



Dacorum Environmental Forum's response to DBC's request of 16/1/20 for comments on the management of the Rivers Gade, Ver and Bulbourne.

(17/2/20)

The Dacorum Environmental Forum and its associated Water Group have for many years met and worked with the Environment Agency, Affinity Water (and its forerunners), Thames Water, The Chilterns Chalk Streams Project and a host of local environmental and angling groups, to discuss issues of water supply, foul water removal and treatment, river water quality, river flow, channel morphology, river ecology and biodiversity in general.

The draft minute quite correctly identifies the serious state of our local rivers and some of the main causes of the continuing decline in their overall quality.

Dacorum Borough Council is in a position to directly affect some aspects of the management of our local rivers, whilst there are other aspects of management where DBC will need to work with a range of other public and private organisations in order to achieve their desired aims. It is likely that joint funding will be needed to support these aims.

There are 4 key areas to be addressed:

1. How to reduce abstraction of water from the chalk aquifer in order to improve groundwater levels and improve the amount of water flowing in our rivers.
2. How to reduce surges of water flowing directly into our rivers from surface water drainage (from roads, pavements and roofs), which alter the natural flow characteristics of the chalk streams and introduce a whole range of chemical and particulate pollution.
3. How to ensure that chemical pollution from farms and damaged sewers does not enter our rivers.
4. How to reduce the demand for water and reduce water wastage.

Actions needed to address the key issues:

1. Taking the first key area - water supply.....
The majority of water supplied and used in Dacorum comes from the chalk aquifer. Every time DBC grants planning permission for new dwellings and other buildings, the local water company is obliged to provide the water, thus increasing water demand. DBC should be encouraging our water suppliers to alter the sourcing of our water, perhaps bringing in water from out of area, and at least consider the positions of the pumping stations in relation to our rivers. Developers must surely, as part of their planning application, demonstrate where sustainable water supplies will come from.
2. In relation to the second key area, DBC can work with Thames Water and seek guidance from the Environment Agency to increase the use and efficiency of sedimentation ponds to hold back runoff and trap sediment before it enters the rivers. Where and when necessary, unnatural sediment needs to be removed from river channels. It is important that clean water and gravel beds are evident, so as to support the biodiversity which typifies chalk streams. River banks must also be properly managed to encourage wildlife. DBC could support a project to re-introduce water voles on the Gade, similar to the Box Moor Trust project on the Bulbourne. They could increase the amount of wetland to encourage a greater range of birdlife and amphibians.
3. In relation to the third key area, DBC can work with Thames Water (in the case of sewage) and the Environment Agency to monitor farm activities which might impact our rivers. Pollution incidents need to be identified and cleared up quickly.
4. The fourth key area is one on which DBC can have an impact, through local advertising and education, as well as through leading by example, by reducing water use and demand in its own properties and activities. Planning consent for new developments should ensure that the highest possible standards are met with regard to sustainable urban drainage systems. Efficient use of water and retention of water in the drainage basin are extremely important.

In addition to these key areas, it is clear that managing the Bulbourne is made more complex due to its relationship with the Grand Union Canal,

which shares water supply. DBC will need to work with the Canal and River Trust to make sure that the canal system is efficient and does not use an unreasonable amount of water at the expense of the Bulbourne.

DEF's main aims have always been to improve water quality, biodiversity and, most importantly, the amount of water flowing through Dacorum's chalk streams.