



**Dacorum Environmental Forum  
Full Meeting Thursday 21/2/2019**

**MINUTES**

**Attendance**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
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
Dennis Harvey	DEF
Cllr Allan Anderson	DBC, Chair O&S Cttee for Strategic Planning & Environment
Marta Pluta	Environment Agency
Rob Rees	Environment Agency
Anne Lyne	West Hemel Action Group
John Mawer	Bourne End Village Association
Chris Mabley	Bourne End Village Association
Paul Harris	DEF and Great Gaddesden PC

Meeting started at 7:30pm

**1. Apologies**

Siva Niranjana, West Hemel Action Group  
Cllr Phil Hills, Tring Town Council  
Cllr William Wyatt-Lowe, DBC and HCC

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 8/11/18**

**3. Matters arising**

**DBC's Street Champions project**

At **CR's** suggestion to Nicky McIntyre, DBC Community Wellbeing Officer, Community Partnerships Team, a Litter Pick of Pulleys Wood in Warners End took place on Sunday 17 February from 10am to 12noon. **CR** said that seven volunteers (including a child and a teenager) collected 35 bags of litter.

**GE** had reported, as invited, to Janice Marshall a problem he had encountered with online fly tipping reporting on DBC's website. The transaction was failing to complete if he entered his Customer Reference Number. **JM** had been able to find a way through the relevant screen that avoided the problem.

for which **GE** had thanked her. **GE** invited any would-be user of the system having a similar difficulty to contact him for the details.

## **Halsey Field Update**

**CR** reported as follows:

The Friends of Halsey Field had held work parties every month during the autumn and winter months in order to keep the scrub in check and to mow and rake scallops in the grass to encourage the growth of wild flowers. They had managed to open up some sunny glades in the overgrown north and eastern areas of the field which added to the mosaic of habitats on the site. All the management work was being logged monthly on a field plan.

Work had started on digging a pond which was now full of water and a second, smaller pool resulted where clay was dug out of the ground to line the larger pond. No artificial liners had been used, so the shape of the ponds could still be altered. The ponds would probably dry up during a dry summer, but such ephemeral pools are very valuable for wildlife.

John Fisher, secretary of the Ver Valley Association had kindly donated a Kestrel box and several smaller nest boxes to the Friends, and had helped them install these during the latest monthly work party.

On 27<sup>th</sup> January the Big Garden Birdwatch was held on Halsey Field, and 16 different species of bird were observed during one hour.

Herts County Council had now given the Friends permission to arrange for the site to be lightly grazed during a few months per year. However, as the Box Moor Trust had stated that they would only organise grazing if this could take place over both parts of the field and HCC had refused permission for the top part of the field to be grazed, there was currently a stalemate.

In order to address the concern shown about the amount of dog faeces on the field, the Friends had been successful in persuading the Council to site a litter bin near the main field entrance, and assurance had been given that it was permissible to use this bin for dog faeces as well as for general litter.

The Friends had been successful with a grant application to pay for a Brush Cutting and Clearing saw course, so that one of their new members could be trained to use these tools safely on work parties.

Herts County Council had offered the Friends of Halsey Field a five-year lease on the site, but as this would entail paying for insurance, the offer had not been taken up. The Friends were hoping for a more permanent solution for the future of the Wildlife Site and had asked HCC if they would consider giving it to the Box Moor Trust, as Mike Penning had suggested in his letter to HCC last June. However so far, they had received no further communication on the matter.

## **LA3 Master Plan and sustainability**

**GE** reported that Dacorum Environmental Forum's objection to the current LA3 Planning Application was posted online on the closing date of Feb. 15th using the name "Mr. Dacorum EnvironmentalForum" and his own address in order to comply with the requirements of the objection form. Currently there were 56 online responses, all "Object"s except for a couple of "Neutral"s. He had also E-mailed some DBC councillors and the Case Officer with the properly formatted versions of the objection and the Figures and correspondence letters that were referred to in it. He thanked DEF members who had responded to his invitation to participate in this objection and had contributed. The objection and supporting documents may be conveniently viewed at:

The main points of the Objection were:

- Lack of distinction between Public Open Space and Wildlife Corridors.
- Inadequate width of Wildlife Corridor for Shrubhill Common Local Nature Reserve. Space to be found by removing some of the 200 homes that are in excess of the original Core Strategy.
- Missed opportunities to encourage wildlife in suburban landscapes at very little cost.
- Lack of proposals for housing to be “sustainable” or “zero carbon”.
- Inadequate plans to prevent traffic congestion throughout Hemel Hempstead.
- Lack of detail of bus services.
- Requirement of proof that throughflow and groundwater flow to the Shrubhill Common LNR will not be reduced.
- Requirement of proof that that supply of the extra water will not be to the detriment of flows in either the Gade or Bulbourne Valleys.
- Visual impact from the Bourne Valley to be mitigated by removing some of the extra 200 homes, as above.

**AA** said that DBC had been statutorily required to limit the advertised consultation period to three weeks, but in view of the size of the scheme objections would still be considered by the Council up to the point it decided on the application, probably in July.

**AL** understood that the website objection route would be kept open for this purpose. The public meeting on LA3 organised by the West Hemel Action Group on 10th Feb at Warners End Community Centre had been attended by over 100. She commended DEF's website with its list of 31 key documents from the Planning Application identified and given meaningful names by in order to help people focus on the key issues. WHAG had submitted a holding objection, which was to be followed by one being prepared by a professional planner.

**SW** had attended the meeting. He said that Lee Royal of WHAG had given an excellent update on the proposed development at LA3 in which he had given a brief background to the work done by WHAG over the past five years or so and had outlined the key issues and explained how people could go about making their views known to Dacorum's Planning Department. He had also provided the meeting with DEF's web address for accessing the key documents. **SW** had also addressed the meeting on behalf of DEF, referring to the May 2017 DEF meeting with the developers at which the issue of increasing the number of dwellings from the 900 of the original Core Strategy was raised. The current application is for 1100 dwellings. He had also referred to the inadequate provision of a Wildlife Corridor to link Shrubhill Common LNR with the surrounding countryside. He had suggested that the increase in the proposed dwelling numbers might well have been at the expense of the Wildlife Corridor.

**JM** said that on the day following the WHAG meeting Bourne End Village Association had held a meeting attended by around 100 (not much overlap with attendees of the WHAG meeting). Their objection to LA3 included a call to close both Chaulden Lane, which the Application calls to be widened, and Pouchen End Lane to through traffic.

**AA** Advised that questions of transport and road capacity implications should be directed at HCC, since DBC is bound to accept whatever they decide. Similarly, issues of sustainable building standards should be raised with DBC's Building Standards department.

**MR** said that besides objecting to DBC, DEF had written twice to Barratts, one of the developers, on the subject of provision for wildlife within the development and sustainable building standards respectively. He added that very recently the independent Committee on Climate Change had advised HM Government that in order to tackle climate change new homes should be banned from connecting to the gas grid within

six years i.e. within the LA3 building schedule. This underlined the need for energy efficiency and locally generated energy such as solar panels. See <https://www.bbc.co.uk/news/science-environment-47306766>

## **DBC 2017 Local Plan (up to 2036) Consultation**

**AA** said that a further public consultation on this was due this summer. (*DEF responded to the previous consultation in December 2017 - See the DEF website under "Consultations".*)

## **Gadebridge Park River Restoration**

**SW** had been informed by the Environment Agency that following last year's Gadebridge Park public consultation they had published the responses received, where consent for this had been given, and that they could be viewed at [www.tinyurl.com/Gadebridge-Park](http://www.tinyurl.com/Gadebridge-Park).

## **4. The river Bulbourne: low flows and the options for mitigation and improvement.**

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

**MP introduced** her presentation that contained detailed survey results, visualised in a variety of ways. A copy of the presentation will be posted on the DEF Website along with these minutes. She drew attention to the partnership programme led by the Environment Agency and Affinity Water "Revitalising Chalk Rivers" covering the Colne and Upper Lea catchment areas. Its purpose was to understand and improve the chalk streams and it had already achieved 42 million litres of water being returned to the environment through Affinity Water's reduction in abstraction. There were also a number of river restoration works under way, some already completed like Affinity Water's Upper Gadebridge Park project and further works were being planned. The River Bulbourne would be included in the programme of improvements post-2020, subject to funding being approved by OFWAT. Following the great success of the 'Bringing Back the Bulbourne' partnership project (see DEF minutes 10/5/18), the focus would be to improve the Upper Bulbourne from its source to Little Heath Lane in Berkhamsted.

**MP** said that the Bulbourne was a chalk river with naturally winterbourne headwaters, and that this meant that one would expect the upper parts of the rivers to be dry when groundwater levels were low. The extent of dry channel would be greater during prolonged dry weather. In the case of the Bulbourne catchment, drying out was exacerbated by groundwater abstraction, canal operations and changes to the land use and to the river channel. Abstraction rates were a key factor in planning for improvement and in this we all shared a responsibility in our use of water as individuals and households, and it was important to engage the younger generation in this. Individuals could also help by reporting instances of misuse of canal lock gates leading to empty pounds and to increased demand for water. These should be reported to the Canal & River Trust on 0303 040 4040. Also via <https://canalrivertrust.org.uk/contact-us/contacting-us-in-an-emergency>.

*The EA's report on their Investigation into impacts on the River Bulbourne of the Canal & River Trust's abstractions will be posted on the DEF Website alongside these minutes.*

**AA** said that the river through Northchurch was currently "dead", and asked who was responsible, and who could improve it. **MP** said that this had been partially caused by dry conditions with effective rainfall recharging the groundwater aquifer having been below normal. This situation was exacerbated by modifications to the river morphology and canal operations, including groundwater abstraction. Atkins Consultants on behalf of the Environment Agency and with cooperation from the Canal & River Trust were currently developing options to improve the River Bulbourne from its source to the Little Heath Lane in Berkhamsted. In doing so, they would take into account fact that River Bulbourne was designated as a "heavily modified waterbody" for urbanisation and recreation (recreational navigation), these uses being

specified under Article 4.3 of the Water Framework Directive. This meant that the improvements to the River Bulbourne could not impinge on the requirements of those protected uses."Urbanisation" here meant river modification through land use, rather than due to increased water consumption. **RR** said that nevertheless there was an obligation on the EA for rivers to contain enough water to continue as rivers. **MP** said that in the case of winterbournes such as the Bourne Gutter seasonal variation in how far upstream the surface flow begins is a natural phenomenon.

**MP** said that much of the research using borehole data and surface water data was used to develop a ground water model to enable assessment of the long term impacts of groundwater abstractions. However, models were a simplification of the real world and were limited by how well they represented it, and their results needed to be checked against further observed data. For instance, in the case of the River Bulbourne, the model for the upper catchment tended to overestimate flows in the river, while the observed data confirmed that reduced abstraction from the Canal & River Trust's sources would benefit groundwater levels and baseflow into the river in the Northchurch area. However, there were other significant factors influencing flow, such as climate change and modifications of the river channel.

**SW** then invited further questions:

**AA** asked whether the Canal & River Trust would cooperate. **MP** said that they had already cooperated in "Switch on/Switch off" tests and in providing data for the investigation. However, getting funding for any recommended options might be more challenging because the Trust was a charitable organisation. .

**PH** asked about the implications of future climate change.

**SW** said that from his own record-keeping there had been no evidence of change in rainfall since 1986. However there had been a meaningful rise in averaged temperatures, which meant more water evaporation.

**RR** said that besides total or averaged rainfall, the nature of the rainfall (Short and torrential vs. long and moderate) would also matter.

**SW** said that he had found no change in this either.

**MP** showed a graph presenting the effective rainfall (that recharged the groundwater aquifer) over the past 12 months. It showed that it was largely below expected levels. The graph can be seen in the presentation posted on the DEF website alongside these minutes as well as in the Monthly Water Situation published by the Environment Agency at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/water-situation-local-area-reports>

**JM** said that de-culverting the lower end of the Bourne Gutter would enhance its wildlife etc. value.

**CM** asked what the procedure for this would be if the culvert was on private land. What powers did the EA have?

**MP** said that it would require the landowner's agreement. One of the significant obstacles for river restoration projects could be the difficulty of reaching an agreement with the landowner. Local environment groups, like DEF could have a helpful persuasive role in reaching out to landowners where and when projects were planned.

**RR** said that nevertheless, there was a requirement on the EA to maintain river flow, biodiversity etc. at or above 2015 levels. Also any developments that might increase flood risk needed to get a "Flood Risk Activity Permit" from the EA. and so might any works within 16 metres of the river.

**CM** said that if this was the case, did anyone proposing a water-retention development need such a permit?

**RR** said yes, the EA had the power to cover such matters, but as with all powers there was a test of proportionality, which required them to look at the benefits, impacts (positive and negative) and costs of any action proposed. Negotiation, persuasion and collaboration remained the favoured approach.

**SW** said that the reduction in rates of water extraction at Piccotts End pumping station, agreed in 2017, had improved the flows through Gadebridge Park. He asked what role the EA had in ensuring that additional abstraction if required for LA3 would not affect the Gade aquifers.

**MP** said that the Colne catchment was now closed to new "consumptive abstractions". For licences where the permitted abstraction rate had been reduced in order to leave more water in the environment, the rate would not be increased in the future to satisfy population growth. Once every five years water companies reviewed their Water Resources Management Plans (WRMPs) which assessed their ability to provide water to their

customers. Where there was not enough available resource they might decide to import water from other regions. To respond to Affinity Water's recently opened consultation on their draft revised WRMP, see <https://stakeholder.affinitywater.co.uk/water-resources.aspx>.

**AA** said that Local Councils were statutorily required to plan extra housing. They then told the water companies how much water would be needed. In the case of LA3 the water companies were "not too worried". The EA had taken part in this dialogue, and were aware of the problems caused by growth in housing.

**SW** pointed out that the Core Strategy requires there to be an improvement in flows in the local rivers.

**CM** questioned the applicability and force of the Core Strategy. (*It is extensively quoted in for instance the LA3 application, and in DEF's objection.*)

**RR** said that Dacorum was within a "closed catchment" area, meaning that water companies were required to "plan strategically" for extra water supply, which implied access to a (physical or conceptual) national water grid and/or reservoirs.

**MR** said that he had observed instances of leakages through closed lock gates, which would add to the water demand caused by operating the locks. **RR** said that seepage could in some cases filter through to and replenish the river.

**DH** asked what proportions of water demand came from the Canal and from the water companies respectively. Both **MP** and **SW** thought they were roughly equal.

**CR** asked why the river Gade was not featured in the 'Revitalising Chalk Rivers' map as for example the Ver and Upper Lea were. **CM** said that the map showed only some examples, and that there wasn't enough room to show all of the revitalising measures.

**GE** obtained support through a show of hands in response to a request from **MP** for DEF to help publicise the online survey (ending Feb 28<sup>th</sup>) that Environment Agency and Canal & River Trust were conducting about activities on the River Bulbourne and the Grand Union Canal (section from Tring through to Berkhamsted Sewage Treatment Works), whose purpose was to understand how local communities use their water environment and how they perceived it. The response form is at:

<https://atkinsgeospatial.maps.arcgis.com/apps/GeoForm/index.html?appid=f211770f5c2c40178448b37f83335603>

## 5. Any Other Business

None.