



Dacorum Environmental Forum  
Full Meeting Thursday 14/5/26

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Gruff Edwards	Chair DEF, now relinquished office
Steve Wilson	Vice Chair DEF, now Chair
Diane Wilson	Friends of Gadebridge Park
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Cllr Kari Poole	Tring Town Council
Steven Werrell (Z)	DBC (SANG) Delivery Manager
Rodney Tucker	Friends of Gadebridge Park
Lucy Shuker	Groundwork South ColneCAN manager

Meeting started at 7:30pm

1. Apologies

Cllr Robin Bromham	DBC Portfolio Holder for Neighbourhood Operations
Mary Arnott-Gee	DEF
Victoria Collins	MP Harpenden and Berkhamsted
Brian Worrell	Hemel resident

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

GE recalled that at the meeting Nick Hollinghurst had 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. He had referred to DBC's "Plan for Dacorum 2024 - 2028" which in addition to listing achievements to date contained pledges for the period, 2024 – 2028 and had concluded from various Council reports that most of the pledges had been addressed. His talk had been followed by an informative discussion focusing on Transport issues.

GE quoted thus from a message he had received from Hemel resident Brian Worrell "under DBC's Plan for Dacorum 2024-2028, Sustainable Future, they mention 'Improve local cycling and walking routes' but don't includes bridleways (or anything equestrian) which is something I requested in my response the consultation as DBC has a large population of horses and horse owners."

3. Election of Chair and Vice Chair

**GE** said that he was not standing for either position. **SW** said that he was prepared to take on the position of Chair for a limited time period. There had been no offers to date for Vice Chair. **SW** was accordingly proposed as Chair by **GE** and seconded by **CR**. There were no nominations for Vice Chair.

**SW** said that he was seeking a Vice Chair if only to take over meetings if he was unavoidably absent. He gave credit to **GE** who had been Chair for thirteen years at the same time as producing meticulous minutes and collating DEF responses to public consultations. He had received assurances from **GE** of continuing support re minutes, the website and E-mail admin.

#### **4. The river Gade and Gadebridge Park**

**SW** gave the first of the two presentations, focusing on the history of the river Gade leading up to the latest developments in Gadebridge Park. This was accompanied by a series of photographs, in the main taken by himself, that illustrated various points. He said he had been drawn to the Gade since the age of 13 (*let's say over half a century*). It was a relatively short, spring-fed river, with its (underground) source near Dagnall about five miles north of Hemel Hempstead, but in a valley that was very wide for such a small river compared for instance with that of the Ver. A massive dry valley down from Nettleden joined the Gade valley at Water End. The width of the Gade valley was not due to erosion and had been determined by the end of the last ice age, though there was no evidence for ice floes having penetrated the valley as there was along the route via Hitchin as far as Bricket Wood. The geology of the Gade Valley was "periglacial" like that in Northern Canada, and characterised by gravel and silt, as exposed on a massive scale for instance when the M1 was constructed. Archaeological excavations on the valley floor in Gadebridge Park had revealed big differences in permeability between neighbouring sites. Permafrost and summer melt would have produced huge flows capable of carrying the gravels which underlie the valley floor.

The water flow of the Gade in modern times was much less than when it emerged from the Ice Age. Much more recently, photographs from around 1906 showed that the flow at that time was much higher than today. **SW** had carried out a study of a rainfall event in 2022 which showed that the discharge on a chalk stream in a rural area in Hampshire had changed very little with the passage of the weather front, exactly as expected. In contrast the discharge from the same front on the Gade, in an urban area, had increased rapidly because of the huge input from road run off. This demonstrated that the Gade no longer behaved like a classic chalk stream.

Amongst the river's historic uses were water mills, for instance Bury Mill which dated from at least 1200. During the 18<sup>th</sup> century The Bury in Queensway used areas of present day Gadebridge Park for ornamental lakes and gardens. Much of the rest contained water cress beds until the 1950s. A large increase in water abstraction for domestic use resulting from population expansion was the primary cause of the Gade's reduced flow. **SW** displayed a copy of the Hemel Hempstead Gazette from 2006 with front page pictures of the dried out bed accompanied by the large print headline "Will it Ever Flow Again?" It was to be acknowledged that a few years ago Affinity had reduced their levels of extraction sufficiently for the river not to dry up again. A further measure that **SW** continued to raise at meetings of various water experts and stakeholders such as ColneCAN would be to move extraction stations to downstream of stretches such as Gadebridge Park where maintaining surface flow was a priority.

Conversely, the seasonal flooding over the last few years by the Gade over large areas of Gadebridge Park had been given as one of the reasons for moving the river from its "perched" position to the valley bottom under the Gadebridge Park River Restoration Project. However there was no evidence of the "old channel" to which the river has been moved, and the primary remedy for flooding had been demonstrated to be weeding and desilting. A further cause for flooding had been barriers holding back the flow at the head of the weir by the gauging station at the south of the park. At that point much of the flow entered a

culvert that emerged near Kings Langley. The purpose of that had been flood avoidance in Hemel town centre, but in reality it had reduced the surface flow, to the detriment of the river quality as it passed through the Water Gardens, Riverside, Heath Park and beyond. This could be corrected by adjustment of sluice boards. The Restoration Project had had at least one tangible benefit which was to increase the river flow and in consequence its health in the stretch to the south of the White Bridge.

Road runoff from the town, notably down Galley Hill had put the Gade in danger of becoming an "urban gutter" with high levels of sand, salt, brake linings and other sediments containing toxic chemicals. Under the previous Affinity/Environment Agency project (circa 2018) for the river to the north of Gadebridge Lane a silt pond had been created to trap runoff, but this had proved to be overgrown and ineffective. A nearby patch of submerged woodland had been filled in to create a barren gravel surface, thereby missing an opportunity to create a managed wetland habitat. Sandbags placed along the eastern bank by the White Bridge car park to prevent spillage into the upper park were proving ineffective and should be replaced by gabions (cages of stones). **SW** questioned why The Thames Water balancing pond just below the Marchmont pub, designed to hold back flood water, had been out of action for years.

**CR** gave the second of the two presentations, focusing on monitoring the river Gade and the effect of rerouting and improvements to the river.

She said that together with **RT** she had been monitoring the river every month since 2017. She showed the necessary implements for this, comprising a square net, a bucket, a white tray and a sorting tray. Testing entailed carrying out a prescribed three-minute "kick sample" (standing in the river and kicking to disturb the bed), then a one-minute "side sample" (taken from the river bank below the surface). The riverfly larvae thus obtained were then sorted and the number of each species recorded. Species included Cased Caddis, Caseless caddis, Mayfly and Gammarus (freshwater shrimps), these species being sensitive to pollution and thus indicative of river quality.

Monitoring was carried out at two sites, one above the outflow by the Link Road and one by the skateboard park near the White Bridge.

**CR** displayed a series of year by year bar charts showing how the numbers of key species individually and in total had varied month by month. On each a red horizontal "trigger point" line showed whether the total numbers had achieved a recognised minimum value for river health. Sometimes as in 2017 the trigger point was breached.

In 2018 work was carried out by Affinity Water between Gadebridge Lane and the Link Road. Riffs and small meanders were created in the river channel to make new habitats and encourage the river to flow faster. Also a settlement pond was built for the purpose of catching water and reducing the pollution flowing into the river from the road. This had had a positive effect on the results of the monitoring, as illustrated by the 2019 bar chart, and the scores had not dropped below the trigger point since the alterations were completed in autumn 2018.

In 2025 the river below the White Bridge had been re-routed. Now the river no longer flowed in a perched channel, meanders had been created to form different habitats, a spring had been rerouted so that it joined the river in the park and new vegetation had been planted on the river sides including Ragged Robin, Marsh Marigold and Purple Loosestrife in order to create different habitats for insects. Water crowfoot had appeared and was thriving in the river channel.

Since the re-routing scores by the skate board park had been consistent, as illustrated by the 2024 and 2026 bar charts, the river was flowing much faster than before and monitoring by the Environment Agency had found several adult Trout and evidence of "Redds" which trout create for breeding.

**SW** as new Chair thanked **CR** and **RT** for their diligence and perseverance with the monitoring over the years and for the very informative presentation.

**KP** said that she had been inspired by **CR**'s talk and would take ideas from it for various projects she was involved with in Tring.

**MR** said that the Environment Agency had reported the presence of water voles near Gadebridge Lane, evidence that they had spread following their reintroduction in the Bulbourne.

*The visuals from **CR**'s presentation are on the DEF website alongside these minutes. For technical reasons it has not yet been possible to upload those from **SW**'s presentation.*

## **5. Any other Business**

**GE** said that he had heard (27<sup>th</sup> April) from CPRE Herts. of their recently published joint report with the London Green Belt Council about the impact of Grey Belt policies on the countryside. The report said that 83% of planning appeals on sites in the London Metropolitan Green Belt between February and December 2025 were permitted specifically on Grey Belt grounds, and that this figure had increased during the past year. The report stated that in Dacorum eight out of the ten major Green Belt applications in 2025 were subject to claims of being Grey Belt despite the fact that "(these) sites are not poor quality nor previously developed land and they are certainly not disused car parks, derelict petrol stations or abandoned garages. They are overwhelmingly highly valued landscapes, mostly agricultural land with public footpaths well used by residents and visitors alike."

See <https://www.cpreherts.org.uk/news/devastating-grey-belt-impact-revealed-in-our-new-report/>

See also the minutes of the DEF meeting on Sept 11<sup>th</sup> 2025 which was addressed by David Taylor, MP for Hemel Hempstead. A subsequent E-mail (Oct. 2<sup>nd</sup>) from David Taylor's Communications Officer had included "Overall, the Labour government's position supports the reinstatement of purpose (c) '*to assist in safeguarding the countryside from encroachment*' as a key Green Belt protection principle, but the formal reinstatement in the NPPF is pending further consultations and policy decisions currently underway". However, a subsequent change to the NPPF appeared to have gone contrary to this position.

**MR** said that Garrick Stevens, a long term supporter of and supplier of information to DEF had recently been appointed as Mayor of Dacorum, and those present agreed to congratulate him via these minutes.

Forthcoming Diary dates 2026:

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

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