



**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 6.09.2018**

MINUTES

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Cllr Garrick Stevens	Berkhamsted Town Council
Lauren Naish	Project Manager for Gadebridge Park, Environment Agency
Jamie Thompson	Environment Agency
Rob Rees	Environment Agency
Celina Rajanayagam	Affinity Water
Rob Beauchamp	Friends of Gadebridge Park
Rodney Tucker	DEF, Friends of Gadebridge Park

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1a. Apologies

Janice Marshall, Environment Portfolio Holder, DBC
Chris Ridley, DEF and FOHF
Siva Niranjana, WHAG,
Cllr Phil Hills, Tring Town Council,
Cllr Steve Bateman, Berkhamsted Town Council
Cllr Tina Howard, DBC and HCC
Brian Worrell, Neighbourhood Watch
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe, DBC and HCC
Dennis Harvey, DEF
Paul Harris, DEF and Great Gaddesden PC

1b. Tribute to Phil Pennington.

GE said that Phil Pennington, his predecessor as Chair of DEF, died on 29th June. He had played a formative role in DEF since its beginning in 1993, including setting up and actively participating in four working groups. His position as Estates Manager at the Box Moor Trust was invaluable in raising DEF's profile and increasing its range of contacts with related agencies and organisations. His term as Chair from 2006 to 2013 was characterised by robust management of quarterly meetings and the Steering Group, frequent attendance at and contribution to lobbying meetings and other events on DEF's behalf

and in the later years the hosting DEF meetings at the Box Moor Trust Centre. His funeral on 19th July at St. John's Church Boxmoor was attended by many, including several members of DEF.

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 10/05/18

No corrections suggested.

3. Matters arising

DBC's Street Champions project

GE said that he had most recently tried (Sept 1st) to use the online form on the DBC website to report fly tipping, but that it had failed with "There was an Error" after clicking on "Find Me" when he tried to use his "Customer Reference Number". This problem and the fly tipping were reported by E-mail as per the site's recommendation, and GE received a reply from Environmental Services saying that the fly tipping report had been added to DBC's reporting system and passed to Enforcement Officers, before being passed to the Clean, Safe & Green team for action, and that the IT problem had been forwarded to the IT team. *(Later note: The fly tipping had been cleared by Sept 8th. The website was still failing as at 13th September.)*

Halsey Field Update

MR reported as follows:

The following has been achieved since the last DEF meeting:

- A new bench was installed by the footpath which crosses the field from the lower kissing gate. This has a good view back up the field, as far as the top of the slope.
- Three moth surveying sessions took place in May, June and August. The June session was particularly successful, and found 56 different moth species in just 2 hours, including some spectacular Hawkmoths and some rare specimens such as the Sulphur Pearl and the Broom moth. On 15th August 40 species were identified, including 11 species not previously recorded on the Field. Loan of The Box Moor Trust's generator on the last two sessions enabled more powerful lamps to be deployed.
- A butterfly transect was walked weekly over the spring and summer, and recorded the largest numbers to date of Marbled White, Common Blue, Brown Argus and Small Copper butterflies, which breed on Halsey Field, reflecting the hard work put into its management. However, the larger butterflies such as the Peacock, Tortoiseshell and Comma, which breed on nettles have been seen in lower numbers than usual this year. Our Big Butterfly Count on 4th August confirmed the large numbers of Common Blues and Brown Argus on the Field.
- The Open Air Laboratories (OPAL) bug hunt on 4th August was enjoyed by all who took part and was attended by a few local people. We found good numbers of invertebrates in different habitats on the field and learned the most effective ways to look for them, as well as some interesting facts about them.
- Advice was sought from Carol Lodge from HMWT on how to increase protection for the site. She advised that although it is difficult to increase protection for a site, unusual species carry their own protection, so we should make sure we report the species we find there. Consequently, when a Green Hairstreak butterfly, which is on the Hertfordshire Red list, was sighted twice this spring on the site, these sightings were reported to Andrew Wood, the records collector for Herts and Middlesex Butterfly Conservation, as well as being submitted with the rest of the transect data on the Butterfly Conservation web page. Meanwhile, the moth lists are sent to Andrew Plant, the Hertfordshire moths recorder, and unusual bird species have been reported on the 'I Record' website. On behalf of DEF, CR wrote to Mike Penning on 15th May regarding the proposed amendment to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF 2018) which would remove protection for Local Wildlife Sites such as

Halsey Field. As a result of this, on 28th June Mike Penning visited the Halsey Field, and was extremely positive, reassuring DEF/FOHF that the site should keep its protection.

GE said that the revised National Planning Policy Framework, published on 24 July replaced the first National Planning Policy Framework published in March 2012, and that now, presumably as a result of consultations since its draft in March this year it protects:

(Para. 174) "components of local wildlife-rich habitats and wider ecological networks, including the hierarchy of **international, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity**", while the Glossary (Page 67) defines:

"International, national and locally designated sites of importance for biodiversity" as "All international sites (Special Areas of Conservation, Special Protection Areas, and Ramsar sites), national sites (Sites of Special Scientific Interest) and locally designated sites **including Local Wildlife Sites.**"

MR said that via Mike Penning, Dacorum BC had been asked to include the protection of the Halsey Field explicitly in the Local Plan, and that it appeared that that had now been done. Mike Penning had recommended that in order to ensure maintenance of the site in the future it should be transferred to a not-for-profit organisation such as the Boxmoor Trust or a Wildlife Trust. **MR** said that the owners HCC would be more likely to support such a move if the site was protected from development and therefore of less commercial value to them.

LA3 Master Plan and sustainability

(**GE** said that) members of WHAG (West Hemel Action Group) had been informed by DBC planning that the developers' planning application for LA3 was imminent, and had written to them (10th Aug) to request that the consultation period should be extended from the statutory minimum of three weeks to nearer three months, pointing out that this request was consistent with the assurances they had previously given to Councillors and to the community that the consultation plan would be both well-advertised, wider and longer than the standard.

DBC 2017 Local Plan (up to 2036) Consultation

Following Sir Mike Penning's visit to Halsey Field on June 28th, **GE** had E-mailed him to give examples of some of the Green Belt areas visible from Halsey Field that had been submitted for consideration for development and that had formed part of the Local Plan Consultation that DEF responded to in December last year, e.g. North Hemel Hempstead (Phases 1 and 2) - Site Reference HH-h1b (422 acres), which extends as far as the bridleway from Water End to Gaddesden Row.

Because of an inaccuracy in **GE**'s E-mail Sir Mike had replied in terms of Site Reference HH-H2, (26 acres) "North of Gadebridge (Land at Piccotts End)" saying that he would not support it, and that he would write to DBC's Chief Executive expressing his "very deep concerns" at the proposals. The response from the Chief Executive (19th July) confirmed that the site was still under consideration and that Technical Assessments of all sites were not likely to conclude until Spring 2019, and that in response to the Government's 'step change' in housing delivery there was likely to be no alternative to the release of (yet more) Green Belt land .

GE said that Both Sites HH-H2 and the much larger HH-h1b had, under the Technical Studies Assessment in the consultation document, "Exclude from further assessment and retain as Green Belt", so it was disappointing that the Chief Executive could give Sir Mike no reassurance on HH-H2 (or by implication HH-h1b) . He had written again to Sir Mike in order to correct his earlier E-mail and to point unambiguously to Site Reference HH-h1b. In response to this (3rd Sept.) Sir Mike said that the fact the land

in question had "effectively been ruled out" in the Technical Studies Assessment was "the best we can hope for at the moment. "

GS said that he had been informed by the DBC planning department that additional areas of land, including some in the Boxted Farm area had been submitted for technical assessment in July this year.

The Boxmoor Trust: Current Policies, Plans and Objectives, and Outreach.

All who had been in attendance agreed that this had been an excellent and informative presentation.

Lobbying local stores and other food outlets on the question of packaging.

GE said that following his suggestion for DEF to lobby local stores and other food outlets on the question of packaging, as it did in 2008 (see DEF May minutes - Any Other Business), only one or two attendees or recipients of the Minutes had expressed an interest in such a project, so instead he had invited four of the major food retailers with stores in Dacorum to field a representative to come to DEF and address them on any changes since 2008. None accepted, but some supplied information, summarised as:

Waitrose

- Committed to making all own-label packaging widely recyclable (using the widely recycled logo), reusable, or home compostable by 2025.
- Have reduced overall packaging by nearly 50% since 2009. 80% of packaging already widely recyclable.
- Were the first supermarket to stop selling products containing microbeads from September 2016 and exclusively sell paper-stem cotton buds.
- Will no longer offer takeaway disposable cups from autumn 2018.
- Since April 2018 cafes have been moving to only offer paper straws and from September 2018 will no longer sell single-use plastic straws.
- Black plastic is a top priority because it's not easy to recycle and infra-red sensors in recycling plants struggle to pick it up. From the end of this year, will stop using black packaging altogether for our meat, fish and fruit and veg. Committed to stop using black plastic packaging for all own label goods by the end of 2019. Currently moving all our Food To Go drink lids from black to clear.
- By the end of July 2018 all Waitrose Duchy tomatoes will be in punnets made from tomato leaves and paper. Have trialled two of our Italian ready meals in trays made out of wood - feel like cardboard.
- Last summer introduced sandwich packaging which makes it easier for the cardboard to be separated from the plastic.
- Are moving steak to a flat vacuum pack from a plastic tray. At the end of October 2017 wholebird chickens had a significant amount of plastic removed from its packaging.
- In November 2017 the packaging of Waitrose Duchy Organic jumbo oats 1kg changed from plastic to cardboard.

Sainsbury's

Committed to reducing packaging by 50% by 2020 and have so far reduced by 35% since 2005.

Signatories to the UK Plastics Pact which has the following targets

- Elimination of single use plastics by 2025
- Making 100% of packaging recyclable or compostable by 2025

- To Increase the recycled content of all plastic to 30% by 2025
To increase the amount of packaging recycled in the UK to 70% by 2025 (currently 44%)

Tesco

Reference supplied to <https://www.tescopl.com/little-helps-plan/products-packaging/>.

Iceland

Automated response only. (However it has announced proposals for pioneering packaging-free aisles)

It had been reported (May 29th) that Sir Mike Penning was among dozens of MPs to support the new Plastics Bill, which if made law would ensure all plastic is recyclable by 2025 and make producers pay for the cost of recycling. **GE** had written to Mike Penning in support of his decision.

4. Recent and Proposed Developments in Gadebridge Park, including the current Public Consultation.

SW set the background for this topic. He said that the Gade was an example of a Chalk Stream, of which there were only around 200 in the world. Their essential characteristics were defined by a large width-to-depth ratio and a gravel bed. In the case of the Gade its upper reaches had an exceptionally large underlying area of gravel laid down in the last Ice Age. In its recent history however, water levels had declined and it had accumulated large deposits of sediment from non-natural sources such as road run-off. There had been much encroachment by vegetation such as nettles that were not generally regarded as waterside wild plant life. Parts of it were as little as two feet wide. These and other factors had been reflected in the way the rate of flow changed in response to previous rainfall, which in the past could be characterised as a gentle rise and fall but for instance at the end of May this year an inch of rain falling in one hour resulted in an abnormal "spike" lasting a few hours. Extraction by water companies had not been the main cause of this to date, and affected flows only when they were very low to start with following a prolonged drought.

CRa reported on the Upper Park project (between Gadebridge Lane and the East-West Link Road). Here a wetland/drainage/filtering area had been created in order to clean water before it entered the river. Trees had been thinned in order to allow more light to the area, although this had caused concern from some quarters. Around 3,000 plug plants of traditional waterside species had been planted. An easy-access footpath had been created in order to engage the public with the project. It was too early to assess the effects of these changes in relation to the requirements of the Government's Water Framework Directive.

MR produced comparative last-year/this-year charts of indicator (river) species to help judge whether work to date had increased the counts. The charts were examined by the EA representatives, and they did appear to show an increase.

MR also asked for any data to show that last year's reduction in abstraction had increased the river flow. **CRa** agreed to send this information.

RT said that when the wetland/drainage/filtering area overflowed its gravel bank, as it did during the torrential downpours of late May, it no longer served as a filter.

SW asked whether an ongoing management plan had been agreed regarding de-silting the wetland/drainage/filtering area. **CRa** said that this responsibility had been handed over to Dacorum BC and that she would check on the status and terms of its management plan. **LN** said that besides the gravel bank, vegetation also contributed a filtering effect.

RT recommended that DBC be asked to check for misconnections (sewage incorrectly being fed into storm drainage pipes) in the surrounding urban drainage area of Hemel Hempstead. **GS** emphasised the importance of SUDS (Sustainable Drainage Systems) in limiting the effect of run-off from urban areas. **RR** said that these were a requirement for all new developments.

LN outlined the broad objectives of the Gadebridge Park River Restoration Scheme, which is the subject of a public consultation that closes on Sept 30th, though E-mailed comments from DEF after that date would be taken into consideration. The objectives included the reconnection of the river to its flood plain, and the enhancement of its water quality. A central feature of the scheme was the re-alignment of the river south of the White Bridge to the valley bottom, the main reasons for this being to enable reconnection with groundwater, to improve drainage in times of flooding, to enable water from a spring to enter the river higher up than at present, and to install a new gauging station which would enable better fish migration. Further wetlands could be created in the upper area to the north of the cross-park path/cycleway from the White Bridge, which could also contribute to flood retention and capture of sediment. She asked for individuals or groups such as DEF to take part in the online consultation at www.tinyurl.com/Gadebridge-Park and/or to get in touch via GadebridgePark@environment-agency.gov.uk.

RT said that there had been instances of drainage manhole covers being blown off by water pressure during peak rainfalls. These were below the currently river level but would be above the new proposed level, making contamination of the river from urban runoff more likely. **LN** said that the EA were aware of the problem and were in consultation with Thames Water regarding it and their maintenance schedules and procedures. Consultants JBA were carrying out further surveys of all outfalls. Photographs of current instances would help in this. She asked for any sewage overflows occurring in the park to be reported as an environmental incident on the EA Hotline 0800 80 70 60.

MR suggested the scheme should include interpretive signs, for instance to indicate the route of the present ("perched") river channel, and to explain the history of glaciation and formation of flood plains. **LN** said that responses to the current consultation, including from the Local History Society, had expressed a lot of interest on this topic.

SW asked about ongoing management issues. **LN** said that a long term management plan was being developed, and that input to this was welcome. **MR** asked whether in particular DBC were willing to do ongoing clearance of vegetation. **CRa** said that DBC had already done such work and had agreed to continue, but that they could be more proactive.

SW raised the question of the effect of future housing development under the existing and new Local Plans. He said that the Environment Agency had no powers to veto development on the grounds of water supply. **RR** said that in respect of Local Plans the EA acted only as Statutory consultees, but that they also work with water companies and others on options to secure sustainable water supplies. Water Companies are required to look at local plans and to plan how they are going to meet the predicted demand. The south-east is an area of water stress, so businesses, communities and individuals should also play their part by using water wisely.

See: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-resources-planning-managing-supply-and-demand>.

5. Any Other Business

GE requested anyone present, or in receipt of these minutes if not too late, to contact him if they were interested in helping to formulate a DEF response to any or all of the following public consultations:

Gadebridge Park River Restoration: to Sept 30th (or later by E-mail)

See (4.) above and/or visit <https://consult.environment-agency.gov.uk/hnl/gadebridge-park-river-restoration>

South West Herts Growth & Transport Plan (SWHGT) Summary for Consultation: to Sept 13th

See HCC Website under "Consultations". **MR** said that many of the basic principles contained in this, such as encouragement of non-car modes of transport, were worthy of support. The problems lay in the detail, which included the closure of Fishery Road to private traffic, apparently without specifying alternative routes.

***GE** has subsequently E-mailed the SWHGT team requesting that E-mailed comments from DEF after Sept 13th can be considered.*

River Basin Management Plans for 2021: to Dec.22nd

RR said that the consultation titled "Working Together" was the first in the process of reviewing and updating these plans. A river basin management plan is produced for each river basin district in England, and the one covering Dacorum is Thames. **GE** said that DEF's Water Group's response to the previous similar consultation ten years ago was still available to view on the DEF Website.

Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for dog-related issues: to Sept 14th

See Dacorum BC Website under "Do it Online". Dacorum are consulting on a proposed Public Space Protection Order (PSPO) for dog-related issues, including fouling.