

Council Briefing Note 27th September 2023

CLIMATE AND ECOLOGICAL EMERGENCY
PORTFOLIO – COUNCILLOR ADRIAN ENGLAND

Dacorum CAN - We can reduce local people's energy bills. Dacorum CAN generate a different future in relation to Climate instability.

We CAN respond to the weakened jet-stream which burned the Mediterranean and ruined the Hertfordshire summer of 2023 – until September, when it was unusually hot here, while the warm, heavy weight of a Mediterranean Hurricane demolished two dams in Libya, and brought a month's September rain to the south of England – in one night.

We CAN respond to the modern-day Pompeii burning of Lahaina, Maui, which was running so hot and dry it only needed a spark before hurricane Dora, from hundreds of miles away, fanned the horrific flames in paradise.

We CAN respond to the dangerous negative feedback-loops – such as the melting summer ice which now makes the assumed year-round snow-white Arctic a dark magnet for the sun.

How? With a new CEE programme team in place, we have reviewed all of the existing actions identified to help deliver our CEE Strategy ambitions, establishing defined projects with key plans and timescales and a new robust governance structure to ensure we have appropriate oversight and accountability of the programme.

The Council's social media connects Climate Emergency response with reducing household costs, and proposes constructive ways to be effective and save money, by saving waste.

We are talking to local people about Climate Justice. The first email was sent to 3,300 registered recipients and was opened by 61% - two thousand people. Dacorum-CAN membership has grown over the summer, as we took a methodical approach to contacting all Dacorum's schools, churches and parish councils. We are currently planning the DCAN conference to be held on 20th November, and a year-round programme of involvement invitations.

We'll be working with Dacorum Environmental Forum (DEF) and the whole voluntary sector. Exploring community energy and how to energise the community. Our primary projects alongside the involvement of residents and organisations in D-CAN and with Cost-of-living support, are:

The generation of income and autonomy, from renewable energy within Dacorum,

Fabric-first decarbonisation of buildings, beyond the limited profile of DESNZ funding,

The planning of better transportation environment via a Local Cycling & Walking Infrastructure Plan (LCWIP), with member engagement briefing coming up on 12th October.

The nationally-recognised "Climate Action Scorecard 2023" result will be announced in October. CAS was supplied with our "right of reply" clarification in June, so the 2023 report reflects the former administration. The key finding appears to be that Local Authorities of all types could be doing more, if investment resources were available from central Govt!

Dacorum is now in a better place to reach its autonomous potential, at least. Districts' potential does vary, according to natural and built features, but crucially, policy is set by differing administrations. At the time of this year's assessment Dacorum Borough Council did not have a proper focus on Climate Emergency, did not have a Climate Change Manager in post and was drifting on EVCPs, having promised them deployed by the end of 2022.

Since the change of administration, further Carbon Literacy training is planned to be delivered to identified key leadership and new staff in management roles to ensure we are considering the Climate and ecological emergency across all service delivery in Dacorum.

We plan to remove meat from the menu for any internal catered events to directly reduce our CO2 impact and walk the walk, as well as talk the talk.

The team and I met with Portsmouth City Council in August, to exchange best-practice on tackling Climate Change and the cost of living.

Work continues to decarbonise sheltered housing, changing gas boilers to hybrid heat pumps. Hybrid heating systems are a combination of air source heat pumps and gas boilers. The heat pump will work as the primary heat source with the gas boiler providing back up or additional supply during peak demand.

Having delivered wave 1 of the Social Housing Decarbonisation Fund (SHDF) investing over £1m decarbonising 24 homes, with 19 of these homes at Energy Performance certificate (EPC) A standard and 5 at EPC B standard, we are now working to decarbonise 75 more homes with SHDF wave 2.

HUG (Homes Upgrade Grant - EPC D to G) We expressed interest in the HUG1 & HUG2 schemes and were then given funding allocations based on our population size (number of residents) and an assessment of likely demand for the scheme (based on the number of off-gas heated homes). Dacorum received just £88,000 in HUG1 works. HUG2 will allocate up to £700m nationwide, with funding expected to be delivered from early 2023 to 2025. Dacorum has been allocated £540,000. No works yet received on HUG2, as the scheme hasn't yet started.

The real challenge for efficiency and effectiveness in tackling decarbonisation is that these schemes are rule-bound and awkward stop-start affairs. We are looking at home-grown initiatives for how Dacorum can take control of its ability to do fabric first for more households.

In the end the Government could be properly investing in our prosperity by saving energy and maximising renewables. You have to ask why they wouldn't, and the answer is found in who funds them. I call on the Government to choose between its friends in the oil and gas industry, be they Russian or otherwise, and its duty to the people of the UK. Compare the money going into chasing fossil fuels with the money going into energy efficiency?

<https://www.theguardian.com/environment/2023/mar/09/fossil-fuels-more-support-uk-than-renewables-since-2015>

Solar Together, a group-buying initiative to help households install Solar PV panels at more competitive rates, was hugely successful across Hertfordshire, and Phase 2 has just launched for registrations. It closes on 27th October and installations will take place next year. Dacorum aims to do better this time around, as this scheme unlocks progress in micro-generation. In round one Dacorum lagged behind our Hertfordshire neighbours, so let's all share the opportunity with our residents?

Transport is responsible for over 40% of the whole borough's greenhouse gas emissions.

As Portfolio-Holder for Climate Emergency, while I am keen to support the transition to Electric Vehicles, I know that what Dacorum really needs is much better buses, which support the LCWIP (Local Cycling and Walking Infrastructure Plan). I am approaching the Hertfordshire Bus Partnership "Intalink", with an ambitious mission to transform buses in Dacorum.

HertsLynx is a new demand responsive transport (DRT) service for rural parts of Dacorum where timetable buses would not be feasible. There are no fixed timetable or routes, instead passengers choose where and when they want to go within a designated operating area. This service is designed to increase access for residents to employment, education, healthcare and shopping and reduce social isolation for residents living in rural areas where there is limited or no access to existing public transport services. This has been successful in areas of North and East Hertfordshire and is expanding to Dacorum, initially as a pilot project, and will be providing transport links to Hemel Hempstead, Berkhamsted and Tring by the end of the year.

Resurfacing the Grand Union Towpath between Nash Mills Lane in Apsley and the River Gade lakes, north of Kings Langley was completed earlier in September, making the area more user friendly and encouraging active travel.

Resurfacing work has now been completed on a further section of the historic Nickey Line footpath and cycleway. It has proved a popular local leisure attraction since it was opened to the public in the 1980s and it now forms part of the national cycling network.

We are working on a number of projects throughout the borough that form part of a long term plan to encourage more active and sustainable travel in the local area. This not only helps to tackle the challenges of climate change but also encourages healthier lifestyles and saves money. Dacorum is now pushing HCC to progress its LCWIP.

We are supporting the funding of HCC upgrades to the A414 St Albans Road to improve access between residential areas and local destinations. This will include a new step free, signalised toucan crossing making it safer and easier to cycle and walk to Jarmans retail and leisure park.

Herts County Council (HCC) have recently received news that they are in Tranche 1 for the LEVI (Local Electric Vehicle Innovation) funding. HCC will decide this funding between the districts and boroughs. We are working closely with HCC to pinpoint potential locations for Electric Vehicle Charge Points and make use of this funding. Residents of your wards should be encouraged please, to report locations where they would like to see EVCPs. The best way is by signing up to DCAN, using this link: <https://www.dacorum.gov.uk/home/environment-street-care/climate-change/climate-action-network>

As part of our plan to improve air quality in the borough, we have been working with Hertfordshire County Council to install three new air quality monitors to monitor pollution levels and help us understand where we need to reduce pollution from road traffic, in addition to our current network of diffusion tubes and analysers. These are in locations including a school, an ongoing air quality management area and a new location raised as a potential traffic pinch point.

The data will be fed into our Pollution Team's regular monitoring and form part of the yearly reports sent to DEFRA, aiding in decision-making around safer walking and cycling routes, traffic management, and raising local awareness. This will also feed into Hertfordshire's air quality alert system, which is a free service that sends registered users an alert if air pollution in their area is forecast or measured to be moderate, high, or very high. The description of the level of pollution is based upon the UK's Air Quality Banding System.