



**Dacorum Environmental Forum  
Full Meeting Thursday 5/9/2019**

**MINUTES**

**Attendance**

<b>Name</b>	<b>Organisation</b>
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Rob Armstrong	Marketing Manager at Renewable Energy Systems
Steve Lings	Consultant Naturalist for Halsey Field
Philippa Jones	Plastic-free Berko
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Michael Nidd	Piccotts End Residents' Association and CPRE Herts.
Paul de Hoest	Berkhamsted Town Council
Brian Patterson	Tring Town Council
David Brown	Berkhamsted Rotary

Meeting started at 7:30pm

**1. Apologies**

Steve Wilson           Vice Chair DEF  
 Chris Mabley           Bourne End Village Association  
 Cllr Alan Anderson    DBC Environment Portfolio Holder  
 Sir Mike Penning      MP for Dacorum  
 Paul Harris            DEF  
 Dennis Harvey         DEF  
 Cllr Jane Timmis      DBC  
 Cllr Ron Tindall       DBC and HCC

**2. Minutes of the Last Meeting held 9/5/19**

No corrections suggested.

**3. Matters arising**

**Halsey Field Update**

**CR** had reported as follows:

On 21<sup>st</sup> May the U3A Natural History group came to walk round the Halsey Field. They found four Green Hairstreak butterflies near the Dogwood bushes. This is the second year running that Green Hairstreaks have been found on the Field, suggesting that the species is probably breeding there. This is excellent news, as they are classified as a rare butterfly in Hertfordshire and could help to give the site extra protection. Other butterflies spotted were over 20 Brimstones, a Peacock, several Holly Blues, an Orange tip and a very early Large Skipper, (not usually seen before June). The group also admired the hundreds of colourful vetch flowers in bloom all over the meadows.

On 6<sup>th</sup> June a Moth Survey was carried out. The rather low temperature meant that not so many moths were found as in June 2018, although a few previously unseen species were found. On the same evening two barn owls were seen flying to and fro between the vegetation on the field slope to Warners End Wood. However, these did not nest in the box installed on the oak tree. Owl pellets were found in and around the box, but it was thought that the birds had been spooked by some disturbance –a downside of the good public access that the site provides.

On 27<sup>th</sup> June a Wildflower Survey was undertaken: 68 Bee orchids were counted on the site, although probably more were growing unseen amongst the vegetation. Pyramidal Orchids were growing everywhere on the field - too many to count, also two large common Spotted Orchids in the pond area, and about five more in the northern meadow area. The number of species and plants found in two quadrats were roughly the same as found in the same quadrat positions in the May survey.

On 13<sup>th</sup> July nine members of the British Naturalist Association held a "mini bioblitz" on the Halsey Field. They all had different specialisms, including botany, entomology and ecology, and they provided some good advice about managing the site. They will send lists of what they found on the field to the Field's consultant naturalist Steve Lings who organised the event.

On 2<sup>nd</sup> August the Big Butterfly Count was held on Halsey field during which 14 species of butterfly and four species of moth were spotted. The butterfly species seen were: Gatekeeper (abundant), Meadow Brown, Large and Small Skipper, Large and Small White, Small Tortoiseshell, Marbled White, Painted Lady, Ringlet, Small Copper, Common Blue, Brown Argus, and Holly Blue, and the moth species were: Six Spot Burnet, Mint Moth, Shaded Broad-bar and Plume Moth. These results were entered onto the Butterfly Conservation website.

Two work parties were held over the summer, one in July and one in August, which concentrated on mowing and raking areas of False Brome grass and sowing Yellow Rattle seeds to weaken the growth of this invasive grass, and also cutting down some of the Dogwood plants that are invading the meadow areas.

Friends of Halsey Field have also been in email conversation with Herts County Council about the future of the site, requesting that the site is given to a conservation group such as the Box Moor Trust or the Wildlife Trust, as Mike Penning MP suggested in his letter of 28<sup>th</sup> June 2018. However, HCC is unwilling to make any decision about this matter before the Dacorum Local Plan is finalised in 2022. *(There was speculation at the meeting as to why this should be.)*

### **LA3 Master Plan and Sustainability**

**GE** said that DEF, Bourne End Village Association (BEVA) and West Hemel Action Group (WHAG) participants of the meeting with DBC and developers on 20<sup>th</sup> May were unanimous in their disappointment that most of the questions they had raised remained unanswered.

There had been a subsequent meeting on June 24<sup>th</sup> between BEVA representatives and local councillors.

"Post LA3 consultation submissions" from Mike and Chris Ridley sent on May 30th to DBC planners James Doe and Ross Herbert, asking them to forward them to the developers, concerning Building Standards and on-site Wildlife measures respectively had not elicited a response from the developers to date.

**GE** had recently had communications from Martin Hicks of Hertfordshire Ecology, who had suggested that DEF should ask Natural England about doing a Habitats Regulations Assessment for LA3, as they had done for LA1. On 5<sup>th</sup> July he E-mailed James Doe and Ross Herbert making this point and re-iterating the unanswered questions from the May 20<sup>th</sup> meeting, and subsequently (July 8<sup>th</sup>) sent the same to Cllr. Fiona Guest, Chair of the Development Management Committee, and its members, then to Cllr Colette Wyatt-Lowe who, as advised by Cllr Guest, will be taking the chair when the Planning Application for LA3 comes before the Committee.

A revised Planning Application for LA3, which contained further detail on traffic impact assessments, but apparently little or no change since February in the majority of other supporting documents, was published on 26 July 2019, with an initial consultation period of 21 days, though Case Officer Ross Herbert did allow some extra time to respond.

**GE** had sent DBC Planning a DEF response to the revised LA3 planning application on Aug 15<sup>th</sup>. This is viewable on DEF's Website under "Consultations". A key element of DEF's objection had been and remained that LA3 adjoins and largely blocks off from open countryside the Local Nature Reserve of Shrubhill Common, and therefore that an adequate Wildlife Corridor towards Fields End along the route of the Chiltern Way should be left, in order to preserve the function of the LNR. A related key part of the objection is the fact that it is for 1100 homes rather than the 900 originally agreed under the Borough's Core Strategy, the developers having taken full advantage of a concession on "flexibility" demanded by the external inspector of the Development Plan Document. This would make it less likely that an adequate Wildlife Corridor could be provided. **GE** understood that yet another revision and consultation on the Master Plan was scheduled.

On Aug 16<sup>th</sup> **GE** received from Assistant DBC Planning Director James Doe, at Cllr Colette Wyatt-Lowe's request, an update on progress on the plan. This was based on a reply sent recently to WHAG, and a copy will be placed on the DEF website alongside these minutes.

### **DBC 2017 Local Plan (up to 2036) and Hemel Garden Communities**

**GE** said that on August 20<sup>th</sup> he had received by E-mail from DBC the first edition of a "Local Plan Update" and that a copy of this in some form would be placed on the DEF website alongside these minutes. The "Update" said that the planners were preparing a "Pre-Submission Plan" and were compiling the evidence to accompany it. Key dates were:

- Pre-Submission Plan for public Consultation - May- June 2020
- Submission of Plan to the Government - November 2020
- Public Examination of the Plan - January-April 2021
- Planning Inspector's report Issued - November 2021
- Adoption of the plan - February 2022

**MR** observed that the Local Plan Update, which reflected the aims expressed in the first version of the Local Plan, was inconsistent. For instance the expressed aim to preserve the character of Towns and Villages could not be physically reconciled with the difference the proposed additional 10,000 homes would make to the lower Gade Valley landscape as viewed from the long-established existing northern edge of Hemel Hempstead, adjoined by Halsey Field.

### **Climate Emergency (Dacorum)**

**GE** wrote On July 11th to Cllr. Alan Anderson DBC Environment Portfolio Holder, with a copy to Council Leader Andrew Williams, requesting that DBC pass a resolution along the lines of "The Council recognises that we are in a state of climate emergency that requires urgent action by all levels of government, including by local councils" and follow on by producing a Climate Emergency Plan in the way other councils have done.

As notified in Cllr. Anderson's reply, on July 17th a full DBC Council meeting considered a draft declaration proposed by Cllr. Ron Tindall, which included the commitment to "Join other councils at all levels of Local Government in declaring a climate emergency that requires urgent planning and action, and commits to work towards reducing carbon emissions across the full range of council activities to net zero by the end of budget year 2029/30, this to include the production of a strategy and action plan to make the activities of Dacorum Borough Council carbon neutral by 2030 in accordance with the IPCC recommendation." The proposal was backed unanimously.

**PdeH** said that a Berkhamsted Climate Emergency Steering Group had been set up following the Town Council's earlier Climate Emergency declaration. This divided into three subgroups, on Energy (which he was leading), Transport and "Habitat" (including waste and food) respectively, with the aim of producing plans within 2-3 months. The Town Council had a valuable role to play in facilitating change, influencing other public sector and commercial bodies whilst representing the opinions and needs of the local community.

#### **4. UK Renewable Energy - Sources and Enabling Technologies.**

Rob Armstrong, Marketing Manager at Renewable Energy Systems (RES), Kings Langley, gave an informative and thought-provoking presentation of RES's role in the Global Renewable Energy industry, with a focus on wind and solar power generation, storage and distribution. A copy of the presentation, apart from some copyright-protected videos, will appear alongside these Minutes on the DEF website.

He said that RES was established 37 years ago by the civil engineer Robert McAlpine "to create a future where everyone has access to affordable zero carbon energy", and is still owned by the family trust.

Globally the company produces 16Gw of power. Offshore wind farms require investment on a far bigger scale than onshore. Increases in wind turbine efficiency and size are such that one of the latest turbines can produce many times more power than one of the earliest ones. **MR** asked whether further increases in power-per-turbine could be expected. **SL** thought that this was unlikely - there were limits to dynamo efficiency, and the need to plan for lightning strikes set a limit to the size.

The distribution grid capacity presented a constraint on the growth in wind power output, but this was being actively addressed through means of energy storage including batteries, electrolysis to produce hydrogen as a carbon-less distributable fuel and, where geography allowed, pumped water storage schemes. **GE** asked what materials were currently used for batteries. **RA** said Lithium and Cobalt, but that saltwater batteries were being developed. **SL** pointed out that Lithium and Cobalt (also used in mobile phone batteries) were already globally scarce resources.

**SL** said that in the Seventies he had worked for the UK geo-environmental consultancy Arc Environmental and had demonstrated one of the first electric cars. The main problem had been and remained that of persuading a world population of 8 billion to change their expectation of energy consumption. **RA** said that the main persuading argument would be the relative cheapness of zero carbon energy.

**BP** said that from the displayed pictures the (battery) power storage units looked very big. Was there anything smaller for local applications? **RA** said yes, the Tesla Powerwall was about the size of a fridge.

**MN** said that he viewed the prospect of battery-powered aircraft with dismay. Airport expansion and its manifold other environmental consequences would no longer be constrained by arguments about carbon emissions. Emissions of any sort at flying altitudes had far more serious implications for climate change than the same emissions at lower altitudes.

**MR** said that he was considering energy storage for his home and the purchase of an electric car, but saw no sense in needing two high-capacity batteries, one for the car and the other for the house. Could a feedback credit system solve this conundrum? **RA** said maybe, although the previous generation of feedback credits had been curtailed.

**CR** asked about the possibility of having electric cars with saltwater batteries. **RA** said that this was still 5-10 years off.

**PdeH** suggested that it should be made possible to exchange uncharged for charged batteries at filling stations, since no one would want to wait while their battery was charged. **RA** thought that this might happen some time.

**PdeH** asked what "solar slates" consisted of. **RA** said they were slates with an applied coating, being marketed by Tesla. They produced less electricity than solar panels, but were visually more acceptable, and therefore could be deployed on listed buildings, conservation areas etc.

**PdeH** asked about the prospects for Biomass and Geothermal Energy. **RA** said that a Biomass evaluation project at RES in searching for the most efficient biofuel had needed to use pellets imported from the USA, so transport had detracted from the carbon-saving benefits. Using food waste was a possibility, but might reduce the incentive for the preferable option of minimising such waste. Geothermal was a good option in places with accessible subterranean heat such as Iceland. **SL** said that London and the South East were in fact sitting on a good source of geothermal energy.

## 5. Plastics and the Environment

Steve Lings, the consultant naturalist for Halsey Field, introduced this topic by saying that our planet was currently drowning in plastic waste, illustrating this by passing round a clear plastic bag the size of a small handbag which was full of an assortment of plastic items, all found in the stomach of a single deceased albatross found near Laysan Island in the Pacific Ocean. Some plastics would take 600 years to decay.

**PJ** said that Plastic-Free Berko had in the past been able to source a disposable cup that contained no plastic and was compostable. The problem was in informing the public that this could be disposed of in the waste food caddy. **GE** said that some of the magazines he received, for instance from CPRE, now came in biodegradable wrappers, and undertook to ask via DBC Portfolio Holder Cllr. Alan Anderson for Clean Safe and Green to update its advice accordingly on what could be placed in the food caddies.

**PdeH** asked what action environmentally aware groups and individuals could take to reduce disposable plastic use. **SL** that there were already a number of available purchasing and related options to individuals, and that the main task was to persuade a significant proportion of the population to take them up. **GE** displayed pictures of a General Supplies "Unpackaged" store he had recently visited in Brighton, where a range of dry and liquid products were available from containers for measured amounts to be fed down into customers' own bags or bottles. **BP** and **DB** cited a delicatessen in Tring and the Acorn Pharmacy in Berkhamsted that provided a similar packaging-free option.

**SL** said regarding the choice between paper and plastic bags that customer choice was biased towards plastic because of the indirect subsidy via the oil industry that the UK government provided. **DB** said that he had worked in the oil industry and had not heard of such a subsidy. Legislation, standards and more persuasion of the public were all required. **GE** said that he believed that the introduction of the 5p charge for bags had been remarkably successful.

**PdeH** said that the problem was that there were so many different standards amongst local authorities on what could be recycled. **SL** said that the Waste and Resources Action Programme (WRAP), (*Established as a not-for-profit company in 2000*) had been calling for common standard, but so far without success.

**DB** said that the majority of plastic junk in the oceans came from Southeast Asia, where environmental standards were relatively low. **SL** said that much of what had been found in the Albatross came from the USA, and that the contents of a similar bag from a porpoise came from Spain.

**PJ** reminded those present that even when a plastic appears to have decayed, there are still particulates from it which are found throughout the world's waters and atmosphere.

## **6. Any Other Business**

**GE** had heard on Aug 8th, via John Webb of Herts Without Waste (HertsWOW) who addressed DEF at their 4<sup>th</sup> Sept. 2014 meeting, that Hertfordshire County Council and Veolia had agreed to cancel their waste management contract worth £1 billion after the application to build a 320,000 tonnes per year Energy from Waste (EfW) plant at Rattys Lane, Hoddesdon was turned down, and that the Council had "vowed to go back to the market" to find an outlet for the 250,000 tonnes of waste the County produces. HertsWOW were seeking involvement in the way forward with interested parties, in particular the Hertfordshire Waste Partnership whose Partnership Development Manager Duncan Jones addressed DEF in February 2018. **GE** had replied to John Webb, to congratulate him and HertsWOW on this result, which was due in no small part to their energy and persistence over many years.

**GE** had been notified on Aug 20<sup>th</sup> that Dacorum Borough Council was in the process of producing a new Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) on Parking Standards and had invited feedback by Aug 30<sup>th</sup>. **GE** had responded, including minutes from DEF meetings when Pavement Parking and Green Space Parking had been discussed (May 23<sup>rd</sup> 2013 and Nov 8<sup>th</sup> 2018 respectively). **PdeH** said that the draft SPD, while recommending a reduction in the number of parking places per dwelling, made insufficient provision for alternatives such as better public transport and cycle facilities and did not take on the fact that cars were now bigger and that this should be reflected in larger garages for new housing. *A copy of the DEF response will be placed on the DEF website under "Consultations".*

**DB** said that a student-driven initiative to reduce plastics at Tring School had been very successful. The project now encompassed Ashlyns and Berkhamsted School, and Berkhamsted Rotary were also involved.

**BP** said that the Tring Allotments and Environment Committee had set up the Climate Change Working Party. The latter had proposed, subject to the agreement of the Committee, to mount an event on local sustainability and climate change; this was likely to be held in October and would have contributions from residents, businesses and interest groups. DEF members would be sent final details.