



Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 8/2/24

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Mike Ridley (Z)	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Chris Ridley (Z)	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Izzy Grigg	Crown Estate, Regeneration Manager
Hannah Patrick	Crown Estate, Community Partnerships Manager
Paul Harris	DEF
Mary Arnott-Gee (Z)	DEF
Cllr Carole Weston (Z)	DBC Portfolio Holder for People & Transformation
Sherief Hassan (Z)	DEF
Andrew Farrow	Great Gaddesden PC
Nick Hollinghurst	Former DBC/HCC
Brian Worrell	Resident
Cllr Nigel Taylor	DBC, Berkhamsted TC
Cllr Robin Bromham	DBC Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Operations

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. **Apologies etc.**

Cllr Robert Farrow, Tring TC, Cllr Ron Tindall, Leader, DBC, Dennis Harvey, DEF

2. **Minutes of DEF Nov 16th meeting and matters arising**

GE recalled that there had been a useful and wide-ranging discussion in advance of DEF's response to the online consultation on the Dacorum Local Plan (2024-2040) – Revised Strategy for Growth, which had a deadline of Monday 11th December, and that the response could be viewed on the DEF website. (<https://dacenvforum.org.uk/consultation-responses-and-representations/new-local-plan-2023/>).

BW asked whether DEF's response had included a call for carbon-reduction standards as planning requirements for new builds.

GE said that he would check, but that over the years DEF had certainly lobbied for them, with DBC and subsequently with the developers with little or no response. (Action **GE**)

NH cited several cases where such requirements had been enforced in Tring including EV chargers at LA5 and solar panels for the Pond Close elderly accommodation site.

HP said that the Crown Estate routinely placed similar requirements on developments.

NT said that the Council and developers had a sympathetic ear towards calls for carbon-reduction standards. He pointed out that the builders had a statutory right to make a 20% profit on a development overall, and that if they spent more on e.g. solar panels they might spend less on e.g. social housing. Solar panels etc. came under Building Regulations rather than planning consents.

RB said that Heat Networks could make an important contribution to carbon reduction. (*See DEF minutes 14/9/23 when RB and Grand Union Community Energy presented*)

MR said that incorporation of Solar Panels etc. at the new build stage did not necessarily incur a net loss to the builder as they would add to the value of the house when sold. The DEF Steering Group had been informed that the Council had the powers to impose such conditions subsequent to outline planning approval when it came to a detailed plan.

3. Introduction to the Crown Estate

In welcoming and introducing Izzy Grigg and Hannah Patrick from the Crown Estate **GE** said that they had kindly agreed to come and speak primarily on the basis of reaching out to a local group and providing some background on the Crown Estate and its purpose and approach to any development, but that there would also be some reference to their holding North Hemel that was a major feature of the Local Plan and of DEF's response to it.

IG presented, displaying pages on the local screen and via Zoom Share Screen.

She said that dating back more than 260 years, the Crown Estate was a unique business with a diverse portfolio that stretched across England, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was re-established by the Crown Estate Act of 1961 as an independent commercial business with accountability to Parliament. One of its purposes was to benefit the nation's finances, with £3bn generated in the last 10 years. It was one of the UK's largest landowners, currently owning some 200,000 acres. Following the appointment of the current Chief Executive in December 2019 its remit had expanded to creating a broad financial, environmental and social value for its stakeholders and customers and for the nation. This included adherence to the Climate Emergency Design Guide LETI ("Low Energy Transformation Initiative") and a target of 15% Biodiversity Net Gain.

The "Group Strategy" included addressing national and regional needs such as

- Energy security and net zero agendas
- Economic growth, productivity and equality
- The growing pressure on urban centres
- Biodiversity

The "Regional Strategy" would target opportunities including

- To impact positively the supply and quality of UK's housing stock
 - To create high quality employment, skills and training opportunities
 - To catalyse the development of innovation and new sectors in the UK
 - To deliver community and social infrastructure as part of a new way of engaging and working with local communities
 - To support regional economic growth and productivity
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- To set and deliver against aspirational environmental standards for development
 - Through innovation, to adopt new methods of construction and technologies in

support of net zero development

- To support affordable community energy provision through local generation
- To support the industrial growth, supply chain and skills needed for the growth of clean technologies

- Protect nature and promote nature recovery through a sensitive approach to development
- Create new green spaces for local communities
- Protect and enhance biodiversity and natural habitats

The Crown Estate's portfolio, current value £15.8 billion, was diverse, including:

- 11 million square feet of prime London real estate
- 11.8 Gigawatts of off-shore wind capacity, supplying 14% of the UK's electricity demand
- 200,000 acres of agricultural land
- More than 12,000 kilometres of coastline and seabed more than five times the area of England and Wales.

Two examples of The Crown Estate's net zero housing demonstration projects were at Wootton, Bedford, featuring 50 net zero carbon homes, 30% affordable, and an additional opportunity to deliver nature-focused public open space in partnership with the Parish Council, and Knutsford, Cheshire where there was outline consent for up to 60 homes, 30% affordable with the opportunity to deliver "low carbon infrastructure" (a link road and roundabout) and longer-term opportunities including an 18-acre business park and adjacent land safeguarded for 300 homes as part of the Local Plan. Bids (from builders) were expected to meet industry-leading operational and embodied carbon targets, to provide on-site energy generation, to meet a minimum of 15% biodiversity net gain and to provide 30% affordable housing.

Regarding the Crown State's land ownership and a long-term commitment to Hemel:

- They were the majority landowner across the Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) growth area, with ownership extending to about 1,000 acres at East Hemel and about 400 acres at North Hemel.
- Their unique status, strategy and the scale landownership meant that they were uniquely placed to take a long-term view on development of this scale.
- They strongly supported the comprehensive and coordinated approach to development across the HGC growth area.
- More broadly, they were committed to supporting the wider transformation of Hemel beyond their direct land ownerships.
- They were committed to early investment, supporting community priorities and long-term stewardship. They would invest in the early delivery of health facilities and schools, sustainable transport improvements and publicly accessible green space, ensuring that local residents realised positive benefits from development in their communities.

Re North Hemel they would "look into" the question of whether or not to develop the eastern flank of the upper Gade Valley.

They intended to build on the HGC Spatial Vision and the Hemel Place work to develop a compelling vision for their land and the creation of a Master Plan for East Hemel (in the first instance) which would encompass the objectives:

Working towards Net Zero Carbon

- Promoting innovative methods of construction
- Sourcing renewable and low carbon energy
- Exploring district heat networks
- Green infrastructure and sustainable transport

High quality homes

- A range of tenures and exploring new models for living (e.g., intergenerational)
- A commitment to at least 40% affordable
- Accessibility and inclusivity

Investing in Placemaking

- Conserving heritage
- Ensuring design excellence
- Focusing on art, culture and "activation"
- Supporting community priorities and investment beyond their direct land ownership

Productivity & Employment

- Investing in local training and skills
- Creating local jobs
- Supporting regional economic growth

Regarding stewardship, nature recovery and providing access to green spaces they were committed to:

- The largest SANG opportunity in the UK through early discussions with Natural England.
- Chalk stream restoration at Redbournbury where they were working with the Chilterns AONB to explore how they can restore the section of chalk stream in their ownership at Redbournbury.
- Using their wider landownership to improve walking and cycling routes, connecting Hemel with Redbourn and St Albans
- Delivering high quality and exciting play space.

GE thanked **IG** for her presentation and asked what control over the development standards the Crown Estate would have after it disposed of a landholding.

IG said that the Crown Estate would create the Master Plan in conjunction with other stakeholders and when selling a parcel of land to a builder it would incorporate Design Codes as covenants.

SW took the chair and invited questions from attendees.

PH asked what the Design Codes would specify in terms of solar power generation.

IG said that this was something they were looking at.

RB said that the presentation had contained many positive objectives. These should include Heat Networks (*see RB's comment above*) and ways of capturing waste heat, such as was currently being produced in quantity by the data centres in Hemel's Maylands industrial estate.

NT asked whether new housing would have gas boilers, heat pumps or what?

IG No gas boilers.

NT asked whether some houses would be for rent.

IG Yes, some, but a "significant proportion" would be for sale.

NH sought clarity on the issue of ownership - Freehold vs. Leasehold

IG Freehold

NH asked who would own Open Spaces and shops within a development.

IG There was a "need to work through" this, working with the Local Authority for the long term management, possibly via a Community and Management trust.

NH asked where democratic accountability for the Crown Estate lay - within itself or with the government. The recently much publicised issue at the Post Office had been complicated by the fact that it had been made independent of the government.

IG confirmed that the Crown Estate Act established it as an independent commercial business with accountability to Parliament.

NH asked where the Crown Estate's policies and objectives originated from, for instance as regards offshore vs. onshore wind power. Why were they not promoting the latter, which was cheaper?

IG said they formed these in the light of consultation with a range of other agencies and bodies.

AF noted that on the map showing land ownership at North and East Hemel about one third appeared to be Crown Estate and two thirds other landowners. How did the other landowners relate with the Crown Estate? They might not comply with the Crown Estate's stated policies and objectives.

IG said that they also had high aspirations. The Hemel Garden Community project also had a role to play in settling policies.

AF asked who was responsible for the proposed transport corridor.

IG said that this would involve more "internal work" and "talking to people" and that it would be a team effort co-ordinated by Herts County Council.

BW asked whether any of the Crown Estate's profits actually went to the monarch.

IG said yes, but a relatively small amount.

NH said that the Crown Estate was the default owner for small parcels of land where the owner could not be established. The legal term for this was Escheat, the reversion of property to the state. Because these parcels were small, claiming ownership was not high on the Crown Estate's priority list and this had led to problems and delays in some instances in Tring.

BW asked who was responsible for checking that Design Codes had been adhered to,

IG said that that was the Local Authority.

BW said that one design consideration should be to have south-facing roofs suitable for solar panels. Also the needs of horse riders should be taken into account when providing walking and cycling routes.

HP said that (re horse riders) the thought process was already there.

MR asked to what extent the Crown Estate were responsive to landscape assessments of the Gade Valley.

SW pointed out that DBC's publication, "Dacorum Landscape Character Assessment" 2003, was formally adopted by DBC on 5th May 2004, as Supplementary Planning Guidance to the DBC Local Plan. The document included the guidance "to restrict further development within the (*Upper Gade*) valley" and to "resist developments which could lower the water table within the valley". He referred to the Government's Environmental Improvement Plan of 2023 which identified the international importance of chalk streams, of which the Gade, Bulbourne, and Ver were three. Goal 3 of the Government's Plan was to protect chalk streams. Guidance for the conservation of chalk stream valleys was provided in DBC's 2013 Adopted Core Strategy.

SH observed that rather than just "Visual Impact", the total environmental impact of development in the upper Gade valley should be assessed.

MR said that he had recently been informed that a further Landscape Character Assessment was planned.

AF said that he had recently been informed that no recent Landscape Character Assessment had been carried out.

NH asked how Homes England, one of the other landholders, related to the Crown Estate.

RB said that this land had been transferred to them from the Commission for New Towns. Homes England had sold some of their land to private owners, which had created problems when subsequently seeking to influence planning objectives.

MR asked, re the objective of "Focusing on art, culture & activation" at East Hemel, where precisely would a venue for such be located?

IG said that as yet there were no more details. Any site would need to be of sufficient size, and that would be easier as part of a major new development. They were trying to find out what the community needed. Current thinking was around locating it in East Hemel but that could be reconsidered.

MR said that, as AVID (Arts Venue in Dacorum) had long proposed, there was sufficient room in the former Market Square which was a more appropriate location in terms of attractiveness, accessibility and the prestige of the town centre. Rather than use part of their landholding for the purpose the Crown Estate should support a town centre venue financially, in line with existing community aspirations.

SW asked whether anyone at the Crown Estate had any experience of establishing a cultural centre.

IG said that the topic was still at an early stage.

CR asked how the Crown Estate could influence the provision of bus services

IG said they looking to engage with Herts. County Council and other authorities.

4. Any other Business

SW said that DBC and HCC were working together to develop a Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP) to improve cycling and walking routes in the borough. He had attended the Microsoft Teams meeting on the topic on January 30th. The online public engagement platform would remain open until Monday 26 February. *More details at <https://www.hertfordshire.gov.uk/about-the-council/consultations/transport-and-highways/lcwips-2022/lcwips-2022.aspx>.*

SW said that he would attend a meeting for the Gadebridge Park river restoration project on February 13th and that he had been appointed to the Steering group of the River Colne Catchment Action Network.

Forthcoming Diary dates 2024:

Main meetings: (Thursdays, Conference Room of the Box Moor Trust building in London Road) 9th May, 12th Sept and 14th Nov.

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