

Brighton & Hove's Wildlife Forum

Minutes of February 2nd 2016 meeting, held 5-7pm at the Booth Museum of Natural History

Key actions and summary points

A BHWF 'Social Get-Together' and Fox Talk planned for 2-5 pm, Sat. March 12th at West Blatchington Mill - Item 2
Madeira Drive Wall- BHWF is *still* awaiting a reply from BHCC -since 11th Dec., regarding wildlife interests - Item 2
BHCC Ranger cuts explained, members consider these pose severe threats to Local Wildlife Site activity - Items 4/8
Hope was expressed that volunteer groups can benefit from **free** Leadership & First Aid courses and Insurance -Item 4
Disbelief that BHCC apparently can't recover information necessary to locate **all** the city's Local Wildlife Sites - Item 5
Concern expressed over potential damage by NR to the railway cutting between Addison & Highdown Roads - Item 6
Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) consultation by BHCC on Open Spaces being held until 27 April - Item 9

Present: *Martin Robinson* (MR) Chairman, Benfield WCG; *John Patmore* (JP) Eco21st; *Maureen Holt* (MH) - notes, *Colin Leeves* (CL) Keep the Ridge Green; *Mike Parrott* (MP), *Graham Champion* (GC) Friends of Bevendean Down; *Stuart Derwent* (SD) Friends of Withdean Park; *Nicola Yuill* (NY) Stanmer Preservation Society; *Dave Bell* (DB) Hangleton Park; *Dolly Bell* (DoB) Benfield WCG; *Martin Wilson* (MW) & *Marcus Oldfield* (MO) TWEAK, Withdean & Westdene Woods; *Gill Taylor* (GT) Friends of Hollingbury and Burstead Woods; *Hazel McKay* (HM), Save THV Community Group; *Tracie Parker* (TP) DPG; *Anne Hyatt* (AH) (RSPB/Woodland Trust); *Pru Gridley* (PG) wildlife enthusiast; *David Johnson* (DJ) Chairman CPRE Sussex; *Millie Ferguson* (MF) Seven Dials Community Group; *Dave Larkin* (DL) BHCC Conservation Manager *John Cooper* (JC) Geologist/Host @ Booth Museum.

Apologies: *Phil Belden* BUWG & SDNP; *Kia Trainor* (Director, CPRE Sussex); *Chris Lowe* (CLo), Friends of Queens Park; *Christine Fitzgerald* (CF) Friends of Waterhall; *Norman Watson* (NW) Friends of Beacon Hill; *Lynn Bird* (LB) Friends of Sheepecote Valley; *Sarah Jane Jones*- Brighton Vertical Gardens; *Rachel Fine & Tara Dawson*- Friends of Preston Park

1. Chairman's welcome to all, including on this occasion David Johnson as chairman of CPRE Sussex, new member Ann Hyatt (RSPB & Woodland Trust) and guest Millie Ferguson of Seven Dials Community Group.

2. Minutes of last meeting (17-11 -15) were approved. Matters arising included:

a) **BHWF Social Event** NY- Members are cordially invited to BHWF's Spring Get-together at **West Blatchington Windmill, Holmes Ave. Hove, 2-5pm on Saturday 12th March**. There will be a talk on foxes by Dr Dawn Scott of University of Brighton's Biodiversity, Behaviour, Ecology and Conservation Research Group 2.30-3.10pm, and a buffet. Everyone in BHWF is very welcome: if this goes well, it could become an annual event.

Information and directions to venue here: <http://www.sussexmillsgroup.org.uk/open1.htm#Blatch> We ask each guest for a small donation (no more than £1 each needed) to cover room hire. Any surplus can go to a charity of the speaker's choice. **RSVP to Anne Hyatt** annehyatt@hotmail.co.uk : also please tell Anne what food or drink you will bring. There will be tea and coffee available and food suitable for vegan/ gluten free diets.

b) Madeira Drive Wall- BHWF wrote to BHCC on 11th December regarding wildlife interests on 'Europe's Longest Green Wall', but still awaits a reply to this letter. A reminder was sent last week. **Action:** BHWF to contact ESCC Ecologist – Kate Cole, and possibly also Gill Mitchell and Maggie Barradell to request a formal response.

c) Rabbits with *Myxomatosis* symptoms reported on Whitehawk Hill by local walker, this was confirmed by DL.

d) MR to postpone Caroline Lucas invitation to a BHWF meeting until further discussion of how this event should be run such as pre-prepared questions, and confirmed dates (i.e. Tuesdays or Wednesdays).

3. Applications for Membership – Three new members confirmed.

4. BHCC Report including Rangers update - DL provided information on the original plan to cut the service to the bone by keeping only two Rangers - plus a Rights of Way Officer which is a Statutory Duty! Members of the Forum were thanked for their support by objecting to *any* reductions from the present nine. Councillors had taken notice of the recent demonstration in Portslade as the situation has now been mitigated to four, plus the ROW officer, but it is not clear how this would be split up as several are part-time. Final cuts are not yet known but should be decided on later this month after BHCC meetings on the 11th and 25th. The meeting was reminded that the Council is run as a minority administration and if the two other parties got together they would be able to overturn this decision.

Sheep grazing would continue as it receives external funding, but shepherds were unlikely to take over all the rangers work with sheep as pay is poor. Volunteer 'lookers' would, therefore, be very necessary to take on further tasks such as sheep moving.



Proposals exist to encourage volunteers to work on behalf of the council, with suggestions that Leadership and First Aid courses might be 'council run' in the future- BHWF members present considered that these courses should be free to LWGs. Similarly free insurance cover should be available to volunteer groups.

TP asked how cutbacks might affect council monitoring of Local BAPs and was told that, very regrettably, Biodiversity checking would only be of low priority on Cityparks budget since they no longer had an ecologist or cash for planning enforcement.

JP brought up the subject of Badger trapping for attachment of GPS collars for university research, which was being done in conjunction with Dawn Scott (animal expert & autumn watch presenter) and DL confirmed badgers in his garden had shown just how restricted their territories actually were.

5. Details about Local Wildlife Sites (LWS) held by BHCC – This List was agreed at 2013 meetings requested from BHCC (Finding the Best Wildlife Sites in Brighton and Hove). A much shorter list of sites was recently supplied, with 55 LWSs absent. Missing sites includes 'Madeira Drive Green Wall' and 'London Road Station'. The formally adopted Local Plan needs to include a map of Local Wildlife Sites (including LGSs), yet BHCC does not appear to know where this information is located, nor where the LWSs are? One suggestion was to re-contact Matthew Thomas, ecologist, although Henri Brocklebank of SWT had agreed to take this task on. The next stage is to write to BHCC development

Control (Head of Planning + copy to officers) also copy this letter to local councillors. On 5th February (after the meeting) JP met Dr Caroline Lucas MP to provide a briefing on missing LWS information. On 6th February we were informed that a 'Data CD' was given to Henri Brocklebank by MT (ex-BHCC Ecologist). Details are yet to be clarified.

6. Potential damage to railway cutting between Addison and Highdown Roads – MF (Seven Dials Group) came to explain the publicity urgency needed to succeed in their task to save vegetation and trees on a slope threatened with clearance by Network Rail this month. The intention was to carry out work prior to the nesting season so the campaign had needed to accelerate since Christmas with demonstrations and negotiations with the public and NR, who appear to have incredible legal rights. There was also wider concern as to what NR were doing elsewhere and long term effects of poisons used where wildlife, including slow worms existed. MW gave advice based on the similar TWEAK campaign in the 1990s where protesters needed to physically prevent contractors from carrying out tree felling near to the railway on their site. It was agreed to 'Follow' the @HoveCutting group on Twitter, and ReTweet relevant messages.

7. Biosphere updates–MR reported on the Biosphere Nature Conservation Meeting held at West Blatchington Mill, Hove, on 24th November. Topics discussed included:- Habitat mapping - discussing with BHCC planning their proposed project to update and standardise information on Local Wildlife Sites across Sussex including Brighton & Hove. A LWS project is being run for 20 months by SWT.

Work on developing an Open Spaces Strategy to inform future management and maintenance of the city's parks and open spaces- to focus on enhancing biodiversity and restoration of species-rich, semi-natural grassland.

Deliver programmes of (a) exhibitions on environmental issues (b) volunteering to empower communities and enable public services to collaborate effectively. Deliver Environmental Education Programme in schools.

Implementation of the Local Biodiversity Action Plan. Work with Kew to collect seed from our best chalk grassland sites to improve the city's chalk grassland and increase the biodiversity value of other green spaces.

Chalk grassland/farmland- SBRC to produce a report on the conservation status of chalk grassland.

Stanmer Estate Master Plan and an application for funding to HLF is being produced.

Flooding and green infrastructure pilot project in Portslade: 2 SuDS 'rain gardens' schemes.

Marine benthic habitat mapping to fill the gap in coverage in the Biosphere inshore area.

8. Local Groups updates – concerns & successes

Benfield Wildlife & Conservation Group – (DoB) Bird boxes have been cleaned and replaced where necessary and scrub clearing is well under way. Work on the Bund at West Hove Golf Course is going full ahead, with traffic lights and heavy lorries on Badgers Way. Glow worms are still being investigated and a paper being drafted by John Tyler includes '*Benfield's Glow worms*', so Martin's records have really come in handy here.

The groundsman Duncan at WHGC has offered to put Bat boxes up along the hedgerow, this excellent offer was suggested by an ecologist working with the SDNP, as part of the trade off for the Bund.

Our AGM is to be held on April 20th at 7.30, in the Oasis Fellowship Church Hall at the junction of Northease Drive and Hangleton Way, and includes a talk by Ian Everest on "*Shepherds of the South Downs*" all welcome. Visit our web site on <http://benfieldnr.tumblr.com/>



Friends of Hangleton Park – (DB) held a successful Wreath making event in December, with nearly fifty wreaths being made. Although a sack of greenery was supplied by Neil Doyle, BHCC Ranger, on this occasion the group ran the event with help from the Youth Team as no Ranger support on the day was available. The possibility of getting grant aid to help maintain the once attractive garden and wild area may be in jeopardy now due to forthcoming cuts. A grant application to help with the Summer Festival has been applied for and plans are being made for this year's event. The AGM will take place in March.

Friends of Bevendean Down - (MP/GC) Sheep have done their usual good job, and we have done our annual poo scraping for the local community garden, *fertility where it's required!* A large percentage of sheep were limping (foot rot) which is not really what we would expect of a healthy flock. Like many other groups our future is in jeopardy because of age and local indifference to the LNR; also like all wildlife groups there is worry over proposed ranger cuts.

Friends of Hollingbury & Burstead Woods – (GT) continue to hold monthly work sessions and on average get about 17 volunteers to help with the following tasks: glade clearance; hedge, path and step maintenance and litter picking. Plus recently clearing round trees/shrubs planted along the woodland edge has been undertaken. The group have not managed to complete all scheduled tasks and are having difficulties with step repairs now that the Council won't provide the materials. To make them responsible for this we are seeking to get our footpaths designated as Rights of Way. Our Ranger is extremely stretched and attends few work sessions now, which has contributed to the non-completion of tasks. We have asked our members to sign the GMB petition and have demonstrated against cuts to the Ranger Service as we desperately need their support to be effective in management of the woods. There was another 'Travellers incursion' on the meadow in December in which damage to our noticeboard was sustained and some of the trees in Triangle Copse were cut to provide firewood. We have also experienced recent fly tipping of builders' rubble and on Monday prevented yet another Traveller incursion with residents blocking the meadow entrance. The Council has still not replaced the padlock to the metal barrier from the December break-in.

Friends of Queens Park (CLO) there was no news here except the first frogspawn in the pond had already been seen. Dismayed by Ranger cuts!

Friends of Brighton Greenway – (JP) a meeting was held on 10th December to discuss planting for wildlife and creating habitat areas suitable for invertebrates. The next workday is 21st February with plans to prepare the wildflower area and sow seeds if frosts have passed. See www.BrightonGreenway.uk

Friends of Sheepcote Valley – (LB) Volunteers collected greenery from around Stanmer Park in mid-December and on 12th December had a morning making Green Christmas decorations- hosted by Ann Barker who provided refreshments. On 16th January volunteers made and erected a handrail up a particularly steep & muddy slope in the valley as steps made several years ago on this area had been eroded by motor-bikers and were difficult to climb up. Sheep are very present along the Eastern Flanks, although three have been lost this year. But due to the high downland drainage, foot rot in the area has been almost non-existent. Ranger Paul is still putting up permanent sheep fencing and at the last committee meeting it was reported that users of the valley were now coming to terms with it better.

FSV Membership has diminished over the years with the mean age of members getting older. So if the Ranger numbers are reduced or their duties diminished it will probably sound a death knell for a lot of the Friends groups round the City. On a happier note, short-eared owls have been seen on several occasions recently.

Friends of Withdean Park – (SD) Work Mornings were held in November and December, but not in January, although numbers attending have continued to be low. Along with BHWF and other groups, FoWP has lobbied relevant councillors objecting to the proposed draconian cuts in the number of Council Rangers and attended the protest and meeting of the BHCC committee meeting in Portslade in January. It is difficult to see how FoWP will continue with active work in the park if there is not a considerable change of approach. A group have started an e-Petition on the BHCC website to support the retention of the Lilac Enclosure fencing in the park. Constructed in 2000 it is now in a poor state. Its original purpose was to keep rabbits away from the younger lilacs, but it is no longer required for that purpose as the lilacs have matured. But it has now become a popular area with dog walkers – individual and commercial – and the e-Petition has already reached over 1,000 signatures. The FoWP view is that the fate of the fencing lies with the Council.

Keep the Ridge Green – (MH & CL): presently this site is extremely soggy! But the good news is that fencing the pond has achieved one step nearer completion with an award of a £1000 BHCC Grant towards costs. Although no actual work has yet started, DL has been consulted over what type of fence BHCC would consider acceptable. In November, Ranger Peter Craske organised the Green Gym to thin out a copse near the windmill. We are currently waiting for three information boards to be made good– and understand signage for these is at Stanmer, namely:



1. The Welcome Board at the end of the passage to the Green is missing completely -disappeared last summer.
2. At Windmill Drive the rotten base board has long needed replacing before the map can be put back.
3. Bottom of Coney Wood 100 steps where the map sign needs putting back –probably missing for over two years now.

Very sadly, one of our oldest members, Joan Howard, died just before Christmas; she and her late husband delivered newsletters for many years around this locality when aged in their 90s. KTRG members joined recent demonstrations against Ranger cuts and are concerned lack of supervision will lead to further problems - including residents backing on to the Green illegally carrying out 'wildlife unacceptable work' in the SDNP boundary hedge behind gardens.

Friends of Preston Park – (Tara Dawson) - A range of nature focussed events (bat, bird and tree walks) are planned for the coming year. BHCC ranger Neil Doyle and CityParks ranger volunteers have erected a new woven hazel fence around the wildlife pond at the North end of the Park. The St Peter's churchyard group has recently expanded its boundaries to keep an eye on the wildlife area. The pond itself has been unclogged and two islands of water plants have been left surrounded by plenty of open water for local wildlife.

Stanmer Preservation Society - (NY) are encouraging members to respond to this consultation on Public Space Protection Orders: http://consult.brighton-hove.gov.uk/public/bhcc/community_safety/public_space_protection_orders SPS also made direct representations to various councillors about the ranger cuts. A newsletter item explains what the rangers do, since some people seem unaware of this.

In the park, rangers will finish this year's coppice coupe within the next month and have already started work on fencing it off with woven fencing. As part of the heritage lottery bid there is a phase 1 habitat survey being conducted by external ecologists to get a more accurate idea of some of the species of flora and fauna etc. within the park. Seedlings from the church yew have been grown on by Special Branch nursery.

Shakedown Festival- SPS understands there are plans for a return to Stanmer, a totally unsuitable venue, despite unambiguous assurances otherwise and following a hugely successful petition in 2013. We will raise this at a meeting with Jan Jonker and will, if necessary, campaign to have this enormously damaging and disruptive event sent elsewhere.

TWEACK - Withdean and Westdene LNR (MW)- has held two workdays since the last meeting. These have involved repairs to sections of the upper path in the Stadium Woods. Unfortunately the November workday had to be abandoned after a short time because of extremely strong winds! Like other groups they are *very concerned* by the planned cuts in the ranger service and will almost certainly not be able to continue as an effective group if there is any significant cut to ranger service support as MW considered much of the work in Withdean Woods involved using chain saws on wind blown trees – work which was beyond the capability of their volunteers. Initially when the group was asked to include these woods many years ago, they were told council help would always be available when required.

9. Planning –a) Public Spaces Protection Orders (PSPOs) consultation by BHCC on Open Spaces being held until 27 April. Search for this topic on the BHWF Discussion Board for a copy of all the questions. **Firearm Misuse** questions could also be included. If you have any comments about your parks and open spaces see BHCC Consultation Portal to complete your survey:-

http://consult.brighton-hove.gov.uk/public/bhcc/community_safety/public_space_protection_orders

b) SD continues to support Patcham and Hollingbury Conservation Association (PAHCA) in endeavours to protect the local public water supplies threatened by pollution from the proposed Travellers' Site at Horsdean. The directional drilling for the foul sewer under the A27 has finally been completed which at least means that foul sewage will be discharged to the public sewer in Vale Avenue to the south. The site is said to be on target for completion this summer to re-open with 21 of the previous 23 Transit Pitches and 12 new Permanent Pitches. It will need rigorous management to ensure that other pollutants are controlled, which has not been a feature of the Transit Site over the years.

c) Both HM and TP remain vigilant over news concerning their sites. Toads Hole Valley was supposed to receive options for the next step in March and the Deans Preservation Group reported CPRE Sussex was assisting in building up information.

10 Any other business. a) Roundabout at the bottom of Mill Road/A23/A27 junction - CL reported on a scene of complete destruction by the Highways dept. using chain saws on trees and vegetation here (which was also home to a colony of rabbits). He has photographs showing just how ugly this looks now at an important entry into the city and with the SDNP nearby.



b) CPRE Sussex Biodiversity Meetings at Lewes – Chairman DJ reported that these had been initiated to show that Nature also needed consideration when looking into Planning. CL and MH had attended the first one.

c) A Biological Recorders Seminar is being held in Hassocks on Saturday 6th February.

d) MH suggests BHWF notes should reach Councillors /MPs and people involved with Greenspace decision making.

11. Dates for next meetings are hoped to be 5-7pm on Tuesdays: **24th May, 16th August and 15th November**. Thanks go to John for kindly providing the Booth Museum as a venue for meetings and for being our hospitable host. However JC retires at the end of March, although still planning to attend BHWF meetings, and will retain a Keeper Emeritus post, but he will no longer be responsible for the building or lock up. This imposes an issue on Lee which may be alleviated by Kerrie –a Collections Assistant working only Wednesdays and Thursdays but can split duties with Lee. ***This may mean changing some meeting days to Wednesdays.*** Council restructuring cut-backs apply to management too as his ***Keeper of Natural Sciences*** post is to be deleted!

We wish John every happiness in his retirement, and express our grateful thanks for his much appreciated help, and hosting of the Forum meetings over the years. It is very pleasing that John intends to continue his membership of the Forum, and attend our meetings.

