



Dacorum Environmental Forum - Minutes
Full Meeting Thursday 9/5/24

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
William Wyatt-Lowe	Former DBC
Marc Wilcox, PhD	Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy Project Manager, HCC
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Mary Arnott-Gee	DEF
Sherief Hassan (Z)	DEF
Andrew Farrow	Great Gaddesden PC
David Kirk	Box Moor Trust
Cllr Robert Farrow(Z)	Tring TC
Nick Hollinghurst	Former DBC/HCC
Cllr Robin Bromham	DBC Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Operations

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies etc.

Cllr. Adrian England, DBC Portfolio Holder for Climate and Ecological Emergency, Adrian Whyte, Plastics and Circular Economy consultant, Dennis Harvey, DEF, [Cllr. Nicola Cobb, Cllr. Alan Briggs and Nikki Bugden (clerk)], Nash Mills PC, Brian Worrell(Resident), Paul Harris, DEF, Martin Hicks, Hertfordshire Ecology.

2. Minutes of DEF Feb 8th meeting and matters arising

GE recalled that Izzy Grigg and Hannah Patrick of the Crown Estate had given an informative presentation including one or two slides relevant to North Hemel, and a useful and wide-ranging discussion had followed. He had asked whether the presentation could be put on the DEF website or sent to attendees, but was asked not to do so until the Crown Estate had had the opportunity to go and meet with other groups directly.

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

No nominations had been received despite **GE**'s call in the Agenda E-mail for bidders to be his successor. **SW** said that the wider membership should consider the matter further during the coming year. Since **GE** and **SW** were willing to continue as Chair and Vice Chair respectively **GE** was proposed and seconded by **WW-L** and **CR**, and **SW** by **MA-G** and **MR** respectively.

4. Local Nature Recovery Strategy

GE explained that Cllr Adrian England who had been billed to present on DBC's position on the subject was unable to be present for family reasons. In welcoming Marc Wilcox, Biodiversity Net Gain and Local Nature Recovery Strategy Project Manager, to speak on this topic, **GE** recalled that at its meeting as long ago as July 2010 the Forum had been given an update on the Dacorum Biodiversity Action Plan review and that the topics of biodiversity, wildlife, green corridors and the like had continued to feature amongst its concerns. Most noteworthy in this regard had been DEF's spawning of the Friends of Halsey Field, the Friends' success in designating Halsey Field as a wildlife site in 2015 and their subsequent regular work parties that had resulted in measurable achievements in biodiversity.

MW explained the timeline between the Herts. Biodiversity Action Plan (BAP) and the current Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS), a review of the former by the Herts. Environmental Forum having fed into the latter, which had come into being under the Environment Act of 2021. The principal goal of the LNRS was to identify and review the sizes of sites which had the potential to improve habitats and contribute to carbon sequestration. For this purpose DEFRA had divided England into forty county-size areas, one of which was coterminous with Hertfordshire. The BAP had resulted in a big document that most people would not read. This needed adapting in order to engage with people at all levels, and an online tool to enable this was being developed, with different views/ levels of access depending on the category of user - planners, large companies, local residents etc.

He gave a 14 slide PowerPoint presentation, which he was happy to have placed on the DEF website alongside these minutes, and whose text is paraphrased here:

The creation of an LNRS is required by the Environment Act 2021 and is funded by Central Government. Its aim is to show how and where to recover nature and to improve the wider environment across England. Nature Recovery is not just Biodiversity Recovery as it includes in addition flood mitigation and opportunities for renewable energy, carbon sequestration and health and wellbeing benefits. It will be delivered in the next 2 years.

The LNRS project will make information available on what projects are taking place, what priorities have been set, how to get involved and what funding is available. Under the legislation the minimum requirement is to produce a publicly accessible map identifying all appropriate habitats and opportunities and for this to be reviewed and republished every 3-10 years, with the republication date to be decided by the Secretary of State. Hertfordshire will, over and above this minimum requirement, have a multi-functional online map tool that is live, updated on a much more regular basis with ecology surveys completed in the county, details of registered Biodiversity Net Gain sites and other data. It will provide planning and sustainability teams with highly useful information about the benefits of any given site. It will also be useful to the general public and businesses looking for ways to help nature recover.

The online map will identify the most valuable existing areas for nature, the areas of greatest potential for creating valuable habitats and where this could deliver wider environmental benefits such as air and water

quality, flood mitigation and carbon sequestration. It will also help identify areas where valuable habitat could be increased and where there is potential for joining up isolated sites, and where habitats can deliver health and well-being benefits for instance improving access to green space. It will integrate with Biodiversity Net Gain (BNG) through developers being incentivised to deliver BNG in sites identified as having 'strategic significance' by receiving extra BNG credits.

Strategic priorities will be identified, including long term priorities regarding the species and habitats of most importance to the county as well as short terms goals such as improving the quality of water habitat in Dacorum and removing weeds and concrete channelling. Actions to achieve these goals will be linked to grant and funding opportunities. Planning applications will have to have regard for the priorities in the LNRS.

A Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership has been established to deliver the LNRS. The Responsible Authority (*presumably Herts. CC*) will manage the budget for the Partnership, report back to DEFRA and chair the Partnership. The other Local Planning Authorities (and Natural England) are Supporting Authorities and will need to 'sign off' the Strategy before publication.

The Partnership's Steering Group consists of:

- Hertfordshire County Council
- The Environment Agency
- Natural England
- Forestry Commission
- The Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Hertfordshire Environmental Records Centre
- Rural Land Management Advisory Group
- Hertfordshire Sustainability Officer Group
- Hertfordshire Planning Group
- Hertfordshire Infrastructure & Development Board
- Hertfordshire Association of Parish and Town Councils
- Lea and Colne River Catchment Partnerships
- Public Health (Hertfordshire County Council)

The Board consists of:

- Hertfordshire County Council
- The Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
- Hertfordshire Climate Change Sustainability Partnership
- Hertfordshire Growth Board
- Hertfordshire Infrastructure & Planning Partnership

The LNRS project seeks to reach out to communities in order to:

- **Gather local knowledge** of Hertfordshire's species and habitats (as well as existing and upcoming nature recovery projects) from the wider community groups in Hertfordshire.
- **Inform communities** about the functions and requirements of the completed LNRS and opportunities it offers. Generate interested in and support for the LNRS and Nature Recovery more generally.
- **Understand communities' needs** for the completed LNRS to ensure that it is accessible, useful and intuitive and tailored to the users' differing needs.

It is gathering information across key topic areas related to the above.

There will be 8 key engagement stages throughout the creation of the LNRS:

Spring '24: Awareness raising

Summer '24: Generating a Priorities Longlist, Site identification

Autumn '24 Reviewing Mapping, Shortlisting Priorities

Winter '24/'25 Wider Community Review

Spring '25 Consultation

Summer '25 Pre-publication

Either "General Public" or "All Hertfordshire Communities" will be involved in all of the above except Site identification and Pre-publication

Upcoming LNRS events include:

- An event on 30th May for all the public and private land managers who have a hand in managing the county's countryside. (*Invitation and agenda to be circulated with these minutes.*)
- LNRS presence at the County Show on 26th May
- Online surveys to identify sites and nature priorities in late May

One can find out more and subscribe to updates at:

[Hertfordshire Nature Recovery Partnership | Hertfordshire County Council](#)

and/or contact LNRS at:

LocalNatureRecovery@hertfordshire.gov.uk

GE thanked **MW** for his informative and clear presentation, then handed over the chair to **SW** for the Q&As.

CR said that she belonged to Butterfly Conservation and knew that the organisation had the same aims as the LNRS, in that they were trying to join up landscapes and to provide suitable habitats for biodiversity where insects could thrive in between nature reserves, and they had recently set out a Landscape scale plan. Was Hertfordshire's LNRS going to communicate and work with them to fulfil this aim?

MW said that they hadn't done so yet, but might do so in the future.

DK observed that liaising with so many different special interest and stakeholder groups was a considerable task. Would all such groups get involved at the formative stage of the Strategy? For instance there were well-established and effective groups such as Farm Clusters, where neighbouring farms co-ordinate on matters of common concern including biodiversity, water and other environmental issues.

MW said that they would be involved both as sources of expertise in biodiversity and as landholders.

AF observed that Guy Halsey, manager of Home Farm, Great Gaddesden was a leading participant in his Farm Cluster.

MR asked how much relevant work had already been done over the years by the Herts Biological Records centre (*re-named Herts. Ecology*) and to what extent would the Strategy draw on it?

MW said that they were the leading group amongst environmental groups contributing to the Strategy. One challenge for the Strategy was to narrow down from the over 2000 species covered by these records to thirty "iconic" species so that non-specialist Herts. residents could be consulted on as regards prioritisation. Getting people on board in this way was key to the success of the Strategy.

SW observed that a similar process of narrowing down the list of species had been one of the topics discussed at a recent meeting of the River Colne Catchment Action Network that he had attended.

Unsurprisingly, the kingfisher had made it through to the "short list".

RF asked whether the current presentation was going to be given to Town and Parish Councils. They were the ones with local expertise.

MW said that this had been considered, but there were so many such councils, he personally did not have a support team and therefore he lacked the resources to do so. However, representatives of these Councils could be accommodated within one or more of the Strategy's Groups and there would be a Strategy presence at various District and Borough events.

GE said that minutes of the current meeting, together with (a pointer to) the presentation PowerPoint file would go out to DEF's mailing list, which included all the Dacorum Parish Councils.

RF asked whether there was a version of the presentation that could be uploaded onto Social Media platforms.

MW said that would be possible in a few weeks time, after initial surveys had been done.

AF said that an initiative by Great Gaddesden Parish Council, communicating via the parish magazine, had highlighted five at-risk species in the parish, using observations including some from back gardens. How could this be scaled up to be County-wide?

Response not recorded

NH asked about the provision for non-car access to sites of interest identified under the Strategy. We needed to relate these to the public Right of Way network which was excellent in most parts of the County and to co-ordinate with public transport services. Funds should be sought from bus companies such as Arriva in order to subsidise these services. Grade-separated family-friendly cycle access should be provided at some sites. He also suggested that the Strategy needed to look beyond Hertfordshire where river catchment areas straddled boundaries.

MW said that all these ideas were under investigation. There were National standards on the nearness and accessibility of green spaces to all sectors of the population.

GE said that part of the current attraction of for instance College Lake to (dog-free) pedestrian visitors was the absence of dogs or bicycles.

DK said that Borough and District councils did not have the legislative power to ensure delivery of the Strategy's goals. There was no mechanism for them to discuss the merits of various sites of interest to the Strategy.

MW said that councils would bring their local expertise to the site assessments when attending meetings convened under the Strategy.

RB said that some officers at DBC were passionate about biodiversity.

WW-L asked whether site designations on the maps in the publication of the Strategy for consultation could be indicated by hatching rather than colour coding for the sake of people with (even partial) colour blindness (*such as GE*).

MW said yes.

WW-L asked whether plants were considered under the Strategy, including "bad" plants such as giant hogweed and Japanese knotweed.

Response not recorded

MA-G asked whether the Strategy's surveys would be made available to people without Internet access, and to children.

MW said yes, through (*Internet?*) access at public libraries and the provision of hard copies.

SW pointed out the Friends of Halsey Field's production of an information leaflet with input from local schools as a good example to follow for involving children.

MA-G said that heavy traffic had an adverse effect on adjacent wildlife sites. Did the Strategy extend to traffic calming around or even diversion from its selected sites?

MW said he had no answer to that at present.

DK said that the education sector should be included in the Communities diagram that had been displayed.

5. Any other Business

MR said that Friends of Halsey Field were holding their AGM at the Warners End Community Centre the following day (May 10th) at 7:45pm. The meeting would include paying tribute to Steve Lings who died on Easter Saturday, and who would be sadly missed after all he had done for Halsey Field. His

enthusiasm for and knowledge of the natural world had been extraordinary, and his great fondness for Halsey Field had been inspiring.

Steve also attended DEF meetings on several occasions, including the one in September 2019 when he presented on Plastics and the Environment, an indication of the extraordinary breadth of his knowledge on environmental subjects.

Forthcoming Diary dates 2024:

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

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