



Dacorum Environmental Forum
Full Meeting Thursday 10/9/26

Attendance (Z = by Zoom)

Name	Organisation
Steve Wilson	Chair DEF
Gruff Edwards	former Chair
Diane Wilson	Friends of Gadebridge Park
David Kirk	Boxmoor Trust
Neil Wickens	Dacorum resident
Nick Hollinghurst	Tring resident
Steven Werrell	DBC Nature Recovery and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG) Delivery Manager
Bob Kettle	Friends of Gadebridge Park
Wendy Bathurst	Chipperfield PC

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
Chris Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Mike Ridley	DEF and Friends of Halsey Field
Brian Worrell	Hemel resident

2. Minutes of DEF May 14th 2026 meeting and matters arising

SWi said that engagement and liaison between Friends of Gadebridge Park and DBC continued. A particular issue was the proneness to flooding of the new walkway, which resulted from changes to the slope down from Leighton Buzzard Road.

SWe said a boarded walkway might be needed.

NH said that the gauging station was in the wrong place.

SW said that the old one was now closed, and that the new one by the bowls club was better positioned. However it was currently constricted by a large log.

3. Chairman statement on change of DEF meeting day from January 2027 and local government re-organisation

SWi said that as from 2027 DEF meetings would be held on Tuesdays rather than on Thursdays, which would enable them to be held in a larger room at the Box Moor Trust in anticipation of rising attendance levels. Steering Group meetings conversely would change from Tuesdays to Thursdays.

A recent UK Government announcement regarding the revision of plans to reorganise local government boundaries meant that the previous plan to merge Dacorum with St Albans into a single West Herts. district could be replaced by something else. Whatever the outcome, it would still be valid for "Dacorum" to be retained in DEF's title, since it was the historic name of the district.

See <https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/all-news/2026/09/08/government-annoucement-on-lgr>

4. Nature recovery in Dacorum. Presentation and opportunity for questions and discussion

SWe said that his responsibilities comprised both Nature Recovery and Suitable Alternative Natural Greenspace (SANG), and that there was considerable overlap between the two.

The UK especially needed action on nature recovery, as illustrated by some statistics *on studied species* from the State of Nature Report 2023:

- 1 in 6 of species were at risk of being lost from Great Britain
- 151 species had been lost since 1500
- There had been a 19% decline *in abundance averaged across species* since 1970
- 43% of bird species were at risk of extinction
- The distribution of 54% of *flowering* plant species had decreased *since 1970*
- 1 in 7 of (*potential wildlife*) habitats were currently assessed to be in good ecological condition

Similar statistics reflecting changes since 1970 and the current state in Hertfordshire, gleaned from the Herts. and Middlesex Wildlife Trust's 2020 Hertfordshire State of Nature Report 2020, included:

- The loss of 76 species
- A 49% decrease in the number of species of conservation concern
- A noticeable decline in 65 Woodland species
- The *loss or decrease* of more than 60% of Grassland and Heathland species
- The loss of 670 hectares of unimproved neutral grassland since 1996
- 19% of species at risk of being lost

The principal causes of these declines were habitat loss, fragmentation and degradation, climate change, pollution and invasive non-native species.

However there were some positive indicators according to a 2024 report on the UK from the Joint Nature Conservation Committee (JNCC) and other sources:

- 45% of the UK's priority species had increased in abundance since 2016
- 81% of SSSI's *in England* were in a favourable condition compared with 67% in 2005
- In 2023 Natural England awarded £14.5 million in grants to 63 projects across England to help protect and restore rare and endangered wildlife.
- There had been 5564 hectares (*21.5 square miles*) of newly protected areas of land in the UK between 2019 and 2024.
- There had been 1330 hectares (*5 square miles*) of new woodland in Hertfordshire since 1996

(For comparison, Google AI says "Between 2019 and 2024, the UK and England experienced continuous losses of countryside and farmland to development, with England alone recording 48,500 hectares.")

The Nature Recovery Strategy originated from the UK Environment Act of 2021 and subsequent strengthenings of the 'biodiversity duty' for local authorities that the Act 2021 introduced. There were currently 48 NRSs in England, and Natural England had taken a special interest in Dacorum's. The recent and forthcoming timeline for Dacorum's Nature Recovery plan was:

- The Dacorum Enhanced Biodiversity Duty Report (Dec. '25)
- The Local Nature Recovery Strategy (Jan. '26)
- Establishment of the Dacorum Nature Recovery Steering Group (Mar. '26)
- Dacorum Local Nature Recovery Plan (Dec. '26)

The Steering group reported to DBC's Environment Board and comprised:

- DBC's Director of Environment, Nature Recovery Manager and DCAN (Climate Action etc.) Coordinator,
- HCC's Biodiversity Programme Manager and HMWT's Director of Nature Recovery who are part of the Herts. Nature Recovery Partnership
- The Environment Agency's Biodiversity Officer, the Chilterns National Landscape's Head of Landscape and Natural England's senior manager for Beds. and Herts., who feed into regional and National strategy and policy
- A trustee from the Box Moor Trust

The Steering Group liaise with the North Chilterns Farm Cluster, DEF and DCAN.

As part of the work towards the Plan DBC had hosted a workshop last November titled "Nature Recovery Seminar" attended by a wide range of organisations including DEF that had resulted in "Early Thinking" diagrams highlighting which parts of Dacorum were best able to achieve which targets. On one such, rather complex, diagram **SWe** drew attention to a series of green circles indicating places suitable for increasing numbers of swifts, a target species.

Page 11 of the display included a map and a list of opportunities and existing projects identified at the Nature Recovery Seminar. The opportunities list included:

- Green Corridors (Pitstone Hill to beyond Tring and Woodhall Farm through Maylands Ave.)
- Wildlife Corridor (the Ridgeway, Tring)
- SANGs (specifically Haresfoot and Castle Hill, Berkhamsted)
- Deer park restoration at Berkhamsted Castle, reintroduction of adders and pond habitat improvements at Berkhamsted Common
- Chalk Stream biodiversity enhancements
- Support for Halsey Field near Gadebridge and Old Joe's Wood near Tring

Details for these and some other projects were shown in a table on Page 12 under column headings: "Lead", "Location", "Theme", "Size", "Habitat", "Description & Delivery", "Funding", "Status" and "Cost Bracket".

SWe said that the map and table contained both work in progress and aims. There continued to be strong liaison with HCC's Environmental Records department, and some of the objectives were set at County level via the Herts. Nature Recovery Partnership. Herts. was in a minority of counties that had adopted a partnership model for Nature Recovery. Hertfordshire's Partnership's key members and funding streams included Gascoyne Estates *who manage the land and property interests of the Cecil Family on behalf of the Marquess of Salisbury* and Natural England. Their current focus was on a pilot project in the Mimram Valley (from Whitwell to Hertford, 12 miles), but Dacorum's Nature Recovery Plan was at the forefront amongst others in Hertfordshire and it was to be hoped that Dacorum would be "the second foot in the door".

Pages 17-22, of the display contained illustrative maps, photographs and headline texts for assessments and aims regarding how the Nature Recovery Strategy would interact with the Bunkers Park SANG, summarised here as:

The 48 hectare site is a mix of grasslands, woodland and hedgerows. Formerly agricultural, it was established as a park in 1990s.

(A map showing areas designated to become "Broadleaved Woodland 1", "Wood Pasture and Veteran Trees 3" and "Grassland 1").

For Broadleaved Woodland 1 the aim was to "Create new woodland and expand existing sites", with a canopy cover of 17%-19%, planting or natural regeneration with new trees protected.

For Wood Pasture and Veteran Trees 3 the aim was to "Create new parkland and plant new trees where lost", to be achieved by planting trees in public open spaces.

For Grassland 1 the aim was to "Manage existing grassland and maintain the biodiversity", to be achieved by:

- Determination of grassland type
- Trials of management methods
- Restoration of chalk vs. neutral soil
- Leaving some areas in flower
- Maintenance and enhancements of edges
- Retention of dead and decaying wood

For Grassland 3 (not mapped) the aim was to "Create more good quality neutral grassland", to be achieved by:

- Determination of the suitability for the grassland type for habitat creation
- Connecting areas of grasslands by creating wildlife corridors
- Maintenance, enhancement or creation of new hedges around newly created grassland fields.

The visuals from SWe's presentation will be on the DEF website alongside these minutes

SWi thanked **SWe** for his informative and thought-provoking presentation and invited questions.

NW asked what had become of DBC's Woodlands five-yearly plans that had been produced from 1995 to 2005.

SWe said these would have been taken account of in the current process.

SWi said the firms operating on Maylands Avenue industrial estate dealt in billions of pounds and that they should be encouraged to contribute to nature recovery projects. This would enhance their reputations.

NH said that such firms held team building exercises which could take the form of participation in a nature recovery project.

DK said that there had been a long history of nature conservation plans being produced under, e.g. the Biodiversity Action Plan (1998) but that this was the first time that something was actually happening as a result. The November seminar and associated activity had already proved beneficial in putting various groups in contact with each other and interchanging ideas. For instance it had helped make him aware of various nature conservation projects taking place in Tring.

SWi said that small scale projects including gardens could make a valuable contribution.

SWe said that as part of the plan process he had held conversations with groups in Berkhamsted and Tring with the objective of linking up small plots in order to create wildlife routes.

NH said that gardeners' clubs would be receptive to ideas concerning enhancing biodiversity alongside growing produce.

SWe said that Dacorum's Green Community Grants scheme could help such small projects get off the ground.

See <https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/community-living/voluntary-organisations-social-enterprises/grants/green-community-grants>

WB said that her recent talk at the Chipperfield community centre about encouraging wildlife in her own large garden plot had attracted a lot of interest.

5. Any other Business

None

Forthcoming Diary dates in 2026:

Main DEF quarterly meeting: (Thursday 7:30pm) Nov. 19th.

SWi said that the presentation at this meeting would be given by David Wilson, Associate Professor, Dept. of Earth Sciences, UCL, a world authority on Climate Change.

DEF Steering Group meeting: (Tuesday 7:30pm) Oct. 6th.