



Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 12/2/25

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF
Cllr Robin Bromham	DBC Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Operations
Cllr Nigel Taylor	Berkhamsted TC and HCC
Nick Hollinghurst	Public
Rosemarie Hollinghurst	Public
Rachael Wells (Z)	DBC Dacorum Climate Action Network (DCAN) Coordinator
Mary Arnott-Gee (Z)	DEF
Cllr Robert Farrow (Z)	Tring TC

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies

Cllr Catherine McArevey	Mayor of Dacorum
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Brian Worrell	Hemel resident

GE apologised for having omitted **SW** from the list of apologies for the Nov 13th meeting.

2. **Minutes of DEF Nov 13th meeting and matters arising**

GE recalled that at the meeting there had been a useful exchange of thoughts on and suggestions arising from DBC's Nov. 5th Local Nature Recovery Strategy Seminar. He had received (Jan 9th) the draft Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Report (39 pages) from the seminar's organiser Iris Shulman, Corporate Graduate, DBC, and had sent it out with the agenda for the current meeting. Chapter 7 of this report discussed how Dacorum would take account of the LNRS and set priorities around the relevant focus areas and targeted species over the next five-year period. Remaining challenges identified in the report included consistent monitoring and enforcement of Biodiversity Net Gain requirements and training developers and planning officers in order to ensure this.

3. **Public Transport**

By way of leading toward a discussion on this topic, **NH** summarised the declared purposes of DEF as well as DBC's achievements over a broad range of environmental issues and how the two entities might interact effectively. His presentation (PowerPoint, 9 pages) is attached to these minutes and summarised here:

NH, having quoted DEF's Terms of Reference on its website put for consideration the questions:

- Should DEF' activities be extended?
- Did DEF need closer ties with DBC?
- How should the DEF best collaborate with the Dacorum Climate Action Network (DCAN)?

DBC had launched environmentally laudable initiatives over the years, including:

- "Our Plan for Dacorum 2024-2028", which included sections on "Sustainable Future", " Clean, Safe & Green" and "Proud and Thriving Borough".
- "Towards 2021" (published Jan. 2008)
- Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Report,
- (DBC) Herts Local Nature Recovery Strategy (LNRS)
- DBC Electric Vehicle Strategy
- DBC Climate Change and Action Plan
- The Sustainable Travel Town Programme

Referring to DEF's Objectives and Terms of Reference **NH** highlighted:

- Objectives to promote public interest in environmental issues and to stimulate local action.
- Providing an opportunity for all interested groups, organisations and individuals within the Borough to meet and exchange information and to work in partnership to promote the protection and improvement of the local environment and contribute to the resolution of global problems.
- Contribution to the development, implementation and monitoring of the Community Plan (*or succeeding equivalents*), raise environmental concerns and issues and, where appropriate, seek consensus and promote solutions through dialogue with other agencies.
- Membership being free and open to all groups, organisations and individuals within the Borough that have an interest in promoting a sustainable environment.

DBC's "Plan for Dacorum 2024 - 2028" in addition to listing achievements to date contained the following pledges for the period, 2024 – 2028.

Under "Sustainable Future"

- Regularly publish the DBC's Carbon Footprint to drive and demonstrate progress to decarbonise DBC buildings, vehicles and operations by 2030
- Increase the use of renewable energy sources e.g. PV panels
- Improve energy efficiency of all social homes
- Use the Local Plan to deliver environmental benefits locally
- Develop a Nature Recovery Plan to protect and improve the natural environment
- Support our residents, community organisations and business to achieve net zero by 2050 through advice and support
- Improve local cycling and walking routes
- Engage with and support residents to improve energy efficiency
- Help young people in groups and schools to play their part.

Under "Clean, Safe & Green"

- Adopt a strategic approach and identify more areas for tree planting
- Encourage re-use rates and improve recycling rates in Herts.
- Identify further reduced grass cutting areas to encourage wildflowers

- Deliver a Biodiversity Strategy and a Nature Recovery Plan
- Work with the Environment Agency to improve the quality of the chalk stream that runs through Gadebridge Park

and under "A Proud and Thriving Borough"

- Improve sustainable travel options

A long list "Actions identified this year" that **NH** had derived from extracts from the Executive Members' and Leader's reports to the last 12 months of DBC Council Meetings included:

- A 5-year Air Quality Plan being finalised
- 68 trees planted last winter across the Borough
- DBC appointed "supporting authority" for the Nature Recovery Plan with HCC as the "responsible authority"
- "Friends of" volunteer working parties run monthly at Bunkers and Chipperfield Common
- DEFRA finds DBC's Air Quality Action Plan Report "well-structured".
- River restoration continues in Gadebridge Park.
- Consultation opens on Dacorum's "Bring Sites" *local, community-based recycling drop-off points for items like glass, paper, plastics, textiles, and sometimes small electrical appliances, often located in supermarket or public car parks.*
- The 2025 Dacorum Climate Action Network (DCAN) event held on 10th March 2025, with 100 guests.
- At the DCAN event 24 Green Community Grant applications totalling £125k. (*were submitted?*)
- DBC has received £50k grant to draw up a Heat Decarbonisation Strategy via Salix who administer the fund for DESENZ
- The Solar Together PV panel bulk-buy scheme to reduce panel prices opened and got a good response. In 2023 it helped house owners to install 2.12 MWatt of production capacity.
- The Air Quality Monitor in Northchurch has been withdrawn following 5 years of levels below UK health limits.
- 104 EV fast (7.4kW) and rapid (≤ 50 kW) charging points have been installed across 18 DBC public car parks in the Borough.
- DBC was awarded £2.3m by DESENZ under their Warm Homes Local Grant scheme for insulation improvements and air source heat pumps
- 80% DBC-owned properties have an Energy Performance Certificate rating of C or better.

Referring back to DEF's Objectives and Terms of Reference **NH** said that like DCAN one of its objectives was to promote public interest in environmental protection. DCAN however appeared to be restricted to an annual event and seminar plus occasional mobilization of some of the "Friends of..." groups.

Referring back to the excerpts from "Plan for Dacorum 2024 - 2028" and to the "Actions identified this year" selectively listed above **NH** said that most of the topics under "Sustainable Future" and "Clean, Safe and Green" in "Plan for Dacorum 2024 - 2028" were reported on to the Council, usually multiples of times. However, he believed that both the current and the preceding council administrations should be congratulated on the way the council's plans were being drawn up, implemented, completed and reported on appropriately to the Council during the year.

Nevertheless, his informal study did indicate that, in a departure from earlier practice, Dacorum Borough Council was no longer formally addressing the issue of the decarbonisation of transport. Transport was a major contributor of greenhouse gas emissions and while Hertfordshire County Council was formally the local Transport Authority, there might well be a supporting role for Dacorum Borough Council to play in

encouraging individuals, businesses and communities to take practical steps to control this source of carbon dioxide. He asked whether the Dacorum Environmental Forum wished to seek the agreement of the Borough Council to extending its activities to include the issues of encouraging the improvement and development of bus and rail public transport. Twenty five years ago there were more extensive 'bus routes sponsored and subsidised by the Herts. boroughs and districts, but Stevenage "broke ranks" and reduced support, followed by others including Dacorum. On a more positive note DBC had agreed proposals for the first electric bike hire scheme in the borough, in partnership with Herts IQ. The scheme would start with the ride zone Hemel railway station to town centre to Maylands Avenue.

4. Discussion arising from Item 3

MA-G said that plans for improving 'bus services needed the full involvement of 'bus company representatives. Routes to St. Albans and Watford hospitals should be priorities. On her several recent attempts to use 'bus services there had been cancellations that had only become apparent on indicator boards as the service disappeared from the screen when the scheduled time had passed. More people would use the services if they were more frequent and reliable and if bus stops provided effective shelters with usable seating.

RB said that there was a responsibility overlap between DBC and HCC regarding transport. Plans for high density housing at the Hemel railway station site (40 dwellings per hectare) would make public transport provision more viable. Westwick Row would be the focus for establishing transport principles for the East Hemel development. DBC's Parking Standards Supplementary Planning Document (2020) said that a two bedroomed house required parking for (only) 0.6 cars. which might encourage some people to use public transport instead of keeping a car. However, persuading people to do without their cars, particularly if already purchased, would require large financial incentives.

GE said that pavement parking, exacerbated by multiple car and van ownership, was a deterrent for people who might otherwise choose to walk, even only as far as to a 'bus stop, rather than use their cars. Pavement parking was not allowed in residential parking zones, but DBC were reluctant to introduce these unless there were exceptional reasons such as proximity to the railway station. Residential parking charges might also encourage some multiple vehicle owners to review the sizes of their fleets once they no longer had free use of the street kerb, a public asset. *He would be interested to know how the number of residential parking places in Dacorum compares with other Local Authority areas, e.g. St. Albans.*

NT said that restrictions on pavement parking in consequence of trial residential zones in Berkhamsted had reduced the availability of parking spaces and spread the problem over a wider area.

From his transport background having worked for Network Rail he recommended building any new Community Centres (like e.g. Stoneycroft) near railway stations, particularly if higher density housing was also planned close by, such as the station at Apsley.

In order to allow for a possible future rail service from Euston to Hemel (like the existing one to Tring) land alongside the existing tracks, necessary for a reversing bay, should be safeguarded from other development. This would also increase the probability of re-connecting with ongoing services to Crossrail and Clapham Junction. The layout at Berkhamsted station did not allow for a reversing bay. Tring station already had one, plus land safeguarded for more car parking.

In his HCC capacity on the committee covering public transport, whenever the question of supporting 'bus services arose, voices were often raised pointing out that no-one used the services. Increasing services should be done incrementally, gauging the increased demand at each stage.

The information screens at bus stops/shelters should be "live tracking" rather than schedule-driven (*as encountered by MA-G, see above*). He envisaged the deployment of the available technology as currently used by Amazon etc. to improve communication between the 'bus operators and would-be passengers. Then passengers could give notice to the operators that they planned to use a service, they could track their 'bus and be notified of any changes in arrival time, and the driver could check them in on pickup.

NH posed the question "Is Public Transport a service or a business?" He said that it was currently a business. For instance, the Watford to Aylesbury service (*No. 501, Red Rose Travel*) operated without a subsidy.

GE asked how bus companies were subsidised from public funds. Was it mainly via compensation for pass users, or from franchises? He noted that on London 'buses his 'bus pass was never scanned. How much money did HCC spend in one way or another on subsidising/compensating 'bus companies, and was it going to be increased?

NT said that Transport for London gave franchises for running services in London irrespective of the number of passengers, so the 'bus companies did not risk being unprofitable. Outside London the companies were franchised at lower levels, so the 'bus companies needed a certain level of passenger numbers to be profitable. There were no proposals at HCC to increase the spend on 'bus services.

RF said that the high cost of fares and unreliability were the main deterrents to 'bus travel. He would support proposals for a tram across Hemel as it would get people out of their cars and onto a carbon neutral mode of transport. (*The publication of details of The Hertfordshire Essex Rapid Transit (HERT) link, which would run between Hemel Hempstead and Harlow, with onward connections to Stansted Airport, was delayed last year.*)

5. Any other Business

RW said that the DCAN Futures Workshop that was originally planned for Tuesday the 24th of February. had been replaced with a survey. This approach would allow everyone to share their thoughts, insights and feedback. The survey, which was due out the following week, would form the basis of how the Dacorum Climate Action Network would be strengthened and developed. Ideas and reflections from DEF and others would help ensure DCAN to become the most effective, supportive and engaging network it could be, for all involved and for the wider public it aimed to benefit. She called for interested parties to:

- Reflect on DCAN and its current role
- Explore what DCAN could become
- Identify the strengths, connections and reach of DCAN's network
- Consider how best to share what is happening and engage with participants

In particular, she invited answers to the question:

"What do you think the Dacorum Climate Action Network currently exists to do?"

There followed a general discussion about the future of DEF and how it might become part of DCAN, of which it is already a member organisation, thereby benefiting from administrative and possibly financial support.

SW pointed out the uncertainty over what would become of DCAN after the disappearance of DBC into a larger local Authority.

NH said that DEF should maintain its ability to express its views independently of DBC policy and restrictions.

GE said that the government had published a draft new version of the National Planning Policy Framework (NPPF). CPRE had set out on their website the key questions to respond to in the consultation, with some suggested copy to use to support answers at:
https://www.cpre.org.uk/action/national-planning-policy-framework-respond-to-the-consultation/?utm_medium=email&utm_source=engagingnetworks&utm_campaign=NPPF_campaignemail&utm_content=NPPF+action+email+1+-+Feb+2026
The deadline for the consultation was 11.45pm on Tuesday 10 March.
(Minutes of DEF meeting on Sept. 11th 2015 re Grey Belt and Purposes of Green Belt refer.)

GE said that he had heard (Feb 6th) from Phillipa Zieba Programme Director, Hemel Garden Communities about two Hemel Garden Communities Supplementary Planning Document Consultations thus:

"The Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) Draft HGC Framework and Transformation Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) will ensure sites are developed in a joined-up way to achieve good quality housing, green spaces and infrastructure features that reduce flood risk and responds to climate change, improve active travel and connectivity across the town. This SPD will also offer design code guidance for developers bringing forward new homes and neighbourhoods within the Programme Area. "

"The Draft HGC Stewardship and Placemaking SPD sets out the approach to stewardship for the Hemel Garden Communities Programme Area (how outdoor spaces and community infrastructure is managed and maintained). This Draft Supplementary Planning Document proposes a coordinated and aligned strategy for stewardship and placemaking across Hemel Hempstead and potentially beyond, so future development sites are consistent in their approach."

"The comments form for both consultations is available to download from:
dacorum.gov.uk/supplementary-planning-documents.

The consultation begins at 12pm on Friday 6th February 2026 and closes at midnight on Thursday 19th March 2026."

(and subsequently 18th Feb.) "Two in person events scheduled for 24 February 2026 at Leverstock Green Village Hall and 26 February 2026 at Redbourn Parish Centre, planned as part of the Hemel Garden Communities (HGC) Draft Supplementary Planning Document (SPD) consultations, will now take place online in March. The change has been made in light of higher than predicted attendance numbers and the capped capacity of the venues....." The event will be hosted on Microsoft Teams. Anyone wishing to join this event, will need to **register** before the event, using the link below: Date: **Monday 2 March 2026, 7pm to 8pm** [HGC SPD Consultation Online Event registration](#)
Registration closes Monday 2 March at midday.

He had received similar notification from St. Albans with different links but apparently relating to the same two consultations, and in addition stating:

"NB: These consultations are not about the principle of Hemel Garden Communities which is being dealt with separately through the Local Plan process."

***GE** invites timely contributions toward a DEF response to either or both consultations from recipients of the minutes, which he will undertake to collate. Contributions preferably to gruff.edwards@tiscali.co.uk.*

Forthcoming Diary dates 2026:

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

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