



Dacorum Environmental Forum  
Full Meeting Thursday 16/11/23

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

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
Paul Harris	DEF
Dorothy Jackman	Boxmoor resident
Annie Heaton	Grand Union Community Energy
Cllr Alan Briggs (Z)	Nash Mills PC
Mary Arnott-Gee (Z)	DEF
Cllr Gill Macdonald (Z)	Tring Rural PC
Cllr Robert Farrow (Z)	Tring TC
Cllr Kevin Fielding (Z)	Berkhamsted TC

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. **Apologies etc.**

Brian Worrell, Hemel resident

2. **Minutes of DEF Sept 14th meeting and matters arising**

**GE** said that Robin Bromham given a comprehensive presentation to DEF on Sept 14th on the subject of "Neighbourhood Heat Networks – an Engineer’s Perspective" and that the following by one by Sarah Burgess and John Ingleby of Grand Union Community Energy (GUCE) was equally well received and commented on.

3. **Discussion of the DBC Local Plan (2024-2040) - Revised Strategy for Growth**

**GE** reminded attendees that DBC were consulting on the next stage of the Dacorum Local Plan 2024-2040. This focused consultation, called “Revised Strategy for Growth”, addressed key issues raised in response to the 2020 consultation, the Local Plan Emerging Strategy for Growth 2020-2038. Once adopted, the new Local Plan would replace the Core Strategy and Site Allocations Development Plan Document (DPD) and polices from the 2004 Local Plan. Comments needed to be received by the end of Monday 11th December.

Other documents concerning the plan that were in the public domain had a different presentation and contained rather more detail than the public-facing consultation document. These included the ones presented to DBC's Strategic Planning Environment Overview Scrutiny Committee on Oct 4<sup>th</sup>, which at Para 2.8 mentions the possible forthcoming changes to the NPPF regarding housing demand figures and to Cabinet on Oct. 17<sup>th</sup> where Para 2.27 *et seq.* shows how the Green Belt land take figure has been reduced and might be reduced further by counting land within Hemel Garden Communities as Green Belt. However, in order to structure the present discussion, only pages of the current consultation document (50 in all) would be scrolled through and projected on the screen in the room and on Zoom Share Screen.

**MR** pointed out that the document dealt only with changes to the 2020 consultation, so it would be valid to raise points that were raised then if they were not mentioned this time round.

**AB** raised the question of what formats were acceptable in replies to the consultation. At a recent presentation of the Plan he had been told that free format via E-mail would not be acceptable, only replies using the online form.

**CR** said that the online form was basically one box, so effectively was freeform.

*The Consultation document does not mention E-mails. It recommends the online form but adds "1.11. Alternatively, completed surveys can be submitted by post to Strategic Planning, Dacorum Borough Council, The Forum, Marlowes, Hemel Hempstead, Hertfordshire. HP1 1DN."*

**SW** took the chair for the remainder of this item, with **GE** speed-reading aloud the gist of the displayed text.

**AB** and **MAG** said that the Two Waters and Apsley areas were already routinely gridlocked by traffic and that the various proposals for new housing in and around these areas would make matters worse.

**SW** said that the same applied to the Box Lane area.

**GE** said that the traffic-generating consequences of developments made them subject to a sign-off by the Herts. County Council Highways department who rarely if ever refused to grant it.

**CR** asked whether the adverse effect of all this extra traffic on air quality had been duly considered.

**AB** said that in the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal (SA) report the effect on air quality was predicted to be "neutral".

*The non-technical summary of the SA has at P11 has "A broadly neutral effect is predicted. Whilst air quality is improving it is set to remain an issue, including due to particulate pollution associated with electric vehicles. There are some significant constraints to growth locally, but there is also a need to avoid exporting unmet need. It is important to emphasise the importance of proactive local plan-making to enable effective strategic transport planning."*

**MR** said that building on the Eastern flank of the Upper Gade Valley (between Hemel and Water End) must be especially opposed on the grounds of the visual impact. The same was true for the Western flank which, although not under threat in the Plan, was threatened by a speculative application by Fairfax Homes.

**SW** concurred, saying that it should also be opposed on the grounds of drainage and adverse effects on the river Gade, an internationally recognised and legally protected chalk stream. A county-wide study had designated the area for protection from development.

**PH** said that Natural England were undertaking a review of the AONB boundary and there was potential for the boundary to extend so that it included part of the Upper Gade Valley. Hemel Garden Community's proposals to de-green belt right up to the existing AONB boundary pre-empted Natural England's review. *The Sustainability Appraisal Report that accompanied Dacorum's Draft Local Plan in 2020 stated under Appendix E.1: "The northern boundary of the site is adjacent to the Chilterns AONB and development could affect the setting of the AONB. The site is within the High Gade Valley and Gaddesden Row character areas. Development of the site would extend Hemel Hempstead into this prominent area of countryside and close the gap with Piccotts End."*

**KF** said that proposal to create SANGs at Berkhamsted in the Castle area and at Haresfoot, two of the town's best Green Belt areas, would require their removal from the Green Belt and did nothing to enhance their value as local amenities. According to the sound study done for the planning application the one at Haresfoot, which was promoted by a developer, would involve extensive fencing, making it less accessible.

**SW** said that the Box Moor Trust were applying for SANG status on areas of their land. These would not be fenced, would be protected from development for 80 years and would provide valuable income for the Trust.

**AH** said that the Sustainability Appraisal (SA) referred to SANGs under the topic of Biodiversity. She asked why a private developer was choosing the location for a SANG.

*The non-technical summary of the SA on Page 11 says*

*"the Council is able to meet c.90% of the standard method for calculating housing need, with a reliance on a combination of Council-led "Strategic SANG" alongside third party bespoke SANG solutions." and "The Council is ... unable to identify a Council-led Strategic SANG at key locations such as Berkhamsted and Tring." and at P12*

*" There is a need for further collaboration with key partner organisations, such as Natural England and the local Wildlife Trust, not only in respect of SANG but also, more widely, to ensure that the spatial strategy supports biodiversity net gain".*

**MR** and **GE** said that SANGs could not be double-counted, i.e. used both toward limiting footfall in Ashridge and toward Biodiversity Net Gain.

**RF** said that the housing allocations on Green Belt East of Tring now withdrawn from the plan (TR01 and TR03) were still the subject of a decision by the Secretary of State for Levelling Up which was expected in January. The Secretary of State would take due note of Dacorum's decision to remove them from the plan, but had the power to override it.

**AH** said that the accompanying Sustainability Appraisal was no more than the title implied. What the Plan needed in this regard was a strategy for achieving Net Zero, sustainable transport and much else.

**SW** said that according to recent news the former Market Square in Hemel Hempstead (HH05 in the plan) as well as being allocated for housing would contain a "Health Hub". This sparked speculation that the move was in order to compensate for loss of facilities at the Hemel Hospital site, now largely given over to housing in the plan.

**MR** said that there was no provision for a social venue in the Town Centre, such as a performing arts centre. He and the AVID group had long campaigned for that to be on the Market Square.

**GM** asked how the plan would affect local (to Tring) villages such as Long Marston and Puttenham. *These villages are not mentioned in the current consultation document, but they are listed in the 2020 Emerging Strategy for Growth under Table 49 "Characteristics of small villages and hamlets" and although the preceding Para. 23.231 states that "The tranquillity of the countryside is important to*

*biodiversity and part of its appeal to visitors." there is no indication there as to how this appeal is to be protected.*

**RF** said that the changes in the plan since 2020 were favourable for wildlife and biodiversity in Tring.

#### **4. Any other Business**

**GE** had heard on Nov. 10<sup>th</sup> from Kelly Standbrook of the Gadebridge Park River Restoration Project that the project had successfully secured the required additional funding and that it was hoped that construction would begin in spring next year.

Dates for 2024:

Main meetings: (Thursdays) **(Please note: these will be in the Conference Room of the Box Moor Trust building in London Road)** 8th Feb. 9th May, 12th Sept and 14th Nov.

Steering Group: (Tuesdays) 9th Jan, 19th March, 25th June, 1st Oct.