



**Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 8. 11.2018**

MINUTES

Attendance

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Rob Beauchamp	Friends of Gadebridge Park
Cllr Phil Hills	Tring Town Council
Cllr Janice Marshall	Environment Portfolio Holder, DBC
Bob German	Conservative Party
Joe Toovey	Liberal Democratic Party
Paul Harris	DEF and Great Gaddesden PC

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies

Siva Niranjan, West Hemel Action Group
Cllr Ron Tindall DBC and HCC
Cllr Garrick Stevens, Berkhamsted Town Council
Cllr Adrian England, DBC
Dennis Harvey, DEF

2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 6/09/18

Some inaccuracies in the minutes concerning the proposed developments in Gadebridge Park had been pointed out to **GE** by **MR**. The minutes had subsequently been updated, and the new version had been be put on the website and sent out with the invitation to the present meeting.

3. Matters arising

DBC's Street Champions project

GE said that Nicky McIntyre, Active Communities Officer at DBC, had kindly organised a get together for Street Champions on Monday 10 December 2018 when there would be a presentation on recycling in Dacorum followed by light refreshments and a chance to have a chat with fellow Street Champions. RSVP to Nicky.

JM offered for any problems encountered in using DBC's online fly tipping reporting system to be referred to her.

Halsey Field Update

CR reported as follows:

- On 26th September, John Wood, the chief executive in Herts. County Council wrote to Mr. Penning to say that they would be supportive to discuss a longer term proposition for the Halsey Field site, subject to agreeing suitable terms. The estates team and Development Services are now looking into this.
- On 27th September the Friends of the Halsey Field Committee met on the field to discuss priorities for the winter management programme. Work parties are being organised every month throughout the autumn and winter months by Friends of the Field in order to carry out this programme, with some being supported by the CSHCV (Chilterns Society and Hertfordshire Conservation volunteers). It was decided to:
 1. Widen the northern path along the boundary fence and cut down some of the vegetation on the field side of the path, to attempt to make the path less muddy.
 2. Cut down some of the larger trees in the bushy northern section of the field to make more sunny glades amongst the shrubs in this area, and also in the bottom (eastern) area of the field.
 3. Maintain the view up the field from the bottom bench by controlling the vegetation up through the middle of the site.
 4. Prune some Blackthorn and Privet etc. in February, before the Brimstone butterfly starts to lay eggs.
 5. Brush cut scallops in the grass on one side of the main footpaths; also, on some of the smaller footpaths which cross the site.
 6. Brush cut emergent patches of small saplings e.g. Hawthorn, Blackthorn and patches of *Brachypodium Sylvaticum* grass growing in meadow areas to prevent shading of flowers.
 7. Dig some test holes to find a suitable place for a small pond. However the hole diggers came across solid chalk very quickly, which is not so good for a pond, but ideal for chalk-loving flowers. So instead work continued on widening the northern path, to let plenty of light get to the soil.
 8. Put some sort of ground covering in front of the top bench.
 9. Count plants on the field using a quadrant during the spring/summer months.
- A local resident contacted the group through the Halsey Field Facebook page to propose giving some saplings to the field. Two Rowans, one Silver Birch and one Hazel were brought to the field before the work party on Sunday Oct 28th and planted on and near the western slope.
- **MR** and **CR** recently met Martin Hicks of the Herts. Biological Records Centre who emphasized the importance of arranging for the field to be grazed. Carol Lodge (from the Herts and Middlesex Wildlife Trust) commented that she didn't think any of the flora and fauna on the field would suffer if the field was grazed for a couple of months each autumn.

LA3 Master Plan and sustainability

No-one present knew of a planning application for a Master Plan yet having been received by DBC.

SW Referred to the DEF meeting in May 2017, when Cllr Colette Wyatt-Lowe had challenged the developers' policy not to provide solar panels at the outset for all new homes as not everyone wanted them, and had said that they should be provided anyway. He had heard that planning consents can indeed

include the requirement to install power-saving devices, and cited a current case concerning electric car charging points.

DBC 2017 Local Plan (up to 2036) Consultation

CR said that on Oct 14th she had seen that work had already begun on the potential building site between Halsey Field and the Leighton Buzzard Road. The soil had been disturbed where excavation, presumably for archaeological interest, had taken place and numbered pegs had been put into the ground.

GE said that it was far from reassuring that they had already begun prospecting the land, which he took to be Site Reference HH-H2, (26 acres) "North of Gadebridge (Land at Piccotts End)" in the DBC 2017 Local Plan (up to 2036) Consultation. Under the DBC Technical Studies Assessment for HH-H2 (and for bigger even more horrific site proposals up the valley) in the consultation document, it said "Exclude from further assessment and retain as Green Belt". Despite this "favourable" (to the Green Belt) assessment the developers appeared to be so confident of success that they had decided to spend this money now on further exploration.

PH said that the Local Plan had been put "on hold".

JM said that there had been a huge number of responses to the consultation. There was some uncertainty about the Housing Demand figures, but they were bound to be "huge". More clarity would emerge in 2019.

GE said that St Albans City & District Council recently held a consultation (closed 17th October) on its new Local Plan, which proposes up to 12,300 dwellings on what is currently , including:

- "East of Hemel Hempstead (south)" – 2400 dwellings
- "East of Hemel Hempstead (north)" – 1600 dwellings
- "North of Hemel Hempstead – 1500 dwellings" (some beyond the plan period)

South West Herts Growth & Transport Plan Consultation

GE had obtained an extension to Sept 30th of the period for an E-mail DEF response. He had produced a draft which incorporated suggestions he had received in response to the request sent out with the DEF minutes, and the result of further discussion at the Steering Group. The resulting two-page response supported elements of some of the consultation's Objectives, including "attractive alternatives to car transport" with the proviso that the interests of cyclists needed to be balanced with those of pedestrians. It was submitted on Sept 28th and has also been put on the DEF website under "Consultations". News had just appeared that the particularly controversial proposal to close Fishery Road to general traffic had been withdrawn.

MR said that concerns remained over the possible closure of Apsley and Kings Langley railway stations.

Gadebridge Park River Restoration

An extension of the period for an E-mail DEF response beyond Sept 30th had been obtained at the DEF meeting, and comments for this were invited from recipients of the Minutes. The consensus at Steering Group was that DEF should in general support the proposals, subject to concerns raised at the DEF meeting. Accordingly, a short response was sent to Lauren Naish of the Environment Agency on October 12th, with further thanks to her and her professional colleagues and project partners for having attended and contributed to the DEF meeting on Sept. 6th. DEF's response has been put on its website under "Consultations".

SW said that unless ongoing maintenance costs were properly budgeted for the project would be a waste of money.

Some present had attended the official opening of Upper Gadebridge Park following the River Gade restoration works October 26th and had spoken with representatives from Affinity and the Environment agency.

RB said that the opening day had been a good opportunity to point out new features, such as riffles (shallow parts where the water flows brokenly), meanders and speed variations that create a variety of habitats.

CR said that Affinity would take action to counter damage caused to the banks by dogs if Rob Cassidy of DBC would supply gravel.

4. Parking on Verges and Open Spaces

GE said that unfortunately Robert Cassidy, Parks and Open Spaces Officer at DBC, who had been billed to attend and participate on this subject, was unable to come because of personal circumstances. He started the discussion by means of a short slide display featuring damaged verges and some of the means currently deployed to prevent damage in his home area of Warners End. He said that the ever-increasing demand for parking space had led to verges being converted either to concrete that still let some grass through, or to a totally tarmacked surface, and that remaining verges were widely being despoiled by unauthorised parking. One bad example of this was on the edge of Jocketts Park, near the School Row junction with Jocketts Road, which was primarily caused by parental pick-up parking, despite the availability, even at pick-up times, of parking a short way down Jocketts Road. Measures to prevent verge parking included bollards and raised kerbs. However, it was becoming common for long-abused verges to be officially converted to parking. This was usually claimed as an achievement by local councillors rather than seen as a loss of visual amenity.

SW chaired the ensuing discussion. He said that, from his experiences while election canvassing, demand for more parking space was uppermost in most potential voters' minds. Councillors would respond to this when budgets allowed. However, the conversion of grass to impervious parking surfaces created an additional load on drains, sometimes with oil-contaminated water.

JM said that when many of the Borough's housing estates were laid out, the anticipated car ownership was minimal. Now we were faced with multiple per-property car ownership and larger car sizes. On-road parking meant that service and emergency vehicles could not get through. Accordingly, for the last five or six years DBC had budgeted substantial amounts for the hardening of verges.

SW said that a tough, perforated plastic membrane incorporated into the turf to provide a firmer base for parking while permitting some growth of grass and more natural drainage had been successful in reducing parking damage when deployed for instance around Leverstock Green Cricket Club and at some National Trust sites.

MR enquired whether this method was cheaper than concrete grow-through blocks or total tarmacking, since if so it would clearly be an optimal solution. No-one present knew.

RB raised the question of the long term maintenance costs of plastic membranes.

JM said that such surfaces could incur additional costs for grass cutting operations, with problems of mowing between and close to parked cars, and damage to cutters from broken sections of membrane.

GE said that long grass did not appear to have been a problem with the concrete semi-permeable surfaces in NorthridgeWay, that had been there since the Seventies.

PH said that the factors leading to multiple car ownership per household should be addressed, for instance by the improvement of public transport. People would then be able to use public transport to get to work.

CR gave the example of her local (Gadebridge/Warners End) 'bus service where recent changes have made it harder to get to the station by bus, rather than easier.

GE said that many parked vehicles stayed in one spot most of the time throughout the day, and speculated that a car was becoming a "must have" for any adult of driving age, irrespective of employment status.

CR said it would be good if we could limit the number of vehicles per household.

JM said that we did not live in the type of state where such a limit could be imposed.

SW said that in future the problem could be solved by the ready availability of hireable driverless cars.

MR said that the technology to enable this was moving very fast, and that driverless cars could rapidly take over. Then the number of parked cars would relate to actual rather than potential use.

PH said that the current state of parking obstruction in Tring was acute, particularly with regard to parking for Tring Station, for which parking spaces and the bus service were inadequate.

SW cited the required method of payment at Hemel Hempstead Station as a deterrent. Payment machines would not take cash. It was becoming increasingly common for a Smartphone and bank details to be required. Discussion ensued about the possibility of a nation wide "parking card" similar to an Oystercard.

MR said that the recently publicised incident of penalties being imposed for parking on the landscaped areas of Gadebridge Park at the opening of the new Splash Park, if repeated, could be an important stream of income for the Council.

PH said that the imposition of similar penalties had been attempted at Great Gaddesden, but that it was questionable whether they were legally enforceable without DBC enacting a byelaw.

BG said that parking by residents on his local green space in Adeyfield left it churned up, particularly in winter, and that the situation in Dacorum was completely lawless. He contrasted it with London, where even pavement parking is unequivocally subject to a fine.

PH said that all green areas should be protected with wooden stakes.

CR asked about the practicalities of applying more draconian anti-parking measures.

JM said that such an approach would not be meeting the demands of residents.

JT said that fines for parking on wider open spaces would be more likely to get community acceptance than fines for parking on a green verge near their home.

GE questioned **PH**, who at the Nov 10th 2016 meeting had cited an example in Tring where a large vehicle was illegally parked on grass (Public Open Space) and had said that Rob Cassidy was looking into the possibility of a prosecution in this case, to ask what the outcome had been. **PH** said that he believed that, as with his case at Great Gaddesden (see above) prosecution would not have been valid without the enacting a by-law.

RB said that on "Splash Park Day" when multiple fines were imposed at Gadebridge Park for parking on landscaped areas the signage had been inadequate, and fine notices had been stuck on cars by a posse of youthful-looking cyclists. He said however that signage had now improved and it was clearer to see where "landscaped areas" started.

JT said that the "Splash Park Day" fining incident sounded opportunistic, and that it was important to apply any rules consistently.

JM said that all involved in the incident were proper Enforcement Officers, who are sent out to address specific issues as and when they occur.

SW widened the topic to the consideration of grassed open spaces generally from the ecological point of view (*minutes of DEF meeting on May 22nd 2014 refers*), citing improvements to the areas either side of Galley Hill, where policies towards encouraging long grass and other vegetation had been successful in attracting insects.

CR cited a recent publication by Friends of the Earth and Plantlife that encouraged councils to adopt similar policies more widely, not just in the interest of biodiversity but to save on grass cutting costs.

MR said that these schemes can be done imaginatively, including mown pathways.

SW referred to Hemel Hempstead's original Master Plan, with its "Green Lungs" such as Shrubhill Common and the Warners End and Gade Valleys. It would be possible to create a gradation of habitats along what remains of these.

CR said that for any such scheme it was important to let people, particularly local residents, know what was being done, and why.

Robert Cassidy subsequently kindly supplied some comments in response to a draft of the minutes.

Paraphrased, these are:

Most roadside verges are under the ownership of Herts Highways. DBC are paid to maintain them. This doesn't include stopping people from parking on verges, which remains the responsibility of Herts Highways.

There have been two planning applications in the last few months to build parking on parks and open spaces. One was for Warners end and the other for Leverstock Green. Rob challenged both, one successfully. He is hopeful that, now that he has contacted the relevant departments there would be no more applications like these.

National Planning Policy clearly states that existing open space, sports and recreational buildings and land, including playing fields, should not be built on unless:

- a) an assessment has been undertaken which has clearly shown the open space, buildings or land to be surplus to requirements; or*
- b) the loss resulting from the proposed development would be replaced by equivalent or better provision in terms of quantity and quality in a suitable location; or*
- c) the development is for alternative sports and recreational provision, the benefits of which clearly outweigh the loss of the current or former use.*

Bollarding open spaces to prevent parking abuse is done in really bad areas, but it is limited by budgets.

The Tring example of a prosecution for parking on open space, (referred to above) was on land off Brook Street. There was a big development being built and various contractors were using the open space for parking. They were served a Community Protection Notice and received a fine. Achieving this was not a straightforward process, and was done through planning enforcement, since the contractors were in breach of their planning application.

5. Any Other Business

Consultation on a proposed Bovingdon neighbourhood area

GE said that Bovingdon Parish Council had applied to designate its parish area as a neighbourhood area. This was the first step towards creating a neighbourhood plan for the area. To comment on the proposal, see

<http://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/regeneration/neighbourhood-planning/bovingdon-neighbourhood-plan>
As far as **GE** knew, this would be only the second Neighbourhood Plan in Dacorum after Grovehill.

JT asked what the turnout had been for the local vote on the Grovehill plan.

PH said he thought about 10 percent.