



Dacorum Environmental Forum - Minutes
Full Meeting Thursday 14/11/24

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Paul Harris	DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Nick Hollinghurst	Public
Rosemarie Hollinghurst	Public
Cllr Garrick Stevens(Z)	Berkhamsted Town Council, DBC
Cllr Nigel Taylor	Berkhamsted Town Council, DBC. HCC
Brian Worrell	Resident
Cllr Robin Bromham	DBC Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Operations

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies etc.

Andrew Farrow Nettleden & Potten End and Great Gaddesden PC, Cllr Robert Farrow Tring TC, Sherief Hassan, DEF, Cllr Caroline Smith-Wright, DBC Portfolio Holder People & Transformation and Climate, Ecological Emergency and Tring Rural & Tring West PCs.

Regarding the Zoom session, to his dismay **GE** found that his Zoom password for launching the meeting was rejected, also his Webmail (for recovering the Zoom password). **GS** was able to attend, with some breaks, because others present set up a new session on their laptops and were in E-mail contact with him. *I found out later that Mary Arnott-Gee (DEF) had also attempted to join. I have since discovered the reason for both the password rejections (Zoom and Webmail) – I'd made a note of the passwords on a sheet of paper that I keep with the laptop, and when I'd been forced to change them for some reason back at home I'd not updated the sheet. Many apologies, and I am determined to do better next time.*

2. Minutes of DEF Sept 12th meeting and matters arising

Cllr Nigel Taylor's suggestion that Gagan Mohindra, the MP for South West Herts. which includes Kings Langley, should be invited to be added to the DEF circulation list (action **GE**) - carried forward.

GE recalled that there had a useful discussion of DEF's response to the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF) consultation and said that he had incorporated observations made at the meeting into DEF's response, which is now on the DEF website.

3. Air quality: ULEZ and Dacorum's Air Quality Action Plan.

GE welcomed and introduced Professor Heydecker, who had agreed to give a presentation to DEF around the topic of air pollution, traffic and ULEZ that would lead on to a discussion including an update on Dacorum's Air Quality Action Plan (AQAP) by Cllr Robin Bromham. He recalled that the Plan had been the main topic at the DEF meeting in February 2017 (*see <https://dacenvforum.org.uk/wp-content/uploads/2017/06/230217-DEF-Minutes-23rd-Feb-2017.pdf>*) when DBC Scientific Officer Danielle Newnham had presented on its progress and prospects. Referring to the minutes of that meeting, **GE** noted that Ms Newnham had given a progress update on DBC's AQAP of December 2014 for 2015 - 2018. That plan was in fulfilment of Part IV of the Environment Act 1995. In 2012 DBC had declared three areas where it was likely that the air quality objective for nitrogen dioxide (NO₂) would not be met. These Air Quality Management Areas (AQMAs) were Lawn Lane, Hemel Hempstead, London Road, Apsley and High Street, Northchurch, where the data from the NO₂ and PM (particulates) analysers were monitored. During the subsequent Q&As Ms Newnham had said that "ambient background concentrations" contributed the largest proportion to existing NO₂ concentrations (approximately 80%), followed by emissions from cars and goods vehicles. It had been pointed out by one attendee that nano-particulates (less than PM₁) were the most harmful to human health and that these were not detected by the monitors.

BH presented, using a display a .PDF file of which will be uploaded to the DEF website alongside these minutes. A précis of the slides and commentary follows:

A map showing by colour code the annual average NO₂ concentration in London in 2016. The orange and red zones where the level exceeded approximately 50 micrograms per cubic meter (µg/m³) covered the 22 square kilometre area of central London, the initial ULEZ zone.

According to Google AI and Wikipedia the World Health Organization (WHO) recommends a (maximum of) 24-hour mean of 25 µg/m³ and an annual mean of 10 µg/m³. Nitrogen oxides (NO_x) are a group of gases that include nitric oxide (NO), nitrogen dioxide (NO₂), nitrous oxide (N₂O), nitric acid (HNO₃) and nitrous acid (HNO₂). Nitrogen dioxide reacts with water to give nitric acid and nitrous acid: $2 \text{NO}_2 + \text{H}_2\text{O} \rightarrow \text{HNO}_3 + \text{HNO}_2$.

The ULEZ charge was introduced on April 8, 2019 to combat these unacceptable levels.

Vehicles that are compliant with the Ultra Low Emissions Zone (ULEZ) in London do not have to pay the daily ULEZ charge of £12.50. Some examples of ULEZ-compliant vehicles include:

- Euro 6 and Euro 4 compliant vehicles: Diesel vehicles that meet the Euro 6 standard and petrol vehicles that meet the Euro 4 standard
- Electric vehicles: All fully electric vehicles are exempt because they produce zero emissions

Travellers' responses to ULEZ fell into the following categories:

- Upgrade vehicle
- Switch mode of travel (use public transport)
- Reduce frequency of travel
- Change route (avoid the Zone)
- Alter destination (go elsewhere)

The resulting percentage reductions in NO_x were summarised for the ULEZ Zone itself, "Inner London" (approximately the area outside ULZ to the North and South Circular roads) and outside of that ("Greater London") out to but not including the M25:

Reductions (%)	NO	NO₂	NO_x
uLEZ	19.0	11.6	20.2
Inner London	17.9	11.4	17.1
Greater London	10.6	13.4	15.1

This showed that the benefits extended beyond the ULEZ area.

Following ULEZ there had been a substantial reduction in the number of non-compliant vehicles registered in Greater London i.e. those that had to pay the charge, tabulated thus:

Proportions of non-compliant vehicles (%)

Date	Cars	Vans
February 2017	56	88
June 2023	7	20
February 2024	3	11

There followed several slides illustrating the distribution of measuring sites, the variations in readings at the same site and between different sites, changes throughout the daily, weekly and annual cycle and reference to the introduction of unleaded petrol in 1985 as evidence that legislation and financial incentives work in the long term. In conclusion:

- ULEZ in London had been effective
- It had encouraged changes in travellers' choices
- Improvement trends accelerated over the years
- The benefits extended beyond the ULEZ zone

The following challenges remained:

- The need for emissions regulations to be adopted elsewhere
- Electric vehicles still generate particulates (PM2.5) from brakes, tyres and the road surface, to which the additional mass of batteries is a contributory factor.
- All the other sources of toxic gaseous emissions besides vehicles.

GE thanked **BH** for his very informative and thought-provoking presentation.

SW managed a Q&A and general discussion session:

BW asked where the £12.50 ULEZ charge went, e.g. was it used to subsidise public transport?

BH said that that aspect was not his responsibility.

BW asked whether the financial burden of the ULEZ charge on traders and residents in the ULEZ zone was taken into account alongside environmental benefits.

BH said that there was a 90% residents' discount for those within the Congestion Charge residents' discount zone. In addition, you don't need to pay the ULEZ charge if your vehicle is parked in the zone and you don't drive it.

NT asked if ULEZ had led to improvements in air quality outside Greater London.

BH Possibly, but he had no data on this.

SW said that it was plausible that for example Dacorum would benefit, because it would persuade more of its car owners to change to electric cars in order to avoid ULEZ when they went into London.

MR commented on the wide range of readings obtained from roadside pollution monitors. In some cases the spread ("Standard Deviation") was wider than the averaged quoted figure.

GE commented that this would imply that some readings were negative.

BH said that would not happen, as the results were analysed in a more sophisticated way.

BW asked what was being done about buses and HGVs that do not pay a ULEZ charge.

BH They are covered by the LEZ (not ULEZ) scheme. Under LEZ the charge is dependent on vehicle type, and ranges from £100-£300 for vehicles that do not meet Euro 3 standards.

NT asked whether aeroplanes and trains had equivalent emissions limits.

BH said that he did not know, but there was a strong lobby in favour of this.

RB said that jet turbines emitted a lot of NO₂ because of the high temperatures at which they operated.

PH said that there was a visible concentration of air pollution in the Heathrow area. There should be a carbon tax as there was in France, where the road tax was also higher than in the UK.

BH Road tax in the UK relates to CO₂ emissions.

According to electrive's website this year France tightened the "malus écologique" for cars emitting more than 118 g/km or more. The tax starts at 50 euros and increases rapidly with higher CO₂ emissions to a maximum of 60,000 euros if CO₂ emissions are higher than 194 grams per kilometre.

NH said that encouraging 'bus use by placing a cap on fares was a positive step towards reducing car use. Vehicle tax should be related to the weight.

RB said that this would also affect electric vehicles (EVs) because of their heavy batteries. However EVs had the additional environmental virtue of using electric retarders rather than brakes, thereby capturing the braking energy. He went on to talk about Dacorum's AQAP. He said that DBC had a statutory requirement to produce reports on pollution levels and to identify AQMAS (*see the first paragraph of this item for the acronyms*). The worst areas in Dacorum were along the valley bottoms or "urban canyons" (*roads hemmed in by unbroken lines of buildings*). Two were near the Grand Union Canal in Apsley. Monitoring tubes measured a range of pollutants which were fed into the Air Quality Standards report. Ideally these data could help identify polluting sources, but that would require gas chromatography which was not available. *According to Google "gas chromatography uses an inert or unreactive carrier gas as the mobile phase, and the stationary phase is generally a thin layer of liquid. As the mobile phase moves, it separates the mixture into its individual components in the stationary phase. We can then identify them one by one."* There were not many things that DBC on its own could do to improve air quality, but via planning powers they could encourage cycling and walking. Building Standards also could be used to ensure that new builds did not use gas.

SW said that the government were "looking at" 2027 for banning the fitting of new gas boilers. *According to the PropertyData website "Gas boilers are to be banned in most new homes by 2027 under the so-called Future Homes Standard" .*

RB said that in his DBC capacity had been involved in the design of the new Hemel crematorium in Bunkers Park and had sought to utilise waste heat from the furnaces to heat a local school. However, the incompatibility of the necessary pipe laying with constraints on disturbing sensitive ground ruled this out. In the same capacity he was currently pressing for new housing areas not to be adjacent to busy roads by planning for factories to go in between. He was also involved in opposing the proposed expansion ("virtually doubling") of the capacity of Luton airport.

SW asked what specific actions had resulted from Dacorum's AQAP.

RB gave as an example a study and assessment of building standards for housing on the former gasworks site on London Road.

CR said that having two exit routes from the Waitrose car park in Berkhamsted rather than the current one would reduce pollution from traffic idling in queues.

RB said that he took note of **CR**'s suggestion in his capacity at DBC.

BW said that he was frustrated by the fact that DBC had not insisted on solar panels for the LA3 (West Hemel) housing development. He had over the years lobbied and responded to consultations saying that all new housing should have a south-facing roof for maximum solar gain.

RB said that there were also advantages in an East-West orientation in that solar power could be captured at times when the feed in tariffs were higher.

4. Any other Business

Halsey Field

GE said that because of a problem with his E-mail provider he had not seen **CR**'s latest report on the Halsey Field wildlife site in time to send out with the meeting agenda, but that he would send it out with the minutes.

Dacorum Local Plan to 2041, and the Regulation 19 consultation

GE said that on 15th October DBC approved the draft consultation that runs from 4th November to 17th December. The Planning Inspector would only be able to assess whether the draft Local Plan has been prepared in accordance with legal and procedural requirements, and whether it is 'sound'. The public could comment on the plan's legal compliance and consistency with the NPPF. He had recently been advised by Chris Berry, Planning Manager at CPRE Hertfordshire that the pre-proposed-changes NPPF would apply in the case of Dacorum because of the existing or expected status of its Local Plan. **GE** invited contributions to a DEF response via E-mail to him.

NH said that the inspectors would also pay heed to the (draft) changes as they indicated the present government's intentions.

MR said that "accordance with legal and procedural requirements" included the requirement for the Local Plan to be compliant with Net Zero legislation.

Forthcoming Diary dates 2025:

Feb 6th, May 8th, Sept. 11th, Nov. 13th (all Thursdays 7:30pm)
and the following dates for DEF Steering Group meetings in 2025:
Jan 7th, March 18th, June 24th, Oct. 7th (all Tuesdays 7:30pm)