



Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 13/11/25

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Malcolm Hull	Butterfly Conservation - Herts & Middx Branch
David Kirk	Box Moor Trust
Nick Hollinghurst	Public

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies

Cllr Robin Bromham	DBC Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Operations
Tim Hill	Herts & Middlesex Wildlife Trust
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Dr. Rachel Palfrey	Land Use Consultants Limited
Iris Shulman	DBC
Ronan Leydon	DBC Head of Strategic Planning
Brian McRae	Entomology specialist
Dennis Harvey	DEF
Cllr. Sally Symington	DBC Leader
Annie Heaton	Grand Union Community Energy
Cllr Caroline Smith-Wright,	DBC Portfolio Holder, People & Transformation
Cllr Adrian England	DBC Portfolio Holder, Place
Mary Arnott-Gee	DEF
Cllr Nigel Taylor	Berkhamsted TC
Cllr Robert Farrow	Tring TC

2. Minutes of DEF Sept 11th meeting and matters arising

GE recalled that the meeting had been a good opportunity for the Forum to exchange ideas and views with Hemel Hempstead MP David Taylor. Along with his answers and comments given at the meeting David Taylor had supplied him with copies of:

- His and Victoria Collins's letter to Chris Weston, Chief Executive of Thames Water regarding sewage discharges into the Grand Union Canal

- Replies to his query on behalf of the Box Moor Trust about the decision to halt the Chilterns AOB/National Landscape from Mary Creagh, Parliamentary Under Secretary of State for Nature and from Graham Horton of Natural England.

There had been subsequent E-mails from David Taylor's Communications Officer on the subjects of:

- The "Grey Belt" question, including a policy intention to restore "Purpose (c)". (see DEF Sept. 11th minutes para. 4.1 for an explanation of what this is)
- Re-organisation of local authorities and mayoral powers.
- Power storage and pylons (nationally).
- Proposals for energy storage in Dacorum.

All of these had been sent out with the agenda for the current meeting.

David Taylor had also said that he would table a written parliamentary question on the subject of Environment Agency and water company influence on strategic planning and the possibility of having a national water network.

3. Reports from attendees at DBC's Nov. 5th Local Nature Recovery Strategy Seminar.

GE thought that the seminar's main value had been the coming together of like-minded people including experts in various fields. Speakers had included the LNRS project leader Marc Wilcox who had given a presentation to the Forum in May the previous year. His display slides consisted mainly of maps of Dacorum not for publication beyond the seminar that showed colour coded areas for:

Areas of Particular Importance for Biodiversity, i.e.

- SSSIs
- RAMSAR sites
- National Nature Reserves
- Local Nature Reserves
- Local Wildlife Site
- Irreplaceable Habitat

The Focus Areas of Dacorum, which were

- Herts Chalk
- Grass and Heath
- Gade Valley
- Chess Valley

Habitat Actions for Dacorum, which were

- Enhance and create new chalk grassland
- Enhance and create new wood pasture
- Enhance and create wetlands

Species Actions for Dacorum, comprising

- Swift
- Nightingale
- Juniper
- Rare Arable Plants

NH noted that SACs (Special Areas of Conservation, notably Ashridge) and Ancient Woodlands were not mentioned specifically.

Marc Wilcox had invited further ideas for nature conservation projects and costings.

Also Jonathan Pescott-Hawley, Head Gardener at Berkhamsted School, and Dan Blesovsky and Mark Miles, respectively Berkhamsted Golf Club Manager and Trustee, had given inspiring and well illustrated reports on their nature conservation programmes.

MH said that while the Golf Club were responsible for the course, management of the rest of Berkhamsted Common was down to its trustees, who had limited resources.

DK said that Berkhamsted Common was an ideal candidate for seeking funds for more conservation projects.

MR said that Cllr. Kevin Fielding of Berkhamsted Town Council was one of the trustees.

GE said that Seminar attendees had been divided into work groups, each with a convenor from DBC to lead a discussion and take notes for subsequent collation into a forthcoming report on the event.

DK said that he was contributing to this report which he estimated would be available in a couple of weeks.

GE said that towards the end group members had been invited to leave their written comments on nearby tables. His own first comment, prompted by an initiative from Chris Ridley, concerned the LA3 (West Hemel) housing development currently under construction and the challenge of influencing the developers at this stage to use a meadow seed mixture recommended by Butterfly Conservation on the slopes of two SUDS on the site.

MH said that sowings of wildflower seeds on parts of the site were now unlikely to succeed as they had been covered with topsoil.

DK expressed disappointment that, as a bare chalk face was evident, it was not possible to suggest a simple environmentally beneficial measure, like sowing chalk specialist seeds on the bare surface. This opportunity would not have been known at the planning stage.

MH said that the sooner in a project one could lobby for such measures the better.

GE said that during over 25 years of opposing LA3 and questioning planning officers about environmental mitigation the responses up to a point in time had been of the nature "It's too early to say", then switched to "Ask the builders." In the earlier stages the developers' case included hundreds of lengthy documents including environmental impact statements and Biodiversity Net Gain estimates prepared by hired professionals.

MH said that it was always difficult for amateurs to argue their case against professionals.

DK said that one could not expect planning officers to have sufficient expertise to assess the nature conservation aspects of planning applications or construction work. As pointed to in previous Nature strategies there should be ecological expertise on tap and with influence during the building process where controversial large developments are taking place.

GE said that his second comment raised concerns about maintaining appropriate management and protection for Varney's Wood, an ancient woodland on the edge of the North Hemel housing development under the Spatial Vision of Hemel Garden Communities.

MH said that one problem with the North Hemel site was split ownership. The Crown Estate were likely to be more responsive than other owners to suggestions for environmental mitigation

GE said that attendees had received a follow-up E-mail from the event organiser Iris Shulman that included some relevant links and attachments including Marc Wilcox's slides. For the current meeting's benefit he displayed a snapshot of the Dacorum part of the draft interactive map that was on the unrestricted LRNS website.

Iris Shulman's E-mail had said: "Next steps: Your views and comments on the day will be considered and included as part of a document that we will be sharing with you and there will be plenty of further opportunities to continue to work together on making Nature recovery a reality for Dacorum." In a subsequent E-mail she had asked to see the minutes of the current DEF meeting.

GE had also heard from Cllr Caroline Smith-Wright, Portfolio Holder, People & Transformation DBC with an invitation to contact her if she could help going forwards.

DK thought that the seminar had been a worthwhile event and had attracted a lot of people with expertise and ideas.

GE and **MR** commented that the sound system and/or acoustics of the council chamber made it harder to hear everything that was being said.

MR read from **CR's** report on the seminar which will be sent out attached to these minutes. Her report included comments and news on SANGS, amongst which:

The SANG at the Box Moor Trust had resulted in the planting of new hedges to join two woods together, and some separate areas had been specifically designated for ground nesting birds, where dog walkers were excluded in the nesting season.

Elizabeth Hamilton, a qualified ecologist who worked for CPRE, had officially submitted an objection to the newly allowed Nettleden SANG, and had expressed huge concern about what would happen to the ground nesting birds, such as Skylarks and Corn Buntings on this site as the SANG status would lead to a large increase in dogs roaming the fields.

(The Nettleden SANG appeal decision (granted) will be sent out attached to these minutes.)

DK said that there might be inconsistency in the way nature is protected in various SANGs and that there had been some doubt as to whether one was allowed to fence off parts of a SANG. It now appeared that it was possible to exclude dogs from certain areas in breeding season but not individuals without dogs.

MH said that such fencing and dogs on lead controls worked at Heartwood Forest near St. Albans.

4. Ideas for projects and funding for the LNRS

MH said that Butterfly Conservation had already submitted 200-300 suggestions to the Herts. and Greater London LNRSs and would send **GE** a copy of those within Dacorum.

MR read from a follow up E-mail from Chris Ridley to Marc Wilcox with her suggestions for the way forward for Halsey Field in which she identified the current constraints on publishing a management plan. In the E-mail she had said that there was a discrepancy between the aspirations of the Herts Local Nature Recovery Plan and the Property department at HCC, with the result that the new Green Space Action plan for the Halsey Field wildlife site had not yet been signed off, although it had been prepared four years ago by Frankie Downes, a Land Management Project Officer, who worked for the Countryside Management Services at HCC. Chris's E-mail will be sent out attached to these minutes.

DK said that, considering the excellent work that was put in by volunteers, HCC should be more readily supportive to Friends of Halsey Field where small changes to management plans or site infrastructure were concerned.

MH said that the Friends of Verulam Park, St. Albans, had 500 members, worked in collaborations with CROWS (*the Countryside and Rights of Way service in Herts.*) and was funded by St. Albans City and District. Dacorum tended to contract out similar services rather than do them to the same extent as St. Albans via CROWS or CMS *the Countryside Management Service.*

DK said that he knew of many "Friends of" groups in Dacorum who should be encouraged to get together for obtaining common funding and other purposes. It was currently difficult to assess the potential of the many Dacorum owned grassland sites in Hemel Hempstead and elsewhere as there was no apparent detailed information on site sizes, areas included for sport, geology and soil fertility. Another problem was that there was limited knowledge on who owned other potentially useful land for nature.

MH said that there was map with ownership information for St. Albans and District. There were around 7,000 "Friends of" groups nationally. In London there was a salaried co-ordinator for them. CPRE Herts. might be a good candidate for doing something similar in Herts.

DK said that the Box Moor Trust had a fair number of juniper seedlings suitable for planting out at suitable sites across Dacorum. Some were already in pots. The only costs involved would be fencing or similar plant protection. DBC had a current project for Coronation Field in Adeyfield. It ought to include a soil survey to assess if there is chalk near the surface to increase the potential for sowing wildflower seeds as already recommended by the consultants.

MH said that there were opportunities for more wildflower seed sowing along the banks of the A41. Also the remaining elm trees in Dacorum should be added to with new disease-resistant varieties.

DK suggested the need for more Wych Elms, the food plant for the White Letter Hairstreak butterfly, and better management of woodlands in general.

DH said that open rides and clearings within woods were the most valuable for biodiversity.

5. Any other Business

MR said that while granting the appeal for the Fairfax development the inspector had placed a requirement on the developers to supply funds for mitigation measures. Friends of Halsey Field which adjoins the development had compiled a list of such measures and had notified DBC about it.

Forthcoming Diary dates 2026:

Main DEF quarterly meetings: (Thursdays 7:30pm)
Feb 12th, May 14th, Sept. 10th, Nov. 19th

DEF Steering Group meetings: (Tuesdays 7:30pm)
Jan. 13th, Mar. 17th, June 23rd, Oct. 6th,