the stated objective of enabling people requiring special and space-consuming equipment such as an oxygen supply to live in their own homes. Such people were from across the age spectrum, so this was a long-term consideration.

**GE** enquired whether anyone had news of when the Master Plan would be published and available for consultation, although clearly DEF had no interest in it being earlier rather than later.

?? said that a planning officer had said in September that it would be within a few weeks.

**CM** said that at one stage the Developers had said August.

**SW** suggested that if anyone got wind of actual or imminent publication, they should let **GE/DEF** know

## 6. "Dacorum Greenway" concept

**SW** said that a suitably pleasant, planned and presented green corridor encircling Hemel Hempstead, possibly with radial extensions, for instance along the Bulbourne and Gade, would enhance the attractiveness and prestige of the Borough, attracting visitors who currently may come for Jarman Park and its Ski centre and little else. Hemel, the town with the largest population in Hertfordshire - 100 thousand - deserved it. It would also contribute to local wellbeing. Locally based Health Walks were already very popular, with an attendance of around a hundred not untypical.

The route could start from the Two Waters fishing lake, via the Water Gardens, Gadebridge Park and Halsey Field. Existing footpaths from there cross Boxted Road and lead to the Chiltern Way/Wildlife Corridor abutting LA3, Shrubhill Common Local Nature Reserve and on to Boxmoor Common.

The route could be promoted using informative brochures, and should be adapted for disability access, as is currently underway in Gadebridge Park. **SW** had already spoken to councillors about the concept, and **MR** had photographed the route.

**GS** said that the concept was in conformity with the New Local Plan which would term it a "Green Lung"

## **7. DBC 2017 Local Plan Consultation (closes Wednesday 13th December 2017)**

**SW** took the chair for this item.

By way of introduction the following were displayed:

(Page numbers as per Acrobat, not as in-document)

### **From the Issues and Options Consultation:**

P7 Foreword by Cllr. Graham Sutton. (Cllr. Sutton had been asked whether he could discuss the Local Plan in addition to LA3 - See Item 5). The Foreword included the following:

"This consultation is the first step in creating a new Local Plan for Dacorum. The Plan, which looks ahead to 2036, will be a key document in shaping the future of our Borough and will affect us all. We are therefore keen to encourage as many people as possible to get involved. You may be wondering why we are preparing a new Plan when we've only recently prepared our Core Strategy and Site Allocations documents, which look to 2031."

". . . the Planning Inspector who examined our Core Strategy required us to sign up to an 'early review' of key parts of our plan, relating to the level of new homes we would provide and how we consider the future role of the Green Belt."

"The Council will continue to plan positively for regeneration and growth and in doing so some difficult decisions will need to be made. Given the limited amount of available land in the Borough and significant environmental constraints it will be vital that the right balance is struck between new development and protecting the character of our towns, villages and countryside which we value so greatly."

### **From the Site Appraisals Draft:**

P16: North Hemel Hempstead (Phase 1) 1,750 homes at 30 dwellings per hectare. The Crown Estate is in discussions with adjoining landowners regarding a larger phase 1 with potentially a total of 2,250 homes.

P21: North Hemel Hempstead (Phases 1 and 2)

4,500 homes at 30 dwellings per hectare. The Crown Estate is in discussions with a range of adjoining landowners regarding site assembly and delivery.

### **From the Site Appraisals Sustainability Appraisal:**

P21 Site Reference: HH-h1b - North Hemel Hempstead (Phases 1 and 2)

**GE** said that to date he had been unable to track down the summary of consultation responses referred to in the extract below from the Site Appraisals Draft. This would be relevant now, as DEF had responded at some length in May to the SA Framework and would like to see whether its response had had any impact. The link provided didn't appear to lead there.

From Site Appraisals Draft, Appendix A, SA Framework

"This SA framework was originally published for consultation in the SA/SEA Scoping Report which was subject to consultation from 23rd March to 5th May 2017. Following that consultation the framework has been updated to take on-board comments received. The updated Scoping Report Update (October 2017) provides a summary of the consultation responses received along with an explanation of how each comment has been taken into account. The Scoping Report Update is available on the Council's website at the following link:

<http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/planning-development/planning-strategic-planning/new-single-local-plan/technical-work-for-the-early-partial-review>"

**DH** asked about the relationship between the New Local Plan and the Department for Communities and Local Government's consultation on "Planning for the right homes in the right places", which was published on 14 September 2017 and which was closing on Nov 9<sup>th</sup>, i.e. the date of the current DEF meeting. **GE** said that the Issues and Options Consultation document clearly indicated that its housing demand figures sought to conform to the Government's consultation, though he thought it illogical that Dacorum's consultation, including projected housing figures, had been approved by the Council before the end of the Government consultation. **GS** said that the emergence of the Government's consultation had caused a delay of a week or so in the finalisation of Dacorum's consultation.

**RT** and **GS** said that major financial considerations were behind the step increase in annual house building rates for the Borough (the Issues and Options Consultation document includes arguments for anything from 601 to 1100). It was the (majority) private market, and the payback to Government that it generated, that was being driven upward in order to fund affordability and "help to buy" schemes. The figure for "intermediate" and social housing was 366 p.a. **MR** quoted a Waiting List figure of 5,600 which could be compared with the Issues and Options Consultation document's 10,940 housing capacity (2013-36) that was "consistent with existing planning policies" (i.e. Green Belt as-is) . **RT** said that there were in addition around 5,000 on Waiting List B (typically, single males).

**SW** cited London, which could find the money to provide council homes for half a million of its households. It was purely a political decision to do so. He said that the number of houses proposed in Dacorum's Local Plan would contain a substantial element providing for people moving out of London. The numbers were in any case plucked out of the air. **RT** said that neighbouring district councils were also contributing to Dacorum's housing demand by buying up properties here for people requiring ongoing social support. It made economic sense for them to do so, as a high proportion of such people had many decades of life ahead, during which their local council (Dacorum) and not the exporting council would be paying for the support.

**SW** referred to the estimated 220,000 vacant homes in Britain (22,000 in London) which should be pressed into use.

**GE** said that several pages of the Options Consultation document (see Acrobat Page 46: "Calculating Local Housing Need") were devoted to the subject of calculating housing demand, based principally on the South West Hertfordshire Strategic Market Housing Assessment (SHMA ) (2016)).

*Subsequent Notes:*

*The Options Consultation document states (3.7.3) that "The National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) provides the main context for local plans. .... The Government asks Councils to ... support development which encourages economic growth and the creation of sustainable communities. The content of the NPPF is due to be revised shortly, to reflect changes suggested within the 2017 Housing White Paper ('Fixing the Broken Housing Market'). We have also taken into account the content of the Government consultation on 'Planning for the right homes in the right places' (September 2017)". Also (3.7.4) "Local Plans should avoid repeating policies that are already covered by national policy and guidance and not duplicate matters covered by other legislation."*

*The SHMA is nearly 200 pages long. It claims (Para. 1.4) that it "responds to and is compliant with the requirements of the National Planning Policy". The SHMA also states (4.18 P39) that "The most up-to-date projections are the 2012-based CLG (Communities and Local Government) Household Projections (from the Office for National Statistics) published in February 2015. These projections were underpinned by ONS (2012-based) subnational population projections (SNPP) – published in May 2014. Planning Practice Guidance specifically outlines that 'The 2012-2037 Household Projections were published on 27 February 2015, and are the most up-to-date estimate of future household growth.' "*

*The Office for National Statistics Website says that the 2012-based projection (published in May 2014) is not the latest release, which is 2014-based.*

**DH** said that he had recently been studying and responding to a consultation set up by the Home and Communities Agency, which dealt with house building targets. One table had "Not Applicable" against "Constraints", which was indicative of where the authors saw the balance between housing demand and environmental impact. He said that Planning Guidance changes meant that it had become the responsibility of local councils to get more houses built, and that there were financial rewards for them doing so.

**JM** said that it was up to local councillors to provide housing without creating social division. They needed to address the public's concerns (*over large-scale developments*). **RT** said that Planning Officers were not to blame, but were merely doing their job as instructed. **GS** said that the fundamental requirement was to build affordable homes. **CM** said that in practice this did not happen.

**RT** said that (*as the terms of the Options Consultation appeared not to include any questioning of National policies*), the Forum should also target our local MPs. This was agreed by **GE** and others. Also, that DEF's response, or a document derived from it, should be sent to all members of Dacorum's Development Control Committee. Also agreed. **TR** to send **GE** a list of their E-mail addresses.

**GE** said that the Government's attitude on Green Belt protection was ambivalent, on the one hand creating via "Planning Guidance" rules that force Councils to deplete Green Belt on a massive scale (CPRE analysis in January this year found that existing and emerging Local Plans nationally are proposing more than 362,000 houses on the Green Belt), and on the other, (quoting from Brandon Lewis MP Minister of State for Housing and Planning 7<sup>th</sup> June ) "The Framework makes it clear that inappropriate development may be allowed only where very special circumstances exist, and that Green Belt boundaries should be adjusted only in exceptional circumstances, through the Local Plan process and with the support of local people. We have been repeatedly clear that demand for housing alone will not change Green Belt boundaries. "

**SW** said that our response should highlight the defence of Dacorum's rare and internationally recognised chalk streams.

It was agreed that DEF should encourage its members to respond to the Options Consultation, as well as doing a DEF response. **GE** said that he would put this in the E-mail that goes out with the Minutes, inviting those who were interested in a DEF response to make contact and/or send in contributions for him to collate. He would also create an initial off-line response document which, subject to time constraints would be sent to interested parties for further comment.

## **8. Any Other Business**

**SW** said that there would be a meeting of the DEF Water Group next Wednesday (Nov 15<sup>th</sup>) at 7:30pm at Berkhamsted Civic Centre. **GE** requested that attendees be asked for a volunteer to help maintain the Water section of the DEF website.

**GS** recommended a report on the impact of new housing written by Cllr. Ian Reay, (Ian.reay@berkhamstedtowncouncil.gov.uk), chairman of the Chilterns Conservation Board, which is responsible for preserving and enhancing the quality of the Chilterns environment.